



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program
Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/08/2026

Project Title: Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program

Funds Recommended: \$2,066,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2026, Ch. 126, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(m)

Appropriation Language: \$2,066,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Shell Rock River Watershed District to acquire land in fee and to restore and enhance habitat in the Shell Rock River watershed.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Courtney Phillips

Title: Program and Project Manager

Organization: Shell Rock River Watershed District

Address: 305 S 1st Ave

City: Albert Lea, MN 56007

Email: courtney.phillips@co.freeborn.mn.us

Office Number: 507-379-8782

Mobile Number:

Fax Number:

Website: www.shellrock.org

Location Information

County Location(s): Freeborn.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Restore

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

The Shell Rock River Watershed District (SRRWD) is seeking funding for their Habitat Restoration Program to restore and protect essential prairie upland, wetland and streambank habitat across the watershed. As a result, a key biological functioning parcel will be permanently protected, streambank habitat will be enhanced, vegetation and feeding sources will be restored, and prairies will be restored. Projects are critical for the benefit of fish, waterfowl, and wildlife populations, reversing the trend of wetland loss and habitat degradation in the prairie ecoregion.

Design and Scope of Work

The SRRWD created the Habitat Restoration Program to restore, protect, and enhance degraded habitat conditions by implementing projects on a lake-shed basis. Specifically, this phase will contribute to the District's goals by:

- Stream habitat restoration on 10 acres that are part of a phased project approach to completing the channel restoration project. This project will also implement rock arch rapids via dam removal to improve in-stream habitat within the channel corridor. This allows for fish passage under all flow conditions, accommodates large, deeper pools for larger bodied fish, and creates high gradient stream habitat that is rare and crucial to the stream community that is often buried by dams.
- Acquire 31 acres from a willing landowner to complete upland prairie restoration and protect existing wetlands.

This proposal uses a programmatic approach to achieve protection and restoration of lakes, wetlands, streams and native prairie landscapes. The program includes projects that are prioritized on the significance of the benefits to aquatic habitat, urgency of the work, availability of leveraged funds, location of projects and agreements with relevant planning documents. All projects listed above have landowner support, who are eager to get funding. The SRRWD has a proven track record with the LSOHC and implementing projects that protect, restore and enhance natural resources. The SRRWD continues to receive strong support for these projects from landowners, local governments and sporting organizations.

The program will also interconnect and reestablish important flyway habitats within Minnesota. Once completed, the program will establish waterfowl and fish populations, increase habitat for wetland dependent wildlife, and re-create the wildlife mecca in southern Minnesota. Finally, this program will preserve an outdoor legacy for Minnesotans to use and enjoy for generations.

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

When critical habitats are lost due to land use changes and other factors, restoring the habitat is imperative to the protection of species and their ecological processes. Important species are disappearing at an alarming rate and the SRRWD has the opportunity to protect their specific habitats. Many of the proposed projects are turning habitat into multi-native species plantings that offer food, shelter, and breeding habitat for a wide array of species.

All restoration projects will have vegetation management in low grounds that include bulrush, smartweed, and marsh milkweed species to provide habitat and food sources for migratory birds. Upland prairie mix will be

established to promote pollinator success. Enhancement efforts to this large scale provides habitat for both spring and fall migration of waterfowl, overall increase the use days by migratory birds, and provides nesting habitat.

Using the Minnesota DNR Rare Species Guide, the SRRWD has identified species of importance for the oak savanna landscape. Those species include birds like the Loggerhead Shrike, mussels such as the Round Pigtoe, and amphibians including the Blanding's Turtle.

Citing the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, Blanding's turtles suffer from low reproductive rates and high nest predation, exacerbated by habitat loss and degradation. The proposal area has a known hotspot for Blanding's turtles identified in the Wildlife Action Network. Projects like the wetland acquisition and streambank restoration provide the needed wetland and upland habitats to complete the Blanding's turtle life cycle.

