

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2012 Accomplishment Plan

June 16, 2011

Program Title: MN Prairie Recovery Project (P-06)

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Funds Recommended: \$4,500,000

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

Abstract:

This project will: protect 1200 acres native prairie/savanna; restore 250 acres grassland; enhance 6000 acres grassland/savanna with fire, invasive species removal, and grazing; and continue a new prairie conservation model.

Program Narrative

Design and Scope of Work

1. Problems to be addressed: the conservation problems facing Minnesota's prairies, prairie potholes, grasslands and savannas are many, and include:

- a. Continued losses of native and restored grasslands due to economic pressures.
- b. Degradation of existing public grasslands and wetlands due to encroachment by woody vegetation and other invasive species that reduces their values to wildlife and people.
- c. Inadequate public access for hunting and fishing in agricultural parts of the state.
- d. Potential loss of local taxes and local incomes when land is acquired by public entities.
- e. Long-term state obligations for management of public lands and payment-in-lieu-of-taxes creates a burden for state budget.
- f. Programmatic and staff limitations that reduce efficiencies in implementing diverse conservation programs across multiple partners.

2. Scope of work: with the requested funding, and with other funds leveraged by this money and brought by other partners, the following actions and outcomes will be realized.

- The “Prairie Recovery Project Partnership” will be expanded from the current 2 focus areas to an additional 2 focus areas (4 total). Project partners, including MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR), MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever (PF), MN Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) and The Nature Conservancy will establish other guidelines for project implementation. Local workgroups will be convened to provide on-the-ground planning and coordination of conservation activities. Additional groups that will be contacted for input or representation will include: MN Cattleman’s Association, local livestock groups, Ducks Unlimited, MN Waterfowl Association, MN Deer Hunters Association, Land Stewardship Project, MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and MN Farmer’s Union.
- An estimated 1200 acres of existing and restorable grassland, prairie pothole complex, and/or savanna will be permanently protected to supplement existing efforts. Lands will be held by The Nature Conservancy. Lands will be open to public hunting and fishing as provided in the Constitution, and basic developments will be implemented (boundary signage, parking lot). Protection efforts will be coordinated with other partner protection programs (e.g., DNR Wildlife Management Area and Prairie Bank programs).
- A separate and discrete internal fund will be established by The Nature Conservancy to cover ongoing land-management costs. Income generated by agricultural leases (grazing, haying and/or cropping), earned interest, public contributions and donations will be held in this account and used to pay for property taxes and ongoing management costs.
- An estimated 250 acres of cropland will be restored to diverse, local-ecotype grassland or grassland/wetland complex (part of the above protected acres) as a supplement to existing efforts. Preference will be given to local producers and contractors for provision of seed and establishment of prairies, to promote creation of local conservation-oriented businesses.
- Up to an estimated 6000 acres of grassland complex will be enhanced on public lands and those purchased with OHF funds and held by the Conservancy (“protected conservation lands”) as a supplement to existing efforts. Management techniques will include prescribed fire, conservation grazing and/or haying, removal of woody vegetation, and control of exotic species. Much of this work will be accomplished by contract. Maximum use will be made of Conservation Corps of Minnesota (CCM) staff, otherwise, local businesses will be solicited.
- On-the-ground staff provided by this grant will form and lead local coordination and implementation teams; identify protection, restoration and enhancement needs and opportunities within the focus area; work with DNR and FWS staff to delineate conservation projects on public lands; coordinate deployment of

contract and staff resources to protected conservation lands; contact and work with private landowners to coordinate agricultural activities/leases on appropriate protected conservation lands (e.g., haying, grazing, cropping); educate lessees on appropriate conservation grazing/haying practices; supervise management of lands acquired above; plan and conduct prescribed burns; secure other funding for conservation practices; and other activities related to prairie conservation in the focus areas. In addition to continuing work in the focal areas that were established in Phase One, two additional “term” biologists (“prairie managers”) will be hired to coordinate activities in the new focus areas. These will be hired and employed by the Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, or another non-government partner, but are expected to be located in a DNR or FWS office. This is intended to foster better coordination and collaboration among partners, while ensuring enhancement needs on public lands are being specifically addressed.

