

# Request for Funding

## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2016 / ML 2015

**Program or Project Title:** Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection

**Funds Requested:** \$9,887,000

**Manager's Name:** Jason Garms

**Title:**

**Organization:** MN DNR

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**Organization Web Site:**

**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 Native Prairie Bank Program will work with willing landowners to enroll 2000 acres of native prairie in perpetual easements. Enrollment will focus on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes and target high quality prairies that provide valuable wildlife habitat.

### Design and Scope of Work:

The loss of native prairie and associated grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing western and southern Minnesota. This proposal aims to permanently protect 2000 acres of native prairie habitat by accelerating the enrollment of Native Prairie Bank easements.

This acceleration is necessary to address today's rapid loss of native prairie and associated grasslands and meet the habitat protection goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie, today about 1.3 percent remains. The few acres of native prairie that remain in Minnesota may have once been thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops – not anymore. The Midwest is experiencing a rate of grassland-to-cropland conversion in the Corn Belt that has not been seen since the 1920s and 1930s, the era of rapid mechanization of America's agriculture. 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. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland dependent wildlife populations.

Recognizing that protecting grassland and wetland habitat is the one of the most critical conservation challenges facing Minnesota, over a dozen leading conservation organizations have developed a road map for moving forward – the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. This plan calls for several outcomes, one being the protection of all remaining native prairie, largely through conservation easements. One of the primary easement tools for native prairie protection in Minnesota is the DNR administered Native Prairie Bank Program easement program.

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 willing landowners. To date 113 Native Prairie Bank easements have been enrolled into the program, covering a little over 9,000 acres. The Native Prairie Bank Program targets the protection of native prairie tracts, but can also include adjoining lands as buffers and additional habitat. Eligible tracts are prioritized based on several factors including:

- 1) Size and quality of habitat, focusing on diverse native prairie communities that have been identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey
- 2) The occurrence of rare species, or suitability habitat for rare species
- 3) Lands that are part of a larger habitat complex

Native Prairie Bank easements provide enduring, long-term protection to prairie habitat by placing restrictions on future land use, including, but not limited to:

- 1) No topographic changes or alterations to the natural landscape (plow, drain, fill, etc.)
- 2) No dumping trash or garbage
- 3) Motor vehicle use limited to management purposes (weed control, prescribed burning, etc.)
- 4) No drawing of water for irrigation or other uses
- 5) No building or placing of structures on the protected property
- 6) No subdivision or dividing of the parcel
- 7) No introduction of invasive species
- 8) No pesticide use without DNR approval

In addition, a Native Prairie Bank easement grants the DNR the right to enter the property to manage the prairie as needed, as well as monitor and enforce the easements terms/conditions.

To accelerate efforts, the Native Prairie Bank Program is coordinating with Minnesota Prairie Plan partners and using the network of established Local Technical Teams (LTT's) to reach out to landowners and increase program enrollment. The LTT's are local staff from SWCD's, NRCS, DNR, USFWS, The Nature Conservancy and Pheasants Forever - to name a few. The LTT's have already begun cultivating relationships with prairie landowners and eagerly await funding to deliver this program to willing landowners - there is a waiting list. The new enrollment of 2000 acres will focus on priority landscapes identified in the Minnesota Prairie Plan, which directly coincides with the location of LTT's.

## How the request addresses MN habitats:

Native Prairie Bank gives priority to sites identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey and targets rare and endangered plant and animal species, high quality plant communities, and key habitats for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). SWAP identifies 139 SGCNs alone in the Prairie Parkland Province. SWAP also identifies prairie as a key habitat in 11 different subsections within the State. Prairie, as a habitat type, contains more SGCNs than any other habitat in Minnesota. The Native Prairie Bank Program can protect these unique wildlife habitats, work with the landowners of these tracts to manage and enhance them, all in way that is permanent and enduring.

## Please explain the nature of urgency:

Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie, today only 1.3 percent remains. Development pressures continue and native prairies are converted to other uses everyday. While roughly half of the few native prairies that remain have some level of formal protection, many do not.

## Planning

### MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats

### Plans Addressed:

- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

## Please describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) systematically collects, interprets and delivers data on plant and animal

distribution and the ecology of native plant communities. These data is used directly in the scoring and evaluation of potential Native Prairie Bank parcels. MBS also conducts long-term monitoring to assess outcomes of conservation actions.

**LSOHC Prairie Section Priorities:**

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

**LSOHC Forest Prairie Transition Section Priorities:**

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

**Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:**

Since inception of Native Prairie Bank, the program has been able to enroll an average of 4 properties protecting 354 acres each year. This is a reflection of funding available and not landowner interest in the program. At that pace most native prairies will be lost before the landowners can be offered protection options. A majority of existing Native Prairie Bank projects were acquired with state bonding funds, while others have been acquired with Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Funds. In addition to this proposal, the Native Prairie Bank Program is also working toward accelerating funding available from state bonding and the Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund.

