

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2012 Accomplishment Plan

Program Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (P-04)

Manager's Name: Michael Pressman
Title: Director of Habitat Protection
Organization: The Nature Conservancy
Telephone: 612-331-0706
Email: @tnc
Fax: 612-331-0770

Funds Recommended: \$1,720,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x): *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

Abstract:

The Nature Conservancy and the US Fish and Wildlife Service will protect for future generations native prairie and associated wetland complexes in western Minnesota by purchasing fee title properties and/or habitat easements.

Program Narrative

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge was established to preserve, restore, and manage a portion of the remaining critical northern tallgrass prairie habitat and associated habitats at widespread locations throughout the western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa historic range. Only 5 percent of the original tallgrass prairie remains for preservation consideration throughout the entire historic tallgrass prairie range. Native prairie declines of 99.9% and 99.6% have occurred in Iowa and Minnesota, respectively. Grassland dependent bird species have shown steeper, more consistent, and geographically more widespread declines than any other group of North American birds.

The number of acres purchased annually has been limited due to funding shortfalls since the establishment of this refuge. The current land acquisition budget cannot keep up with the landowner interest in this program. This funding will allow us to better meet refuge goals and objectives to protect this vanishing habitat.

The Nature Conservancy will work closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to review potential properties within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area. These properties will be ranked by Service field staff who will work with TNC personnel to protect these tracts.

Lands and easements purchased through this program by The Nature Conservancy will be transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge to be owned and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The majority of the lands protected will consist of native prairie, however, restoration of wetlands and grasslands will also be completed where needed.

Design and Scope of Work

TNC will utilize the funding for the purchase of approximately 1,470 acres of native prairie in Western Minnesota. Fee title tracts will be the top priority for the funding. The funding will be used for the purchase of habitat easements if the funding cannot be used entirely on fee title acquisition. Lands protected will eventually be transferred to the Service and will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.

The purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR is to preserve, restore, and manage a portion of the remaining critical northern tallgrass prairie habitat and associated habitats at widespread locations throughout the western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa historic range.

Planning

This project correlates well with the recommendations of ***The Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan***. Habitat Protection 1 (pages 63-67) states “Protect priority land habitats,” while Habitat Recommendation 5 (pages 80-81) states “Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds.” This project will protect and restore priority native grasslands and their associated wetlands important to grassland dependent wildlife, especially grassland and wetland birds. This proposal will also implement the following habitat recommendations within the plan:

1. Habitat Recommendation 3 (pages 74-78) “Improve connectivity and access to outdoor recreation” - All fee title lands acquired and restored will be open to the public for hunting and other activities allowed under the National Wildlife Refuge System.
2. Habitat Recommendation 7 (pages 84-87) “Keep water on the landscape” – by protecting and restoring grasslands, this proposal will help keep water on the landscape (permanent vegetation restoration).

The need for this project is outlined in the ***Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area Final Environmental Impact Statement***, US Fish and Wildlife Service 1998. The primary purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie HPA is to preserve and enhance the remaining remnant tracts of northern tallgrass prairie and aspen parklands habitats within Iowa and Minnesota.

A secondary purpose is to link existing prairie tracts together (Federal, state, tribal, private organization, and private landowner ownerships) into larger blocks and to buffer remnant prairie. This will establish larger, more viable units of managed prairie and allow travel corridors for wildlife. Future prairie restoration efforts by the US Fish and Wildlife Service could help link existing prairies together.

The basic goals of the Service’s Strategic Habitat Conservation are: 1) accomplish landscape level planning based on quantifiable objectives, 2) implement planned actions, then, 3) evaluate your actions to see if they are addressing the objectives. This is what the Service’s HAPET (Habitat and Population Evaluation Team) office in Fergus Falls does for the Service and its partners in the prairies of Minnesota. The Service’s HAPET office does landscape level planning to meet specific wildlife objectives and conducts evaluation activities (i.e. 4sq.mi.

surveys), to see if Service/partners' activities are meeting Service objectives. The planned actions to be implemented through this grant application are the acquisition and restoration of converted wetland and grassland habitats. Based on HAPET evaluation strategies, modeling predictions can be made on the numbers of nesting waterfowl, grassland nesting birds, and pheasants the acres affected by this grant application will produce. Besides the obvious wildlife benefits, once restored, the lands acquired through this grant will provide additional water quality, groundwater recharge, and flood abatement benefits.

By purchasing fee title to or habitat easements over 1,470 +/- acres, this project will meet the LSOHC Section Priorities 1. *Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes;* and 2. *Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna.*

Although we will strive to acquire lands that already have healthy grassland and wetland complexes, in some cases, restoration is needed. Restoration needs will be determined on a case by case basis. Any such restoration will be performed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service outside of this Accomplishment Plan and may be the subject of future OHF funding requests. In such cases, the US Fish and Wildlife Service land manager will decide which of the current techniques and technologies will be used when restoring the grassland and wetlands of these areas. Grasslands needing restoration will be seeded with local ecotype native grass seed mixtures. Restoration efforts will meet the LSOHC Sections Priority 3 – *“Convert agricultural land to wetland/upland to protect, enhance, or restore existing habitat complexes.....”*; Priority 6- *“Protect expiring Conservations Reserve Program (CRP) lands”*, if the CRP acres are planted to native grass mixture; and Priority 7 – *“Protect, enhance and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success.”*

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

No other Constitutional Funds will be used on to this project.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

This project will greatly accelerate conservation activities in prairie regions of Minnesota. Since 2000, the Service has received annual appropriations of approximately \$500,000 in federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. This annual funding has allowed the Service to purchase smaller sized tracts of prairie during the last 10 years. The addition of Outdoor Heritage Funds will greatly increase the Service's ability to protect larger tracts of native prairie throughout the 48 Minnesota Counties in the HPA.