- Contracts will be let to provide a high level of enhancement activities to new and existing protected conservation lands, greatly expanding current capacity. These activities will improve the habitat value of public lands that are not currently receiving adequate management treatment, while simultaneously providing jobs for MCC and local businesses. Activities will include removal of undesirable woody vegetation, identification and treatment of invasive species infestations, removal of abandoned fences and/or other structures, and related restoration/enhancement activities.
- A project coordinator will oversee implementation of the above activities, and provide administrative support for budget monitoring and reporting. Significant marketing and media outreach will be provided by the Conservancy to highlight the goals and accomplishments of the project to local and statewide constituents, as well as elected officials.

3. How priorities were/will be set: prioritization and prioritization criteria vary with the conservation tactic being employed (i.e., protection, restoration, enhancement). Focus areas were selected where there was overlap with MN County Biological Survey prairie “focus areas” and TNC priority areas. Because this is a collaborative effort involving multiple partners, tactical priorities and criteria will be established at both the state and local level by respective coordinating groups. Likely criteria for each of these tactics include:

- a. Protection: location/proximity to other habitats, location/proximity to other protected lands, presence of rare/endangered species, imminence of conversion, ability to support grazing, size, cost, and likelihood for leveraged funding. A more robust listing of selection criteria can be provided upon request.
- b. Restoration: feasibility/likelihood of success, location, cost, availability of seed, and availability of restoration technical assistance.
- c. Enhancement: urgency/time since last enhancement, feasibility of success, accessibility, availability of enhancement technical assistance, cost, proximity to other habitats and partnership benefits.

4. Urgency and opportunity of this proposal: about 1% of Minnesota’s original native prairie still remains (about 200,000 acres of an original 1.8 million), and the remnants are still being destroyed and degraded today. Less than half is currently protected from conversion, and management capacity is unable to address needs. Additionally, more than 90% of the original prairie pothole wetlands in the western part of the state have also been lost. These losses threaten the viability of Minnesota’s prairie/wetland wildlife and recreational opportunities that depend upon them. Further, huge strides that have been made in supplementing habitat with the Conservation Reserve Program are in imminent danger of being lost as contracts expire. Conservationists have a narrow window of opportunity to protect remaining native grasslands, wetlands and other habitats, restore and protect supplemental grasslands and wetlands, and accelerate enhancement efforts to ensure these habitats are providing optimal value to animals and people. This proposal accelerates an initiative begun last year, and expands efforts into 2 new focus areas where maximum benefits can be realized.

5. Stakeholder involvement and/or opposition: this proposal continues an initiative begun this year with OHF funding. We have worked very closely with conservation interests in developing this initiative and proposal, and will be intensively collaborating among partners. Via past and ongoing projects, we are also coordinating with other stakeholders (e.g., cattlemen’s associations, Land Stewardship Project, county boards), and will ramp up that coordination significantly. It is the intent of this project and partners to identify reasons for opposition and address them in a cooperative environment with stakeholders. Local implementation committees will help address these issues.

Planning

This project implements strategies identified in at least 5 credible plans, as identified below.

1. MN Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan. The strategic framework of this plan has 5 elements in its “Habitat” section: integrated planning, critical land protection, land and water restoration and protection, (identification of) sustainable practices, and (provision of) economic incentives for sustainable practices. Further, while the plan does not go into great detail with respect to prairie conservation, it clearly states that “protection of priority land habitats” is a vital practice, and prairies clearly fall here.
2. Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare. The primary objective identified in the MN DNR’s plan is to “stabilize and increase populations of “species in greatest conservation need (SGCN)”. In the prairie regions of Minnesota, strategies to achieve this goal include:
 - a. Support incentives that avoid conversion of grasslands into row crops where SGCN occur.
 - b. Use mowing, cutting woody vegetation, prescribed fire, or careful use of herbicides to prevent the invasion of grasslands by trees and shrubs.
 - c. Lengthen the cutting rotations for hay; avoid early-season mowing.
 - d. Use light to moderate, rotational grazing programs to benefit SGCN
 - e. Prevent fragmentation of grassland habitat.