**Non-OHF Money Spent in the Past:**

<b>Appropriation Year</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Amount</b>
ML14	Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$3,000,000
ML06	Bonding - State	\$900,000
ML05	Bonding - State	\$950,000
ML03	ENRTF (LCCMR)	\$191,600
ML13	Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$800,000
ML13	ENRTF (LCCMR)	\$472,000
ML11	ENRTF (LCCMR)	521,000
ML11	Outdoor Heritage Fund	347,900
ML10	Outdoor Heritage Fund	590,700
ML10	ENRTF (LCCMR)	\$94,500
ML08	Bonding - State	\$1,600,000
ML08	ENRTF (LCCMR)	\$475,000

**Sustainability and Maintenance:**

The policy of the DNR is to follow, as closely as possible, established industry practices in the stewardship of its conservation easement interests. The intent of this stewardship is to protect both the conservation values of the property protected by these easements and the investment of the state in those interests. Elements of this stewardship include the creation of baseline property reports, enforcement protocols, regular compliance monitoring, effective record keeping and reporting, and maintaining effective working relationships with the owners of these easement properties. The Native Prairie Bank Program implements this policy by following the “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 Native Prairie Bank easements acquired under this proposal.

## Maintain Project Outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2020	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 1: Notify landowner, conduct site visit and monitor easement to ensure terms and conditions are being upheld		
2021	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 2: Notify landowner, conduct site visit and monitor easement to ensure terms and conditions are being upheld		
2022	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 3: Notify landowner, conduct site visit and monitor easement to ensure terms and conditions are being upheld		
2023	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 4: Notify landowner, remind them of easement terms and conditions, discuss management concerns		
2024	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 5: Notify landowner, remind them of easement terms and conditions, discuss management concerns		
2025	Conservation easement fund established with this appropriation	Year 6: Notify landowner, conduct site visit and monitor easement to ensure terms and conditions are being upheld		
Ongoing...				

## Applicable Criteria:

*If funded, this proposal will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056? - **Yes***

## 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
Enroll 2000 acres of Native Bank Bank easements	June 30, 2019

## Outcomes

### Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands - *Acres of native prairie protected from conversion*
  - *Acres of native prairie protected with high connectivity to other conservation lands*
  - *Acres protected within Prairie Plan Core and Corridor Areas*
  - *Average size of protected complex*

### Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered - *Acres of native prairie protected from conversion*
  - *Acres of native prairie protected with connectivity to other conservation lands*
  - *Acres protected within Prairie Plan Core and Corridor Areas*
  - *Average size of protected complex*

## Relationship to Other Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

The Native Prairie Bank Program has a good track record of securing Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund (ENRTF) dollars for the stewardship of Native Prairie Bank easements. This includes funding for landowner stewardship plans, technical assistance, prescribed burning and invasive species control, as well as additional acquisition of easements. The program will continue to seek ENRTF funds for native prairie stewardship activities.

# Budget Spreadsheet

**Total Amount of Request: \$9,887,000**

## Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$555,000	\$0		\$555,000
Contracts	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$8,400,000	\$0		\$8,400,000
Easement Stewardship	\$420,000	\$0		\$420,000
Travel	\$22,500	\$0		\$22,500
Professional Services	\$313,500	\$0		\$313,500
Direct Support Services	\$120,000	\$0		\$120,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$6,500	\$0		\$6,500
Supplies/Materials	\$24,500	\$0		\$24,500
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$9,887,000	\$0	-	\$9,887,000

## Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Project Coordinator	0.10	4.00	\$34,000	\$0		\$34,000
Natural Resource Specialist	1.55	4.00	\$448,000	\$0		\$448,000
Acquisition Specialist	0.25	4.00	\$73,000	\$0		\$73,000
Total	1.90	12.00	\$555,000	\$0	-	\$555,000

Amount of Request: \$9,887,000

Amount of Leverage: \$0

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.00%

## Output Tables

**Table 1a. 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	2,000	0	0	2,000
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	2,000	0	0	2,000

**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	1,500
Enhance	0
Total	1,500

**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	\$9,887,000	\$0	\$0	\$9,887,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$9,887,000	\$0	\$0	\$9,887,000

**Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern 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	500	0	1,500	0	2,000
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	500	0	1,500	0	2,000

**Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern 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	\$2,484,200	\$0	\$7,402,800	\$0	\$9,887,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$2,484,200	\$0	\$7,402,800	\$0	\$9,887,000

**Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$4,944	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

**Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
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	\$4,968	\$0	\$4,935	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

