

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2014 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 17, 2013

Program or Project Title: Accelerated protection of grassland and prairie habitat with Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) and Native Prairie Bank (NPB) easements

Funds Recommended: \$ 5,450,000

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Title:

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity Type:

- Protect in Easement

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Prairie

Abstract:

The Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) and the Native Prairie Bank (NPB) programs (NPB) are coordinating to accelerate grassland protection efforts. This proposal will enroll 520 RIM acres and 600 NPB acres. Enrollment will focus on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes.

Design and Scope of Work:

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing western and southern Minnesota. This proposal aims to protect 1120 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment of Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) and the Native Prairie Bank (NPB) easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

The National Agriculture Statistics Service reports that grassland conversion to corn and soybeans across a significant portion of the Western Corn Belt is comparable to deforestation rates in Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia. In fact, the rate of grassland-to-cropland conversion in the Corn Belt has not been this high since the 1920s and 1930s, the era of rapid mechanization of America's agriculture. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of

prairie, today less than 2 percent remains. The few acres of native prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops – not anymore. The current combination of low interest rates, high corn and soybean prices and ever-increasing yields per acre make it economically attractive to convert even marginal lands that were never before deemed tillable. Even the last 25-years of investments to restore grasslands with the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) stands to be lost. There was once 1.9 million acres of CRP in Minnesota; today that amount is about 1.4 million acres. Since 2007 Minnesota has lost 425,000 acres of CRP and another 625,000 acres of CRP is scheduled to expire over the next five years. Together, that’s a land mass roughly the size of Rhode Island. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

Recognizing that protecting grassland and wetland habitat is the one of the most critical environmental challenges facing Minnesota, over a dozen leading conservation organizations have developed a blue print for moving forward – the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. This plan calls for several outcomes, including the protection of all remaining native prairie and the protection other grasslands through conservation easements. The two primary, state administered easement programs identified to accomplish this are the Reinvest in Minnesota Program (RIM) and the Native Prairie Bank Program (NPB). In 1986, the Reinvest in Minnesota Resources Act was enacted to restore certain marginal and environmental sensitive agricultural land to protect soil and water quality and support fish and wildlife habitat. To date over 6,000 RIM easements have been enrolled, covering more than 250,000 acres. The RIM Program currently focuses on permanent wetland restoration, adjacent native grassland wildlife habitat complexes and permanent riparian buffers. The Native Prairie Bank Program was established by the 1987 legislature to protect private native prairie lands by authorizing the state to acquire conservation easements from landowners. To date 111 NPB easements have been enrolled, covering about 8990 acres. The NPB Program targets protection of native prairie lands, placing highest priority on diverse native plant communities, rare species habitats and lands that are part of a larger prairie complex.

Between the current priority lands for RIM and NPB enrollment lies a mix of restored grasslands and low diversity remnant prairies – without any protection from conversion. In order to achieve the Minnesota Prairie Plans goals the RIM and NPB programs are re-tooling to better address today’s threat of prairie, grassland and wetland loss. A strong infusion of new funding and targeting enrollment to priority landscapes will better position these programs to deliver the outcomes called for in the Minnesota Prairie Plan. Specifically this proposal will enroll 520 acres of RIM easements and 600 acres of Native Prairie Bank easements. These acres will be focused on priority landscapes identified in the Minnesota Prairie Plan. Local Technical Teams comprised of local conservation organizations have already been assembled and eagerly await funding to deliver these programs to willing landowners.

Planning:

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Plans Addressed:

- Grassland Bird Conservation Area
- Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse
- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN
- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Scientific and Natural Area's Long Range Plan
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- North American Waterbird Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for States and Physiographic Regions
- Partners in Flight Grassland Bird Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Strategic Habitat Conservation Model
- U.S. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Plan

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work; provides the most cost-effective use of financial resources; and where possible takes into consideration the value of local outreach, education, and community engagement to sustain project outcomes
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Restore or enhance habitat on permanently protected land
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Forest Prairie Transition Section Priorities:

- 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
- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie
- Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success

LSOHC Prairie Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes
- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna
- Protect expiring CRP lands
- 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 Relationships Listed

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

The RIM program has traditionally focused on restoring habitat on marginal croplands and creating new, additional habitat. With limited funding, the Native Prairie Bank (NPB) program has traditionally limited enrollment to the highest quality native prairies. Minnesota has many restored grasslands and moderate quality native prairies, all providing significant habitat value, but has not been a traditional focus of these programs. Without permanent protection options, these existing grasslands are under great threat of conversion to row crops. Under the strategic direction provided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan, and the recognition that a new wave of grassland loss is upon us, both the RIM and NPB programs are realigning targets and priorities. This realignment will ensure that a gap doesn't exist between the programs, and that a landowner interested in permanent protection of their grassland or prairie has a viable option. Funding from this proposal will provide an acceleration of targeted enrollment for both programs.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its RIM conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. Stewardship costs are part of this project and are calculated at \$5,000/ easement for 25 years. BWSR is in the process of reassessing stewardship costs based upon perpetual costs. Accomplishment plan amendments will be requested if costs change significantly. Landowners are ultimately responsible for maintaining easement areas according to the approved conservation plan which is part of every easement by incorporation. Native Prairie Bank (NPB) conservation easements are monitored according to the MN DNR's "Scientific & Natural Areas Program Conservation Easement Long-Term Stewardship, Monitoring & Enforcement Plan". This plan calls for annual landowner contacts as well as on-the-ground site evaluations every year for the first three years, then once every three years if no violations are found. Budgeted into this proposal is funding to establish an account dedicated to the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of NPB easements acquired under this proposal.