- f. Avoid soil compaction in areas occupied by mammal SGCN.
 - g. Increase native plant species components
 - h. Control spread of invasive species to adjacent native-dominated sites.
- This project proposes to address all but item “f” above.
3. The Nature Conservancy’s Northern Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregional Plan (1998). This plan identifies key conservation targets, geographic emphasis areas, threats to native plant and animal communities, and key strategies to mitigate these threats. The proposal is a solid step in the implementation of this plan. Also, as a step-down from the NTP Ecoregion Plan, the Chapter has completed local level planning (Conservation Area Planning) for smaller geographic units that will correspond with the focus areas. These are very explicit in identifying conservation targets and activities.
 4. DNR’s Pheasant Plan. This proposal is in full support of the Pheasant Plan goal to add 1.5 million acres of undisturbed grassland to the state by 2025.
 5. DNR’s Waterfowl Plan. This proposal is in full support of the state Long-range Duck Recovery Plan to add 2 million acres of habitat to the state by 2025. It also utilizes establishment of complexes, as per the plan, to achieve multiple conservation synergies and benefits.

This plan helps fulfill multiple priorities specified by the LSOHC “Prairie Section Vision”, including permanent protection of existing prairies and wetlands, restoration of prairie and wetland habitats, building grassland/wetland complexes in at least 9-square mile blocks, enhancement of public lands for game species and other species of conservation need, and protection of watersheds of shallow lakes. Specifically, this proposal addresses “Prairie Section Strategies” 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 directly. Finally, implementation will be guided by planning assistance from USFWS Habitat Assessment, Populations and Evaluation Team (HAPET) using strategic planning models and tools. Partners are currently developing a statewide prairie conservation plan, which will further guide efforts as it is finalized.

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

A current LCCMR/ENRTF project (Reconnecting MN Prairies) will provide baseline data and modeling information to guide deployment of conservation practices. It is also expected that local project teams will direct additional expenditures from ENRTF and Clean Water Funds (via BWSR programs) into conservation efforts as these are available and channeled into focus areas.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

This project will greatly accelerate conservation activities in prairie regions of Minnesota. OHF funds will be additive to the 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; insurance, 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

Restoration activities will include grassland and wetland restorations. The prairie pothole landscape is sustained through the regular application of appropriate disturbance, including fire, grazing and haying. A chronic problem for land managers is securing adequate funding to do these conservation practices as frequently as needed (e.g., every 1-4 years). A primary purpose of this proposal is to establish a collaborative and coordinated partnership that can accelerate the application of these management techniques across multiple landscapes. On existing protected conservation lands, an annual infusion of funding will be required unless or until this income/funding model can be more widely applied. For new lands acquired under this proposal, we will establish a new funding model by attempting to secure management funds by generating compatible income from acquired lands. In addition to the conservation value of planned haying and grazing, the income generated by these agricultural leases can help pay for management activities and property taxes. The Nature Conservancy will pay property taxes on all lands acquired with OHF dollars appropriated for the Prairie Recovery Phase II project. Restoration and enhancement will be limited to land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership or in public waters as defined in Minnesota Statutes 103G.005, subdivision 15 or interest in land acquired using funds appropriated in Laws of Minnesota 2010, Chapter 361, Article 1, Section 2, subdivision 2(f).

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date completed
Protection	First 300 acres acquired	June 2012
	Additional 300 acres acquired	Sept. 2012
	Additional 300 acres acquired	Dec. 2012
	Final 300 acres acquired	June 2013
Restoration	Restoration initiated on 125 acres	Sept. 2013
	Restoration initiated on next 125 acres	Mar. 2014
	Restorations completed	June 2014
Enhancement	100 acres woody veg. control	Dec. 2011
	2500 acres prescribed fire	June 2012
	400 acres invasives control	Sept. 2012
	200 acres woody veg. control	Dec. 2012
	2500 acres prescribed fire	June 2013
	300 acres invasives control	June 2013

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:	MN Prairie Recovery Project Phase 2
Date:	16-Jun-11
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	P-06