0

# Parcel List

## **Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List**

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

## **Section 2 - Protect Parcel List**

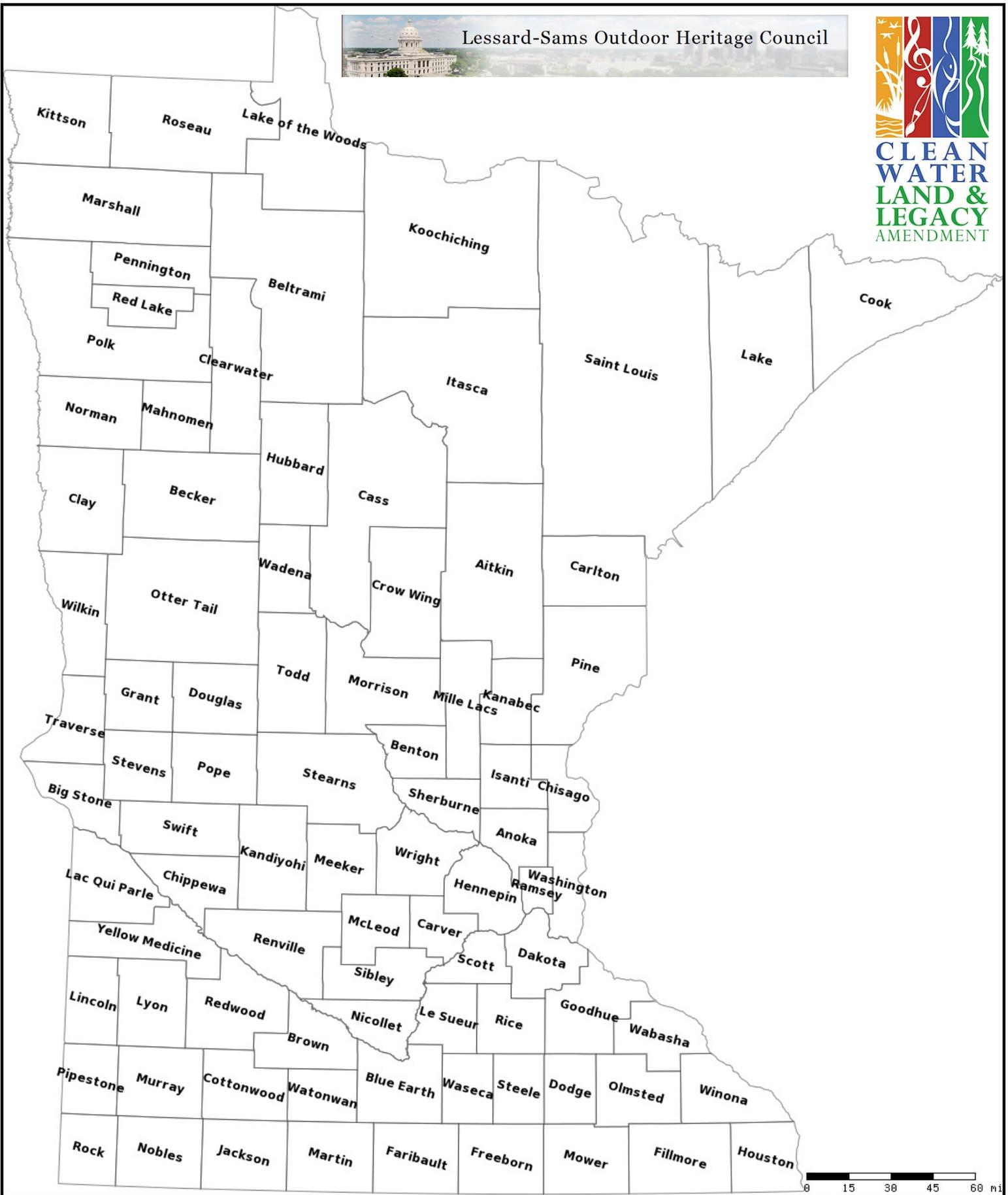
No parcels with an activity type protect.

## **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.



**Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection**

**Legend**

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



# Native Prairie Bank Evaluation Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Site Name \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Township \_\_\_\_\_ Range \_\_\_\_\_ Section(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Acres \_\_\_\_\_ Landowner Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

EVALUATION FACTORS	NOTES	POINTS
<i>Diversity and quality of native prairie habitat</i>		
<i>Size of prairie</i>		
<i>Occurrence of, or suitable habitat for, rare species</i>		
<i>Location relative to other native prairie and/or public lands</i>		
<i>Potential for long-term management and enhancement</i>		
<i>Additional factors (include as appropriate)</i>		
<b>OVERALL SITE EVALUATION</b>		<b>Total Points</b>