OHF funds will be additive to The Nature Conservancy's budget. The annual Conservancy budget for Minnesota, raised almost entirely from private sources, will help implement the activities in this proposal. Because OHF funds are not available to cover all expenses incurred for this project (e.g., indirect costs such as legal, grants, and human relations staff; office space, etc.), the Conservancy will incur an actual net unreimbursed cash expense of approximately 23% the operational component of this project. We are exploring options for raising these funds.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Outdoor Heritage Funds will be used to purchase the land in fee title or to purchase perpetual habitat easements. The land purchased will be transferred to the Service to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife and habitat monitoring will be funded through annual Service operations funding. Habitat easements

are perpetual and managers will work with landowners to maintain and, where needed, restore the native prairie on each tract of land.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date
Identify priority acquisitions (fee and easement)	6 potential properties	August 30, 2011
Appraisals ordered	5 tracts	December 1, 2011
Purchase agreements (fee title) finalized	2 tracts	February 15, 2012
Easement Options finalized	2 tracts	June 1, 2012
Acquisitions complete	1,470 acres	June 30, 2012
Grassland Restorations completed*	4 tracts	December 31, 2014

Note – because not all acquisition efforts are always successful, we will identify more potential properties than available funding. Appraisals will be ordered on the most promising and highest priority tracts (once individual tracts have been approved by LSOHC staff).

* Restoration will be completed by USFWS outside of this Accomplishment Plan and may be funded with future requests for OHF funding.

Table B-2. Other Outcome Table

(This table should be used instead of attachment B for activities that are not counted in acres, miles etc. If you use attachment B you can delete this table from the accomplishment plan.)

Goal 1	Activity – P/R/E	Measure	Impact	Ecological Type
Goal 2				

Attachments *(on spreadsheet workbook – 3 separate tabs)*:

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables
- C. Parcel List

No Map is needed for the accomplishment plan

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

Name of Proposal:	Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge
Date:	4-Nov-10
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	P-04

[Link Here to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

Total Amount of Request \$ 1,720,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	Anticipated Cash		Cash Leverage Source	Total
			LSOHC Request	Leverage		
Negotiators	24%		\$ 22,862	\$ 5,288	\$	28,150
Data Manager/Technician	10%		\$ 4,756	\$ 1,100	\$	5,856
Field Steward	5%		\$ 2,545	\$ 589	\$	3,134
Land Steward	2%		\$ 1,772	\$ 410	\$	2,182
					\$	-
					\$	-
					\$	-
Total	0.41		\$ 31,935	\$ 7,387	\$ -	\$ 39,322

Budget and Cash Leverage *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.

Budget Item	Anticipated Cash		Cash Leverage Source	Total
	LSOHC Request	Leverage		
Personnel - <i>auto entered from above</i>	\$ 31,935	\$ 7,387	\$ -	\$ 39,322
Contracts			\$ -	\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT <i>(breakout in table 6 & 7)</i>			\$ -	\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT <i>(breakout in table 6 & 7)</i>	\$ 1,655,346			\$ 1,655,346
Easement Acquisition	<i>***Note \$1,655,346 in fee and/or easement total, fee will be preferred approach, but it will depend in part on landowner goals.</i>		\$ -	\$ -
Easement Stewardship			\$ -	\$ -
Travel (in-state)	\$ 720			\$ 720
Professional Services	\$ 32,000			\$ 32,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs			\$ -	\$ -
Other			\$ -	\$ -
Capital Equipment <i>(auto entered from below)</i>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools			\$ -	\$ -
Supplies/Materials			\$ -	\$ -
	\$ 1,720,001	\$ 7,387	\$ -	\$ 1,727,388

Capital Equipment *(single items over \$10,000 - auto entered into table above)*

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
<i>Item 1 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 2 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 3 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 4 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 5 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 6 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 7 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 8 enter here</i>		
Total	0	0

Attachment B. Outcome Tables

Name of Proposal:	Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge
Date:	4-Nov-10
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	P-04

Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same

If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:

Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect		1470			1470
Enhance					0
Total	0	1470	0	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

1470

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

1470

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect		\$ 1,720,000			\$ 1,720,000
Enhance					\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ 1,720,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 1,720,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 1,720,000

Check to make sure this amount is the same

as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect				1470		1470
Enhance						0
Total	0	0	0	1470	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

1470

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

1470

Total Acres from Table 1.

1470

These three cells should be the same figure.

Attachment C. Parcel List

Name of Proposal: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge
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County	Township	Range	Direction	Section	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity R=Restore P=Protect E=Enhance	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name						1470	\$1,720,000		P		Y

Note - At time of proposal - this project is not parcel specific as specific tracts for protection have not yet been solidified. Properties will be evaluated and considered for inclusion by TNC and USFWS, and reviewed for approval by LSOHC staff. Funding will be used to purchase either fee title tracts, habitat easements, or a combination of the two.