Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 10

ML 2025 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 05/16/2024

Proposal Title: Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 10

Funds Requested: $9,738,000

Confirmed Leverage Funds: $1,296,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie
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Location Information

County Location(s): Pope, Swift, Douglas, Otter Tail and Grant.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie
- Northern Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 10 advances conservation of high priority wetland complexes within Minnesota's Prairie Pothole Region to the benefit of waterfowl and SGCN populations. Phase 10 will permanently protect 1,314 acres and restore 1,394 acres of priority habitat. Minnesota Land Trust will prioritize parcels with high-quality wildlife habitat proximal to other protected lands. Restoration and enhancement will be completed with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on previously protected properties. This proposal includes enhanced leverage from the USFWS, the Inflation Reduction Act, and donation of easement value from landowners.

Design and Scope of Work

Wetlands and shallow lakes provide the essential backbone for the survival of waterfowl and other important wildlife species. In fact, more than 50% of Minnesota's Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) use wetlands during their life cycle. Most of the plans developed to protect Minnesota's wildlife—including Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, and the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan—cite the protection and restoration of the state's remaining wetlands as one of the top priorities to achieve the State's conservation goals. Moreover, these plans cite the use of conservation easements on private lands as one of the primary strategies to protect important wetland and shallow lake habitat.

Minnesota Land Trust's Wetlands Habitat Protection Program area extends from Meeker County northwest to the Canada border, located along a vast glacial moraine system in western Minnesota. This prairie pothole country is the core of Minnesota's "duck factory" and is central to one of North America's most important flyways for migratory birds. Through Phase 9 of this program to date, the Land Trust has procured 45 conservation easements protecting 5,793 acres of habitat and 60 miles of shoreline. The Program has 5,680 acres of restoration/enhancement complete or underway.

Phase 10 will continue these accomplishments by restoring or enhancing 1,394 acres of important prairie and wetland habitats on permanently protected private lands within the Program area in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The Land Trust will also work with FWS and landowners to develop additional shovel ready R/E projects. In addition, the Land Trust will protect 1,314 acres of new priority wetland and associated upland habitat through conservation easements. The Program will be closely coordinated with other public agencies, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders to ensure this Program meets multi-agency conservation goals.

The Land Trust will continue to implement a criteria-based ranking system and market-based approach for purchasing conservation easements. The Program will continue to target projects that help complete gaps in existing public ownership, are of the highest ecological value, and provide the greatest leverage to the state. The Land Trust will seek donated easements in these areas whenever possible, but will also purchase the full or partial value of easements to complete key complexes as necessary.

To focus our easement protection work, the Prairie Plan and other data sets/plans were used to shape our Wetlands Program plan and identify important wetland complexes in this landscape based on the nexus of high-quality habitat, existing protected areas and restorable agricultural lands. These complexes include a mosaic of wetland, prairie/grassland, and forest habitats, and agricultural land. Outcomes from this project include: 1) healthy wetland habitat complexes and associated populations of waterfowl, upland birds, and SGCN; 2) improved water quality; 3) increased participation of private landowners in habitat conservation projects; and 4) enhancement of prior public investments in wetland and upland habitat

Explain how the proposal addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation

Our Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program addresses LSOHC priorities by protecting and restoring/enhancing wetland and grassland complexes that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and prairie-pothole associated species.

Minnesota's wetlands are essential to our wildlife health and diversity. This project directly benefits SGCN and other important game and non-game wildlife species by minimizing the potential threats to their habitat caused by detrimental agricultural practices, residential or commercial development or imprudent land management. The wetland habitat complexes that will be targeted through the ranking system will include a mosaic of wetlands, grasslands and woodlands. Priority projects will include high or outstanding habitat as identified in Minnesota Biological Survey data. Projects will also be located near other protected lands to help build larger habitat complexes comprised of both public and private lands. The vast majority of this landscape is in private ownership. For that reason, working with private owners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this region. Finally, we will work closely with partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments.

What are the elements of this proposal that are critical from a timing perspective?

Wetlands and associated upland grasslands in Minnesota's Prairie Pothole region (and the species that live in these habitats) are under continuous threat of agricultural conversion and residential development. A short window of opportunity exists to permanently protect previously unavailable parcels as current land ownership is transitioning from one generation to the next. This proposal aims to capitalize on strong landowner interest we have secured in land protection and R/E arenas.

In addition, a significant backlog of R/E needs occurs on USFWS protected properties. In early 2024, the USFWS initiated a broad effort utilizing funds from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to accelerate restoration of native habitats on its lands in the Prairie Pothole Region. The Land Trust’s Wetlands Program will have this enhanced leverage over the next 5 years.

Describe how the proposal expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:

This program is focused on procuring easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitats on easement lands within priority complexes of wetlands and associated upland habitats, as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, Duck Plan and Prairie Plan. Specific parcels available for easement acquisition are evaluated relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors (1. amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; 2. the quality or condition of habitat; and 3. the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas) and cost. The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas (WMAs,

WPAs, etc.), facilitate the protection of habitat corridors and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. In addition, our partnership with USFWS will enable the Land Trust to further reduce effects of fragmentation through restoration of prairie, wetlands and other habitats. Minnesota Biological Survey data is cornerstone to our assessment of potential conservation easement acquisitions; we also conduct field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition, because many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?

- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Explain how this proposal will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.

The Minnesota Land Trust's Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program uses a two-prong approach to addressing habitat resilience to climate change: 1) we prioritize land protection and restoration projects that most support regional climate adaptation strategies such as improving migration corridors or habitat complexes, and 2) we include adaptive specifications in every project, such as using climate forward seed mixes and designing wetland features for future precipitation patterns.

Within our program, increasing the number and distribution of wetland-prairie complexes within the flyway improves the habitat selection opportunities for waterfowl and SGCN species, resulting in an increase in the regional resilience to climate change. Climate-forward seed mixes include enhanced proportions of plant species of the native plant communities that are expected to maintain or increase under future climate scenarios.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Northern Forest

- Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:

The Minnesota Land Trust and USFWS will focus their protection, restoration and enhancement work on key wetland, prairie and other habitats within Minnesota's Prairie Pothole area, guided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan,

Duck Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan. High quality lands are protected through acquisition of perpetual conservation easements; native habitats are restored and enhanced on existing eased lands. We work in partnership with local, state and federal agency and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary to those undertaken by others working in the program area. By doing this, we are building complexes of high quality protected habitat, reducing fragmentation concerns and providing for connectivity between core habitat areas that will enable species to move freely.

In obtaining conservation easements (whether by donation or through purchase), we work with willing, conservation-minded landowners. Our landowner bid process will be targeted toward specific areas within our Wetlands program area identified through the plans listed above. Opportunities within the program area are identified and prioritized based on the potential to contribute to build a permanent conservation legacy that includes positive outcomes for wildlife and the public. Prairie and wetland habitats on lands protected through conservation easement by the Land Trust and USFWS are targeted for restoration and enhancement to elevate their inherent value for wildlife. Both the Land Trust and USFWS are deeply committed to maintaining these investments over time.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *This program will permanently protect 500 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restore/enhance 475 acres of wetlands and prairies in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *This program will permanently protect 314 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ~ *This program will permanently protect 500 acres and restore/enhance 919 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.

Funding procured by MLT through the Outdoor Heritage Fund through this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management,

addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in cases of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

The USFWS and MLT (as easement holders on respective properties) will work with landowners on an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources, and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement, and ongoing management of these properties. The partnership between USFWS and MLT also includes the landowners we work with. The landowners who participate in this partnership have a landowner agree that states they must maintain the habitat restored. The level of dedication they have to their land makes what we do possible and propels our work far beyond each phase. We could not be successful without them.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2029 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-
Every 4-6 years	USFWS, Landowners, MLT	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control	-	-

Provide an assessment of how your program may celebrate cultural diversity or reach diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:

One of the Minnesota Land Trust's core public values is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have been engaged in a year-long process to assess how the conservation community—and the Minnesota Land Trust in particular—can better address these issues. To date, we have demonstrated this commitment when possible given the funding parameters and our unique role in working with private landowners, including numerous projects to protect the camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota youth and a long-term partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa on wild rice restoration. Going forward, we intend to build on this engagement by using diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection. In each of our program areas, we intend to listen and seek out potential, authentic partnerships that can advance our goals of conserving the best of Minnesota's remaining habitats and, at the same time, being a more inclusive organization. One related program we are exploring is a new "Ambassador Lands Program" which would connect willing conservation landowners to diverse community groups that need access to land for a variety of programming purposes, such as youth mentor hunts, cultural or ceremonial use, conservation employment training, bird banding, and much more. This would add greatly to the more universal public benefits of conserved lands such as wildlife habitat, clean water, and climate mitigation. Finally, we welcome more conversations with the LSOHC and conservation community about how these values can be better manifest in all our shared work going forward.

Activity Details

Requirements

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?
Yes

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?
Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?
Yes

Where does the activity take place?

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?
Yes

Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:
Easement Acquisition:
The purpose of the Minnesota Land Trust's conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. We restrict agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either exclude the agricultural area from the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to exclude those areas. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement.

Restoration/Enhancement:
Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted best practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, 1-2 rotations of soybeans could be used for restorations in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie planting. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank.

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this proposal either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?
No

Will the eased land be open for public use?
No

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?
Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:
Most conservation easements are established on private lands, many of which have driveways, field roads and trails located on them. Often, the conservation easement permits the continued usage of established trails and roads so long as their use does not significantly impact the conservation values of the property. Creation of new roads/trails or expansion of existing ones is typically not allowed.