The Loggerhead Shrike is listed as endangered and can be attributed to the loss of suitable shelterbelts and grasslands. With the projects identified, prairie creation and tree management on current grasslands can provide better habitat.

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

For acquisition projects, landowner willingness is a large factor in determining the urgency to be completed. Securing properties, while having a willing landowner, is imperative to its success. Landowners often get frustrated if funding isn't available when they want to sell. The acquisition in this proposal has an eager landowner who came to the District for first right to purchase.

For the Channel Restoration Project, timing is important to group the work completed into scaled phases that incorporates economy of scale to get the best unit price per linear foot restored.

Projects selected in the program contribute to the success of long-term management plans. Key biological functioning parcels will be permanently protected, streambanks will be enhanced, there will be improved access to public lands, and vegetation will be restored.

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

The Channel Restoration Project has the potential to install rock arch rapids to implement fish passage between Fountain Lake and Albert Lea Lake that is currently prevented. Boulders are placed with varying sized gaps in-between to create fish passage openings through the weirs. The boulders are set higher continuing towards the banks to dissipate flow energy along the banks and create slower flow areas for weaker swimming fishes. This allows habitat corridors and connections between the two water bodies.

Additionally, the SRRWD utilizes precision conservation modeling with monitoring to identify Property Management Zones (PMZs) on a sub-watershed basis. The PMZs was a watershed wide parcel review where habitat areas were ranked on a 1 to 3 scale. This scale incorporated a variety of measures including size of the habitat complex to be protected, proximity to existing protection, and distance to a water source. All of the parcels included in this proposal are identified as either a 1 or 2 ranking, which are high value locations. Implementing site specific habitat restorations projects are progressively improving populations of native fish, waterfowl and wildlife habitat to once again create a wildlife mecca.

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

Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management

Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife

Explain how this plan 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.

In many prairie plantings, five different species types including wildflowers, legumes, warm-season grasses, cool-season grasses and sedges/rushes are planted to mimic a native plant community. To address the anticipated warmer temperatures, hardy species resistant to pests and diseases that can be found in southern regions are selected. Doing so ensures that habitat needs such nesting, shelter, and food sources, including pollen and seeds, will be available in changing climate conditions.

For streambank restorations, natural channel design that includes restoring a floodplain bench to accommodate higher flows reduces the likelihood of scour, severe undercutting, and erosion along streambanks and allows base flow to be maintained in a primary channel when water is low. By doing so, fish, mussel, and invertebrate habitats are more able to withstand extreme variability in water flow. Additionally, creating riffles and pools provides areas of refuge and maintains critical oxygen levels.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Prairie

Restore or enhance habitat on public lands

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands ~ *Restored and enhanced parcels that include in-lake and streambank restorations will be measured by the increase of Fish IBI Scores based on DNR surveys. Wetland restorations will be evaluated by use days for migrating waterfowl as well as increased species biodiversity survey (pre and post restoration) that supports waterfowl. Upland prairie restorations will be monitored for increased usage, such as Pheasant Roadside surveys. Additionally, the number of prairie acres restored, and wetland acres created will be reported in the SRRWD's reporting framework.*

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.

This request is not supplanting funding or substituting from any previous funding.

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

The SRRWD has multiple funding sources including a citizen driven local option sales tax, local levy, and multiple public funding sources to assist in the District's restoration efforts. Following this LSOHC appropriation timeline, the District will use their general fund dollars for maintenance implementations.

Additionally, the SRRWD is authorized by Minnesota state statute 103D and operates under a series of 10-year

Water Management Plans that are approved by the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR). These plans include a comprehensive list detailing natural resource restoration, enhancement, along with protection and management strategies that can be used for funding in the future for maintenance.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2030+	Sales Tax	Maintenance Inspections	Maintenance Implementation	-
2027-2029	Sales Tax and LSOHC	Construction	Vegetation Maintenance	-

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

The SRRWD annually utilizes the Understanding Environmental Justice in Minnesota tool developed by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, to understand where BIPOC, diverse and unserved communities are present in the planning area by using the socioeconomic indicators layers. This program also includes income poverty status. Projects identified in this proposal, specifically the in-lake habitat restoration and channel restoration are targeted to improve public lands that are located in, and used by, BIPOC and underserved communities. This tool is ran annually to help determine project locations, along with the Priority Management Zone mapping. The District will include the assessment outcomes in each of the project’s operations and maintenance forms.