# Native Prairie Bank Evaluation Guidelines

EVALUATION FACTORS	NOTES	POINTS
<p><b><i>Diversity and quality of native prairie habitat</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>30 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of a native plant community with A, B, or B/C element occurrence (EO) ranking based on DNR Natural Heritage Database and Minnesota Biological Survey protocols; <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• At least 75% of the project site’s native prairie communities are C rank or higher based on DNR Natural Heritage Database, Minnesota Biological Survey protocols; <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• Site identified as Minnesota Biological Survey site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance; <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• Presence of regionally significant prairie community type (e.g. wet prairie communities in predominately drained regions of the state); <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• Locally documented high biodiversity despite a previous low Minnesota Biological Survey ranking – must be confirmed by DNR staff using Minnesota Biological Survey protocols.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>25 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 50% of the project site’s native prairie communities are C rank or higher based on DNR Natural Heritage Database, Minnesota Biological Survey protocols; <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• Site identified as Minnesota Biological Survey site of High Biodiversity Significance.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>15 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 25% of the project site’s native prairie communities are C rank or higher based on DNR Natural Heritage Database, Minnesota Biological Survey protocols; <i>and/or</i></li> <li>• Site identified as Minnesota Biological Survey site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>5 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The only native prairie present on site has a D ranking based on DNR Natural Heritage Database, Minnesota Biological Survey protocols.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>5-30</i></b></p>
<p><b><i>Size of prairie</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>15 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prairie is regionally significant in size. Example: a 20-acre bluffland prairie in Southeastern or along the Minnesota River is regionally significant, but a 20-acre site in the Agassiz Beach Ridge is not regionally significant.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>10 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate sized prairie remnant relative to other prairies in the area.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>0-3 Points</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small prairie remnant relative to other prairies in the area.</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>0-15</i></b></p>

# Native Prairie Bank Evaluation Guidelines

EVALUATION FACTORS	NOTES	POINTS
<p><i>Occurrence of, or suitable habitat for, rare species</i></p>	<p><b>20 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of, or habitat for, a federally listed rare species; and/or</li> <li>• Presence of one or more state endangered or threatened species with an A, B or B/C element occurrence (EO) rank.</li> </ul> <p><b>15 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable habitat for rare species; species found within ½ mile.</li> <li>• Five or more Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) as determined by Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare: Minnesota’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy.</li> <li>• An unranked occurrence of a state endangered or threatened species.</li> </ul> <p><b>10 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence of one or more special concern species with a C/D or D element occurrence (EO) rank.</li> </ul> <p><b>0 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No rare species on site or within 2 miles.</li> </ul>	<p><b>0-20</b></p>
<p><i>Location relative to other native prairie and/or public lands</i></p>	<p><b>15 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a Core Area of the Prairie Plan or within a relatively high concentration of native prairie remnants and rare species occurrences; and/or</li> <li>• Near or adjacent to other permanently protected conservation lands; particularly units with prairie/grassland habitat.</li> </ul> <p><b>10 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a Prairie Plan Corridor.</li> </ul> <p><b>0-5 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isolated parcel. Other prairie habitat or conservation lands within 2 miles = 5 points; greater than 10 miles = 0 points.</li> </ul>	<p><b>0-15</b></p>
<p><i>Potential for long-term management and enhancement</i></p>	<p><b>10 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves management options for larger, contiguous area (e.g. prescribed fire, invasive species control).</li> <li>• Direct access from a public road (property borders road).</li> </ul> <p><b>8 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No major limitations to management</li> <li>• Access route from a public road to the property that landowner is willing to designate as legal access.</li> </ul> <p><b>0-3 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant limitations to management (e.g. surrounding residential development, invasive species control issues).</li> <li>• Poor or non-existent access. May include needing permission from neighboring parcel to access, or crossing other privately-owned parcel(s) to access.</li> </ul>	<p><b>0-10</b></p>

# Native Prairie Bank Evaluation Guidelines

EVALUATION FACTORS	NOTES	POINTS
<p><i>Additional factors (include as appropriate)</i></p>	<p><b>10 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeopardy of losing prairie because site is in an area experiencing development pressure due to gravel mining, cropland conversion, housing, or other imminent threats.</li> <li>• Landowner is willing to donate significant acreage and donation would contribute to prairie conservation goals.</li> </ul> <p><b>5 Points</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation and a recommendation for protection by local staff familiar with the site. May be staff from DNR, USFWS, NRCS, SWCD, or researchers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>5-10</b></p>
<p><b>OVERALL SITE EVALUATION</b></p>	<p><b>Overall summary for enrollment based on evaluation criteria. Write a succinct statement describing your evaluation of the site. This is very helpful for developing the fact sheet and for future reports.</b></p>	<p><b>Total Points</b></p>



# Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection

**Target: 2000 acres of Native Prairie Bank easements, on an estimated 28 tracts, will be enrolled in MN Prairie Plan Core and Corridor Areas**