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?
Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?
Existing trails and roads are identified in the project baseline report and will be monitored annually as part of the Land Trust's stewardship and enforcement protocols. Maintenance of permitted roads/trails in accordance with the terms of the easement will be the responsibility of the landowner.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?
No

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this proposal's funding and availability?
Yes

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?
Yes

Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?
Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2024	$2,128,000	-	-	-
2023	$3,012,000	$143,845	$2,868,155	4.78%
2022	$3,330,000	$288,033	$3,041,967	8.65%
2021	$3,088,000	$1,035,875	$2,052,125	33.55%
2020	$2,683,000	$1,886,156	$796,844	70.3%
2019	$2,129,000	$2,084,349	$44,651	97.9%
2018	$1,786,000	$1,782,213	$3,787	99.79%
2016	$1,629,000	$1,627,187	$1,813	99.89%
2013	$1,980,000	$1,966,200	$13,800	99.3%
Totals	$21,765,000	$10,813,858	$10,951,142	49.68%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Conservation easements completed or options secured	June 30, 2029
Restoration and enhancement projects completed	June 30, 2029

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$500,000	$296,000	Inflation Reduction Act, USFWS In-Kind	$796,000
Contracts	$4,831,000	-	USFWS	$4,831,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$3,500,000	$1,100,000	USFWS; Landowners	$4,600,000
Easement Stewardship	$336,000	-	-	$336,000
Travel	$25,500	-	-	$25,500
Professional Services	$361,000	-	-	$361,000
Direct Support Services	$135,000	-	-	$135,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$2,500	-	-	$2,500
Supplies/Materials	$47,000	-	-	$47,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$9,738,000**	**$1,396,000**	**-**	**$11,134,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Land Protection Staff	0.75	4.0	$300,000	-	-	$300,000
FWS Restoration Designer	0.1	4.0	-	$46,000	USFWS In-Kind	$46,000
MLT Restoration Staff	0.5	4.0	$200,000	$250,000	Inflation Reduction Act	$450,000

Amount of Request: $9,738,000
Amount of Leverage: $1,396,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 14.34%
DSS + Personnel: $635,000
As a % of the total request: 6.52%
Easement Stewardship: $336,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 9.6%

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
$1,396,000	$1,296,000	92.84%	$100,000	7.16%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:
USFWS: $1,000,000 in permanent conservation easements funded by USFWS/Migratory Bird Conservation Fund; $40,000 in-kind contributions for R/E projects.

MLT: $290,000 for R/E personnel from Inflation Reduction Act. Anticipated: $100,000 from landowners through donated conservation easement value.

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable?
Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Acre scaling will be moderately less than proportional due to fixed costs and other factors. R/E project selection will be based on priorities; scaling may not be proportional. Activities will be curtailed, but less than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Acre scaling will be moderately less than proportional due to fixed costs and other factors. Restoration/enhancement project selection will be based on priorities; scaling may not be proportional. Activities will be curtailed, but less than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?
Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?
FTEs listed in the proposal are an estimate of the personnel time required to deliver the grant outputs included in this proposal. An array of staff may work on projects to complete legal review, sub-contracts, negotiating with landowners, drafting conservation easements, completing baseline reports and managing the grant. MLT's basis for billing is the individual Protection or Restoration project we work on, ensuring allocation to the appropriate grant award, and by using a timesheet based approach we use only those personnel funds actually expended to achieve the goals of the grant.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
Restoration and enhancement accounts for $4,750,000 of the contracts line amount. Additional funds in the contract line are for the writing of habitat management plans via qualified vendors and engaging county SWCD and other vendors for landowner outreach purposes to facilitate communication of the protection program.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Other : Mapping, Environmental Assessments; Mineral Reports; etc.
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?
Minnesota Land Trust expects to close 10-15 conservation easements through this proposal. The average cost per easement to fund the MLT's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is $28,000, although in extraordinary circumstances additional funding may be warranted. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?
Yes

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging
Land Trust staff regularly rents vehicles for grant-related purposes, which is a significant cost savings over use of personal vehicles.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:
Yes

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?
In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We applied this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services requested through this grant.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?
GPS devices, R/E tools, satellite communicator, safety gear.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?
Yes

Are the funds confirmed?
Yes

- Cash : $1,250,000
- In Kind : $46,000

Is Confirmation Document attached?
Yes

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	94	0	0	0	94
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,314	1,314
Enhance	0	1,300	0	0	1,300
Total	**94**	**1,300**	**0**	**1,314**	**2,708**

How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	39
Total	**39**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	$341,300	-	-	-	$341,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	$4,677,000	$4,677,000
Enhance	-	$4,719,700	-	-	$4,719,700
Total	**$341,300**	**$4,719,700**	**-**	**$4,677,000**	**$9,738,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	85	0	9	0	94
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	500	0	500	314	1,314
Enhance	0	390	0	910	0	1,300
Total	**0**	**975**	**0**	**1,419**	**314**	**2,708**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	$308,600	-	$32,700	-	$341,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$2,000,000	-	$2,000,000	$677,000	$4,677,000
Enhance	-	$1,415,900	-	$3,303,800	-	$4,719,700
Total	**-**	**$3,724,500**	**-**	**$5,336,500**	**$677,000**	**$9,738,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	$3,630	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	$3,559
Enhance	-	$3,630	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	$3,630	-	$3,633	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$4,000	-	$4,000	$2,156
Enhance	-	$3,630	-	$3,630	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?
Yes - Sign up criteria is attached