Public Use:

Will the eased land be open for public use? - No

Permanent Protection:

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - Yes

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Enrollment of 520 acres of Reinvest In Minnesota easements	June 30, 2017
Enrollment of 600 acres of Native Prairie Bank easements	June 30, 2017

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 *Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, habitat complex's and corridors will be targeted for protection; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*
- Wetland and upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands *Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, habitat complex's will be targeted for protection; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*
- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands *Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, protection of native prairie will be top priority; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected *The scoring for process for RIM easements gives a preference to protecting expiring CRP; the resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*
- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands *Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, protection of native prairie will be top priority; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*
- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife *Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, key*

parcels in core areas will be targeted for protection; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.

- *Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered Native Prairie Bank easements will target remnant prairies, but also enroll adjoining lands as a buffer; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*
- *Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species Using the MN Prairie Plan framework, habitat complex's and corridors will be targeted for protection; resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.*

Budget Spreadsheet

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

Total Amount of Request: \$ 5450000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$328,800	\$0		\$328,800
Contracts	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$4,698,600	\$0		\$4,698,600
Easement Stewardship	\$177,000	\$0		\$177,000
Travel	\$12,600	\$0		\$12,600
Professional Services	\$128,600	\$0		\$128,600
Direct Support Services	\$37,000	\$0		\$37,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$7,500	\$0		\$7,500
Supplies/Materials	\$29,900	\$0		\$29,900
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$5,450,000	\$0		\$5,450,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Easement/GIS/Database	0.25	3.00	\$49,000	\$0		\$49,000
Engineering	0.20	3.00	\$60,000	\$0		\$60,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.00	\$45,000	\$0		\$45,000
Program Management	0.10	3.00	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
Natural Resource Specialist	0.50	3.00	\$105,000	\$0		\$105,000
Acquisition Specialist	0.15	3.00	\$33,800	\$0		\$33,800
Total	1.35	18.00	\$328,800	\$0		\$328,800

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	BWSR	\$190,000	\$0		\$190,000
Contracts	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	BWSR	\$2,145,000	\$0		\$2,145,000
Easement Stewardship	BWSR	\$65,000	\$0		\$65,000
Travel	BWSR	\$3,600	\$0		\$3,600
Professional Services	BWSR	\$39,000	\$0		\$39,000
Direct Support Services	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	BWSR	\$2,500	\$0		\$2,500
Supplies/Materials	BWSR	\$4,900	\$0		\$4,900
DNR IDP	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$2,450,000	\$0		\$2,450,000

Personnel - BWSR

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Easement/GIS/Database	0.25	3.00	\$49,000	\$0		\$49,000
Engineering	0.20	3.00	\$60,000	\$0		\$60,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.00	\$45,000	\$0		\$45,000
Program Management	0.10	3.00	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
Total	0.70	12.00	\$190,000	\$0		\$190,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	DNR	\$138,800	\$0		\$138,800
Contracts	DNR	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	DNR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	DNR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	DNR	\$2,553,600	\$0		\$2,553,600
Easement Stewardship	DNR	\$112,000	\$0		\$112,000
Travel	DNR	\$9,000	\$0		\$9,000
Professional Services	DNR	\$89,600	\$0		\$89,600
Direct Support Services	DNR	\$37,000	\$0		\$37,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	DNR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	DNR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	DNR	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	DNR	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000
DNR IDP	DNR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$3,000,000	\$0		\$3,000,000

Personnel - DNR

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Natural Resource Specialist	0.50	3.00	\$105,000	\$0		\$105,000
Acquisition Specialist	0.15	3.00	\$33,800	\$0		\$33,800
Total	0.65	6.00	\$138,800	\$0		\$138,800

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
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	1,120	0	0	1,120
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1,120	0	0	1,120

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

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	500
Enhance	0
Total	500

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
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	\$5,450,000	\$0	\$0	\$5,450,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$5,450,000	\$0	\$0	\$5,450,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
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	224	0	896	0	1,120
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	224	0	896	0	1,120

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
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	\$1,095,000	\$0	\$4,355,000	\$0	\$5,450,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$1,095,000	\$0	\$4,355,000	\$0	\$5,450,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

0 miles

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
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Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.