Additionally, the SRRWD has a digital option to view all completed work. Digital options give diverse community members an option to engage regardless of color, transportation, and gender.

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

Yes

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) 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?

Public Waters

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?

No

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?

No

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

Public waters are open to state fishing regulations. Private lands are currently not open to public hunting but will be once acquired and restored.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

Local Unit of Government

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

Other : Shell Rock River Watershed District, Public Recreation Area

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

One

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

No

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

Yes

Native prairie plantings will be installed.

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

Yes

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Finalize acquisitions and start seeding the sites for restoration.	May 2029
Conduct maintenance and monitoring of all restoration and habitat improvement projects.	Ongoing
Implement vegetation enhancements on restoration projects, complete final project construction.	July 2030
Begin restoration and enhancement projects during the 2026-2027 construction season following completion of design and permitting.	2027-2028 Construction Season
Begin project planning, design, and permitting work for restorations and enhancements. Complete survey and appraisals for acquisitions.	Late 2026-2027

Date of Final Report Submission: 06/30/2031

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

(a) Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Money appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

- (1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2030;
- (2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2034;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2031;
- (4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and
- (5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$45,000	\$20,000	Local Option Sales Tax , Local Option Sales Tax	\$65,000
Contracts	\$1,438,000	-	-	\$1,438,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$287,200	-	-	\$287,200
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$295,800	\$80,000	Local Option Sales Tax and City of Albert Lea	\$375,800
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,066,000	\$100,000	-	\$2,166,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Manager	0.04	5.0	\$25,000	\$15,000	Local Option Sales Tax	\$40,000
Program Assisant	0.03	5.0	\$20,000	\$5,000	Local Option Sales Tax	\$25,000

Amount of Request: \$2,066,000

Amount of Leverage: \$100,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 4.84%

DSS + Personnel: \$45,000

As a % of the total request: 2.18%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

Acquisitions with willing landowners tend to be more of a priory and so that project will stay. All enhancement projects were removed and being the Channel is a phased project approach, priority is given to that project. Funding will be solicited again due to the reduced allocation.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

Leveraged funds come from the City of Albert Lea and the SRRWD's Local Option Sales Tax.

Does this project 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?

The District submits this proposal with the capability and intentions to complete all projects if fully funded. A 50% reduction would mean the in-lake habitat project and channel restoration would have to be reduced in scope, and the acquisition and one wetland restoration would be removed.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?

The District does not use DSS. The grant funded personnel costs would be reduced to \$45,000 but the in-kind staff dollar amounts would be moved from personnel to professional expenses, creating a near proportionate reduction.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

All the work in the contracts line is centered on restoration construction costs minus professional services and staff time.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Design/Engineering

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

One

Federal Funds

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

No

Output Tables**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	10	10
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	31	31
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	41	41

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,763,800	\$1,763,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$302,200	\$302,200
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$2,066,000	\$2,066,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	10	-	10
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	31	-	31
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	41	-	41

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,763,800	-	\$1,763,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$302,200	-	\$302,200
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$2,066,000	-	\$2,066,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$176,380
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$9,748
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$176,380	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$9,748	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

9890 Feet

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Parcels are selected using the Property Management Zones (PMZs). The PMZs are identified using precision conservation modeling, along with monitoring, and science-based targeting. Parcels are then prioritized and ranked based on the degree of habitat degradation, restoration potential, and landowner interest and support. All parcels listed below have willing landowners ready to initiate the projects if funding allows.