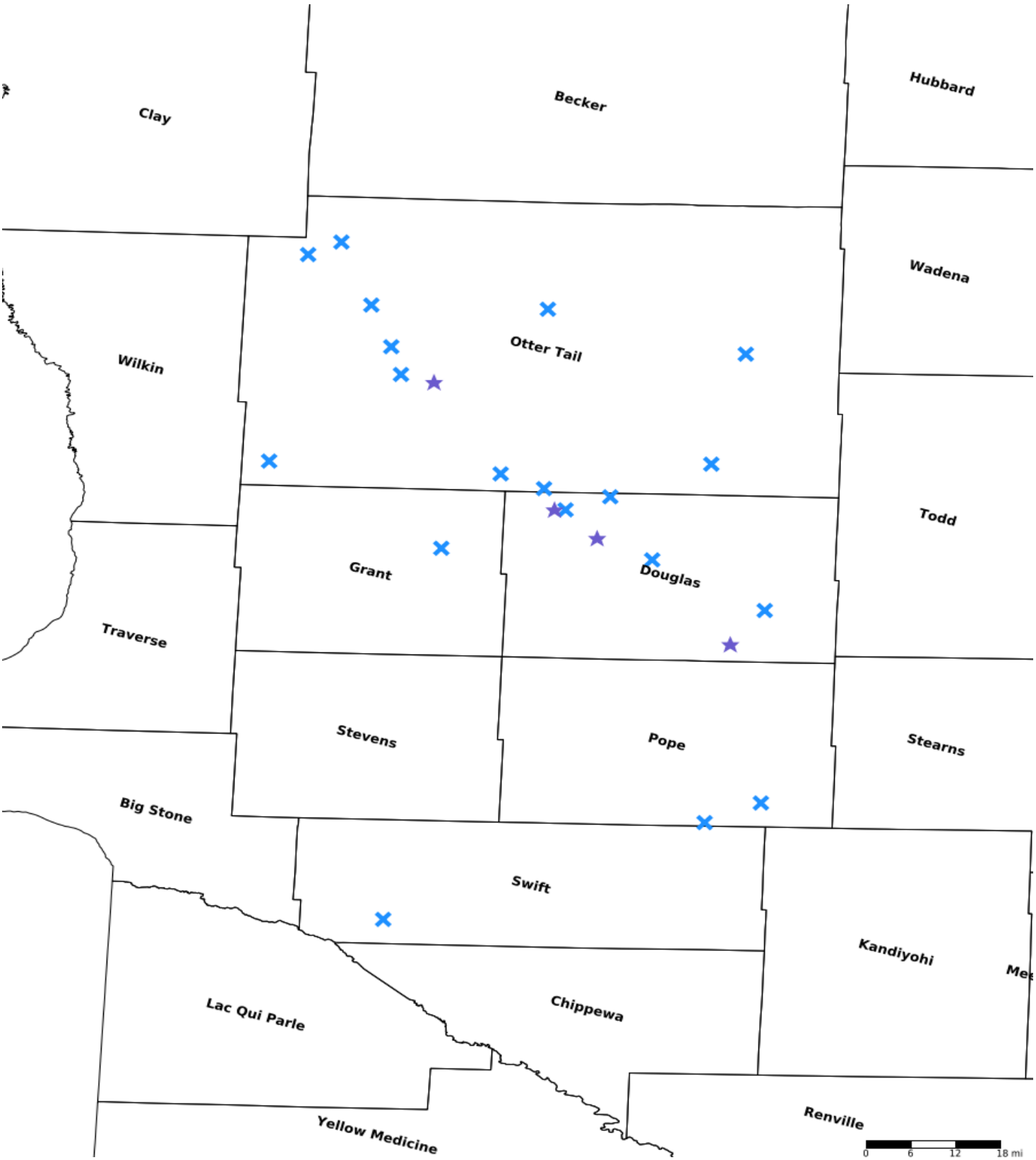
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
The Land Trust uses a competitive, market-based approach through an RFP process to identify interested landowners and prioritize parcels for conservation easement acquisition. All proposals submitted by landowners are evaluated and ranked relative to their ecological significance based on three primary factors: 1) size of habitat on the parcel; 2) condition of habitat on the parcel; and 3) the context (both in terms of amount/quality of remaining habitat and protected areas) within which the parcel lies. We also ask the landowner to consider contributing all or a portion of fair market value to enable our funds to make a larger conservation impact (see attached sign-up criteria). We contract with local SWCD offices to provide outreach services as a way to connect effectively with local landowners.