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

Total Amount of Request \$ 4,500,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	Anticipated Cash		Cash Leverage Source	Total
			LSOHC Request	Leverage		
<i>Project coordinator</i>	0.5	2	\$ 127,204	\$ 29,422	TNC	\$ 156,626
<i>Term Biologist #3</i>	1	2	\$ 111,384	\$ 25,763	TNC	\$ 137,147
<i>Term Biologist #4</i>	1	2	\$ 111,384	\$ 25,763	TNC	\$ 137,147
<i>Grant Administrator</i>	####	3	\$ 18,802	\$ 4,324		\$ 23,126
<i>Protection Specialist</i>	####	2	\$ 73,542	\$ 17,010	TNC	\$ 90,552
<i>Burn Crew</i>	####	3	\$ 153,678	\$ 35,661	TNC	\$ 189,339
<i>Term Biologists #1&#2</i>	2	1	\$ 113,568	\$ 26,268	TNC	\$ 139,836
Total	6.3		\$ 709,562	\$ 164,211	\$ -	\$ 873,773

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 - auto entered from above	\$ 709,562	\$ 164,211	\$ -	\$ 873,773
Contracts	\$ 804,400	\$ 466,058	LCCMR, NFWF, TNC	\$ 1,270,458
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)	\$ 2,455,880	\$ 910,000	RIM, NAWCA	\$ 3,365,880
Easement Acquisition				\$ -
Easement Stewardship				\$ -
Travel (in-state)	\$ 93,498	\$ 15,138	TNC	\$ 108,636
Professional Services	\$ 215,400	\$ 34,875	TNC	\$ 250,275
DNR Land Acquisition Costs				\$ -
Other				\$ 244,673
Capital Equipment (<i>auto entered from below</i>)	\$ 42,000	\$ -		\$ 42,000
Other Equipment/Tools	\$ 67,850	\$ 5,375	TNC	\$ 73,225
Supplies/Materials	\$ 111,410	\$ 18,038	TNC	\$ 129,448
	\$ 4,500,000	\$ 1,613,695	\$ -	\$ 6,113,695

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

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
<i>Slip on burn rig</i>	10500	
<i>UTV</i>	10500	
<i>UTV</i>	10500	
<i>Trailer</i>	10500	
<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	42000	0

Attachment B. Outcome Tables

Name of Proposal:	MN Prairie Recovery Project Phase 2
Date:	16-Jun-11
Legal Citation / Proposal Number:	P-06

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	50	200			250
Protect	200	1000			1200
Enhance	1000	5000			6000
Total	1250	6200	0	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

7450

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

7450

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$ 50,000	\$ 200,000			\$ 250,000
Protect	\$ 368,382	\$ 2,087,498			\$ 2,455,880
Enhance	\$ 269,118	\$ 1,525,002			\$ 1,794,120
Total	\$ 687,500	\$ 3,812,500	\$ -	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 4,500,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 4,500,000

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				250		250
Protect				1200		1200
Enhance				6000		6000
Total	0	0	0	7450	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

7450

These three cells should be the same figure.

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

7450

Total Acres from Table 1.

7450

Attachment C. Parcel List

Name of Proposal: MN Prairie Recovery Project Phase 2
Date: 16-Jun-11
Legal Citation / Proposal Number: P-06

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											
<i>Protection Projects</i>											
	Polk							Note: specific tracts for protection are not yet identified. We will work with the Council and staff to identify these and get approval prior to purchase negotiations.	P		
	Red Lake						P				
	Norman						P				
	Clay						P				
	Wilkin						P				
	Kittson						P				
	Roseau						P				
	Big Stone						P				
	Lac qui Parle						P				
	Swift						P				
	Chippewa						P				
	Pope						P				
	Kandiyohi						P				
	Stearns						P				
<i>Restoration Projects</i>											
	Polk							Specific restoration projects won't be known until lands are acquired pursuant to above note. We will seek concurrence by Council prior to expending any funds.	R		
	Red Lake						R				
	Norman						R				
	Clay						R				
	Wilkin						R				
	Kittson						R				
	Roseau						R				
	Big Stone						R				
	Lac qui Parle						R				
	Swift						R				
	Chippewa						R				
	Pope						R				

Attachment C. Parcel List

Enhancement Projects

Kandiyohi		R
Stearns		R
Polk	Specific tracts for enhancement will be identified in discussions with DNR, FWS and other partners once the biologists are in place. We will work with Council and DNR to get concurrence on these sites before funds are expended.	E
Red Lake Falls		E
Norman		E
Clay		E
Wilkin		E
Kittson		E
Roseau		E
Big Stone		E
Lac qui Parle		E
Swift		E
Chippewa		E
Pope		E
Kandiyohi		E
Stearns		E