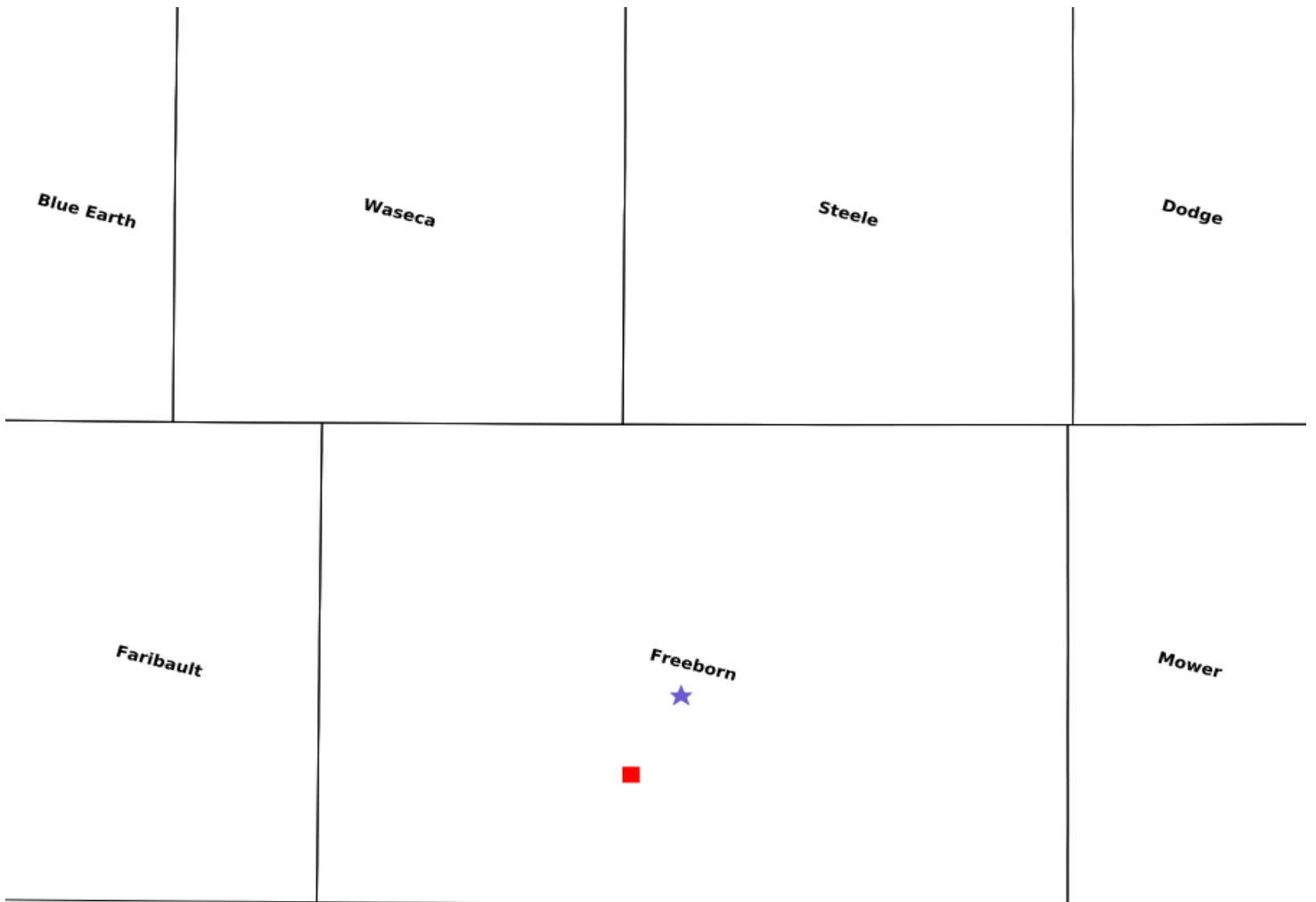
Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Channel Restoration Project	Freeborn	10221209	10	\$1,468,800	Yes	Restoration and naturalization of a Channel in an urban setting to increase habitat success

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Rognes Property	Freeborn	10221231	31	\$302,200	No

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ⊕ Other