Restoration and enhancement work will take place on private lands over which MLT and USFWS have secured permanent conservation easements to protect wetlands and associated upland habitat. The projects included in the parcel list were identified as priorities for restoration/enhancement by USFWS staff in their Morris and Fergus Falls offices and MLT staff.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
DScr	Douglas	12737221	9	$120,000	Yes	Wetland
LNee	Douglas	12939204	1	$12,000	Yes	Wetland
MOEP2	Douglas	13040213	20	$120,000	Yes	Prairie
RSla	Douglas	13040214	54	$359,000	Yes	Wetland
CKBe	Douglas	12938220	110	$344,000	Yes	Prairie
JHP2	Douglas	13039203	55	$239,000	Yes	Prairie
CVic	Douglas	12837225	37	$111,000	Yes	Prairie
CShe	Grant	12941218	20	$178,000	Yes	Priarie
ESP2	Otter Tail	13140234	10	$120,000	Yes	Prairie
CSP2	Otter Tail	13644213	30	$120,000	Yes	Prairie
BTru	Otter Tail	13437222	100	$299,000	Yes	Prairie
LWZu	Otter Tail	13342209	100	$299,000	Yes	Prairie
FFFGC Do	Otter Tail	13144216	155	$464,000	Yes	Prairie
BPre	Otter Tail	13137207	30	$90,000	Yes	Prairie
BLei	Otter Tail	13543224	50	$239,000	Yes	Prairie
LLei	Otter Tail	13442220	45	$209,000	Yes	Prairie
LTBa	Otter Tail	13643204	40	$150,000	Yes	Prairie
LBar	Otter Tail	13540222	30	$179,000	Yes	Prairie
JRaL	Otter Tail	13141224	50	$299,000	Yes	Prairie
RNP2	Otter Tail	13342213	30	$299,000	Yes	Wetland
Skar	Pope	12337213	89	$181,000	Yes	Prairie
BeML	Pope	12337231	213	$128,000	Yes	Prairie
FlEd	Swift	12042217	116	$237,000	Yes	Prairie

Parcel Map


Clay
Becker
Hubbard
Wadena
Wilkin
Otter Tail
Todd
Grant
Douglas
Traverse
Stevens
Pope
Stearns
Big Stone
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Kandiyohi
Lac Qui Parle
Chippewa
Yellow Medicine
Renville
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6
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18 mi
Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program

Phase 10

Request	**$9,738,000**
Leverage	**$1,396,000**
New FWS easements	$1,000,000
R/E match from FWS	$46,000
R/E personnel from Inflation Reduction Act	$250,000
Donated conservation easement value	$100,000
Acres protected	**1,314**
Acres restored	**1,394**

For more information:

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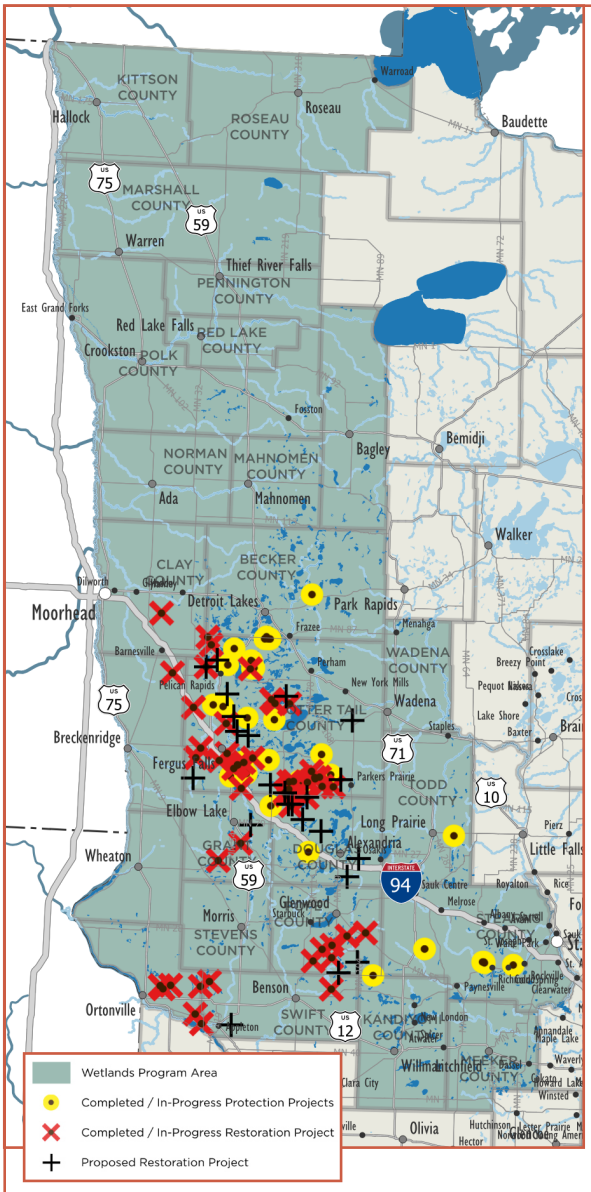
The Land Trust will secure 1,314 acres of conservation easements that target high priority wetland habitat complexes within Minnesota's Prairie, Forest/Prairie Transition, and Northern Forest sections. In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Land Trust will also restore/enhance 1,394 acres of wetland and prairie habitat on lands protected through conservation easement. This partnership will bring $1,396,000 of leverage from FWS, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, the Inflation Reduction Act, and private landowners.

How Does the Program Support State Goals?

This program targets high-priority wetlands and associated upland habitat, advancing a primary goal of the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan through stabilization of Species in Greatest Conservation Need. Protection and restoration of wetlands and grasslands are strategies identified in Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan, the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan, and the Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in Minnesota.

What Are the Outcomes?

- Healthy wetland habitat complexes and associated populations of waterfowl, upland birds, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need.
- Improved water quality.
- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects.
- Enhancement of prior public investment in wetland protection and restoration.



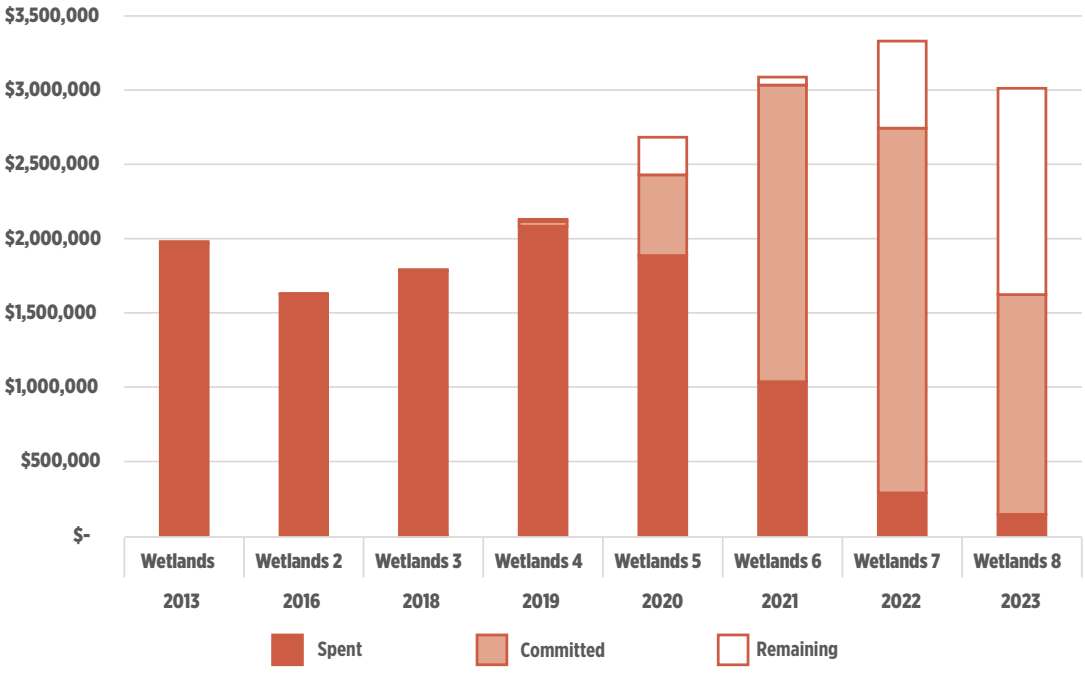
What has Been Accomplished to Date?

Complete (Phase 1, 2, 3):
Completed 28 conservation easements, protecting 3,653 acres of habitat and 41 miles of shoreline. Completed 880 acres of restoration/enhancement of wetland and prairie habitats.

In Progress (Phases 4, 5, 6, 7, 8):
Twenty conservation easements have been completed, protecting 3,186 acres of habitat and 24 miles of shoreline; 4,725 acres of restoration/enhancement of wetland and prairie habitats are completed or underway.

Planned (Phase 9):
Starting in July, we will begin the ninth phase of the program to restore/enhance an additional 983 acres of habitat.

Collectively landowners have contributed over $13.1 million in easement value as leverage to the $12 million paid by the Outdoor Heritage Fund.



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MEETS STANDARDS
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LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

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Mission

The Minnesota Land Trust protects and restores Minnesota's most vital natural lands in order to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences, and scenic beauty for generations to come.

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

A Decision Support Tool for Prioritizing Conservation Easement Opportunities

The Minnesota Land Trust often employs within its conservation program areas an RFP (Request for Proposals) model to both identify high-quality projects and introduce a level of competition into the easement acquisition process. Below, we briefly discuss how the system works and the framework put in place to sort the varied opportunities that come before us.

How the Ranking System Works

The parcel ranking framework employed through the Minnesota Land Trust's RFP process is intended as a ***decision support tool*** to aid in identifying, among the slate of landowners submitting bids for conservation easements, the most ecologically significant opportunities for the price. Using this framework, the Land Trust and its partners use an array of weighted data sets tailored to the specific circumstances inherent in a program area to identify those worthy of consideration.

It is important to note that this parcel ranking framework enables the Land Trust to rank projects *relative* to one another. That's important to do, but it's also important to understand how a project (or suite of projects) relates to the ideal situation (i.e., a project that is of exceptional size, condition and superb landscape context). If, for example, an RFP generated 20 proposals in a program area, the framework would effectively sift among them and identify the relatively good from those relatively bad. However, this information alone would not determine whether any of those parcels were of sufficient quality to pursue for protection (all may be of insufficient quality to warrant expenditure of funds). To solve this problem and make sure ranked projects are high priorities for conservation, we step back and evaluate them relative to the ideal - i.e., is each project among the best opportunities for conservation we can expect to find in the program area?

As part of its proposals to LSOHC, the Land Trust included easement sign-up criteria that laid out at a general level the framework utilized by the organization. Below is a more detailed description of the process the Land Trust utilizes in ranking potential parcels relative to one another, and identifying those with which a conservation easement will be pursued. We also include a ranking form illustrating the representative weighting applied to each criteria. These weightings will be refined as we move forward in applying this approach in each program area.

The Framework

We evaluate potential projects based on two primary factors: ecological significance and cost. Both are assessed independent of one another.

Factor 1: Ecological Significance

The Ecological Significance score is determined by looking at 3 subfactors, each weighted equally (as a default). Each of these constitutes 1/3 of the total ecological significance score.

Subfactors:

- **Size or Quantity** – the area of the parcel to be protected (how big is it?), length of shoreline, etc. The bigger the better.
- **Condition or Quality** – the condition of the natural communities and/or target species found on a parcel. The higher quality the better.
- **Landscape Context** – what's around the parcel, both ecologically and from a protected status standpoint. The more ecologically intact the surrounding landscape the better; the extent to which a parcel builds off of other protected lands to form complexes or corridors, the better.

Note that we have the ability to emphasize one subfactor over another if the specific circumstances warrant it, but we begin with a default standard at the onset. At present, all of our geographies are using the default standard.

Indicators:

A suite of weighted indicators is used to score each parcel relative to each of the above subfactors. Indicators are selected based on their ability to effectively inform the scoring of parcels relative to each of the respective subfactors. Weightings for each criterion are assessed and vetted to ensure that a set of indicators for each subfactor produces meaningful results, then applied across each of the proposed parcels. Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Data sets used for this purpose must offer wall-to-wall coverage across the program area to ensure that bias for or against parcels does not creep into the equation. Where gaps in such coverages exist, we attempt to fill them in to the extent feasible (via field inventory, etc.). Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Factor 2: Cost

Cost is a second major factor used in our consideration of parcels. Although ecological significance is *the* primary factor in determining the merits of a project, our RFP programs also strive to make the greatest conservation impact with the most efficient use of State funds. As such, we look at the overall cost of each project relative to its ecological significance; we also ask landowners to consider donating all or some of their easement value to the cause and to better position their proposals. Many landowners participate in that fashion.

Cost, as a primary factor, is assessed independently of the ecological factors. Given equal ecological significance, a project of lower cost will be elevated over those of higher cost in the ranking. That said, exceptionally high quality projects are likely to be pursued even if no or modest landowner donation is put forward. Alternatively, there are projects offered as full donations that are not moved forward because their ecological significance is not acceptable. The degree to which cost factors into the ranking of parcels relative to one another is made on a case-by-case basis.

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST WETLANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet	SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5	SITE 6	SITE 7	SITE 8	SITE 9	SITE 10	SITE 11	SITE 12	Notes
COUNTY													
100 Pts **ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE**													
Weighting Factor **Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)**													
a) Size (33 pts): Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement													
SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Weighting Factor **Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)**													
a) Habitat Quality (28 pts): Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)													
b) Imperiled Species (5 pts): Occurrence of Documented Rare Species on Parcel													
SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Weighting Factor **Landscape Context (34 points)**													
Current Status (30 points)													
a) Protection Context (15 points)													
i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands (8 pts)													
ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property													
: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
b) Ecological Context (15 points)													
i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat (8 pts)													
ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property													
: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
Future Potential (4 points)													
a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)													
b) Amount of Existing Activity (2 pts)													
SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	
COST													
i. Bid amount ($)/acre	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	
ii. Estimated donative value ($)/acre	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	
TOTAL ACQUISITION COST ($)	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	**$ -**	

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out

WETLAND HABITAT PROTECTION PROGRAM

Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet – Scoring and Criteria

Three primary factors when taken together provide a good estimate of long-term viability for biodiversity: 1) **Size** of the occurrence (species population or example of natural community), 2) **Condition** of the occurrence, and 3) its **Landscape Context**. This framework is used widely across the world by a large number of conservation organizations and agencies and here in Minnesota by the Minnesota DNR, The Nature Conservancy and others. The Minnesota Land Trust has adopted this practice as well.

In this summary document, we provide an overview of the framework used by the Land Trust in assessing and prioritizing land protection opportunities before the organization.

1. **Habitat Size (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on acres of habitat to be protected through the easement relative to the largest parcels available for protection in the program area. Although size can pertain to species populations, the size of such populations is often constrained by available habitat. In addition, very little information pertaining to the size of species populations on a given property typically exists, making any determination suspect. Habitat size is a valid indicator in these circumstances.

   Scoring: Parcels are scored by how they fall relative to twelve size classes of habitat:

Points	Acres of Habitat on Parcel
0	1-39
3	40-49
6	50-69
9	70-99
12	100-139
16	140-189
20	190-249
25	250-319
33	320 or greater

2. **Condition of Natural Resources (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on the condition o of occurrences of ecological communities (habitat) and imperiled species if known. As with Habitat Size above, population data for imperiled species is often minimal on private lands. As such, the condition of score is heavily influenced by the condition of natural communities on a property. However, we do allocate a modest level of points to the presence of imperiled species if they have been documented on a property.

   Scoring: Parcels are scored based on the condition of focal ecological community targets – both terrestrial and freshwater – and presence of imperiled species on the property, as such:

a) Habitat Quality (30 points) – The Minnesota Biological Survey ("MBS") native plant community ("NPC") element occurrence ranking framework and the Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas site evaluation guide are used to score habitat quality on parcels, as such:

Points	Description
0	• Only NPC present has a D element occurrence ranking • Site ranked "below threshold" for biodiversity significance by MBS
8	• Less than 50% of parcel is C-ranked, remainder is ranked lower than C
15	• Half of parcel is C-ranked, the rest is D-ranked or lower • Part of parcel has moderate biodiversity significance, remainder is lower than moderate
25	• Half of parcel is C-ranked, remainder is D-ranked or lower • All of parcel has moderate biodiversity significance or higher
28	• Half of parcel is C-ranked, remainder is ranked higher than C • Part of parcel has outstanding biodiversity significance • Parcel or part of parcel has high biodiversity significance • Parcel includes one or more MBS-identified "lakes of biodiversity significance"
30	• More than half of parcel has an A, B, AB, or BC ranking • All of parcel identified has outstanding biodiversity significance

b) Imperiled Species (5 points) – Scoring of the parcel is based on species abundance as measured by occurrences documented on the property by the Natural Heritage Information System, as follows:

Points	Occurrences
1	1
2	2
3	3 or more

3. Landscape Context (33 points): Parcels are scored based current ecological context of the property and protected lands surrounding it; in addition, points are also allocated based on the likelihood that lands around a parcel will be protected going forward based on the identification of these adjacent lands in respective conservation lands.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based as follows:

a) Protection Context (15 points) – Is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous protected land (if any) and amount of protected land within 3 miles of the property. Here, we look at two subfactors:

i) Amount of protected land (acres) contiguous with the parcel. Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of protected land contiguous to the parcel (8 points), as follows:

Points	Acres Contiguous Protected Land
0	<1
1	1-39
3	40-79
5	80-119
7	120-199
8	200 or greater

ii) Amount of protected lands within a five-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby but not contiguous can also play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight protected lands within one-half mile of the parcel higher than those farther removed and score them separately.

Amount (acres) of protected land within one-half mile of property (4 points), scored as follows:

Points	Acres Protected Land within 1/2 mile
0	<1
1	1-79
2	80-199
3	200-299
4	300 or greater

Amount (acres) of protected land within between one-half mile and five miles of the protected property (3 points), scored as follows:

Points	Acres Protected Land 1/2 mile to 5 miles
0	<40
1	40-999
2	1,000-9,999
3	10,000 or greater

b) **Ecological Context** (15 points) – As with Protection context, ecological context is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous ecological habitat (if any) and amount of ecological habitat within five miles of the property.

i) Amount of ecological habitat (acres) contiguous with the parcel, providing species with direct access to larger blocks of permanent habitat (8 points). Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of natural ecological habitat contiguous to the parcel, as follows:

Points	Acres Contiguous Ecological Habitat
1	<80
2	80-249
3	250-499
4	500-749
5	750-999
6	1,000-2,999
7	3,000-4,999
8	5,000 or greater

ii) Amount of ecological habitat within a five-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby, whether contiguous or not play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight ecological habitat within ½ mile of the parcel higher than that farther removed, and score them separately.

Percentage of land within one-half mile of protected property that has natural land cover (4 points), scored as follows:

Points	Percent of ½-mile Radius with Ecological Habitat
1	1-23
2	24-48
3	49-73
4	74-100

Percentage of land one-half to five miles of the property (3 points) that has natural land cover (3 points), scored as follows:

Points	Percent of ½-mile to 5-mile radius with Ecological Habitat
1	1-32
2	33-65
3	66-100

c) **Future Potential** (4 points) – The degree to which the area within which a parcel lies has been identified as a priority for conservation action and the degree to which action is being implemented in that area is a direct indicator of the long-term potential for maintenance of biodiversity associated with a parcel. Lands affiliated with priority areas are more likely to be complemented with additional levels of nearby protected lands than those outside of priority

areas. In areas experiencing high levels of development, this factor may carry a significant amount of weight in setting protection priorities.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on their position relative to priority areas identified in statewide or local planning efforts.

Points	Description
0	Parcel not within priority area
1	Parcel within priority area of one plan
2	Parcel within priority areas of two plans
3	Parcel within priority areas of three plans or more