

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Laws of Minnesota 2016 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 14, 2015

Program or Project Title: Grassland Conservation Partnership Phase II

Funds Recommended: \$ 1,475,000



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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, Pope, Renville, Stevens, and Swift.

Regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Habitat
- Prairie
- Wetlands

Abstract:

This project will protect high priority grassland, prairie and wetland wildlife habitat with 400 acres in conservation easements throughout western Minnesota's core prairie areas. Grasslands represent one of Minnesota's most threatened habitat types.

Design and scope of work:

A Conservation Legacy in Jeopardy

Native grasslands are the most threatened ecosystem in Minnesota and one of the most threatened in the world. The LSOHC defined Prairie Section has suffered the greatest habitat loss of any of the five sections examined by the Council. Furthermore, only a third of the remaining habitat in the Prairie Section is permanently protected. To compound the problem, in the next five years approximately 800,000 acres of Minnesota's conservation lands enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will expire. Unless action is taken to continue protection of these lands by using a combination of conservation programs, many will likely be converted to cropland, eliminating most of the wildlife habitat and associated ecosystem benefits.

Project Scope

This project will combine two land protection strategies in order to protect high-priority grassland wildlife habitat: conservation easements on private lands and fee-title acquisition for public lands. The Grasslands Conservation Partnership project builds upon the success The Conservation Fund (TCF) and the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) have had in protecting important wildlife habitats in the previous pilot phase of this project using conservation easements that use innovative managed grazing and grassland management as an important conservation tool for Minnesota.

Conservation Easements:

As one of the founding partners in the development of the Prairie Plan, TCF has been working with other non-profits, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to protect more than 600 acres of prairie habitat in the past two years. Part of this effort was working with BWSR, MLT, and DNR to develop a strategies for protecting working grasslands that are vital for wildlife in the prairie region. This joint effort enabled MLT to establish the first privately-held working-grassland conservation easement in Minnesota in 2015 protecting nearly 300 acres in Pope County.

Science has proven that proper application of haying and grazing techniques can be used to mimic natural processes necessary for healthy grass natural communities. Our colleagues at The Nature Conservancy and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service have proven these techniques successful in Minnesota over a significant period of time. Working with these partners, as well as the Land Stewardship Project, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association and the McKnight Foundation, we are confident that the time is right to expand our previous efforts to protect even more land. All easements will be held and monitored by MLT. TCF will perform the initial landowner contact and negotiations leading to the establishment of a conservation easement.

Lands targeted for conservation easement protection through this project will meet the following criteria:

1. Lands with significant existing prairie or grassland habitat
2. Lands near or within the Core Areas identified in the Prairie Plan
3. Lands adjacent to or in close proximity to permanently protected land (e.g. WMA, WPA, CREP, TNC preserves, etc.)
4. Lands which will help establishing connections to permanently protected land wherever possible and create larger habitat complexes
5. Lands which may also include low production cropland that can be converted back into grasslands, thereby increasing overall grassland habitat

MLT and TCF will use the above criteria to generate a systematic ranking system to vet potential projects and ensure maximum conservation values. We will also screen for producers with a proven ability to successfully implement the best management practices for conservation grazing. Whenever possible, MLT will use the proven "reverse-bid" model to ensure that conservation funds are used as efficiently as possible. This reverse bid model first ranks the projects according to their habitat values and then ranks them according to the landowner's bid on what they are willing to get paid for the conservation easements. Projects that MLT will prioritize are those with the greatest conservation benefits at the lowest cost to the State.

Capacity:

TCF and MLT are two of only four land trusts operating in Minnesota accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission awards accreditation to land trusts that meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure that conservation efforts are permanent. Accreditation is not a one-time action and land trusts must maintain their accredited status by applying for renewal every five years.

Crops:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - No

How does the request address MN habitats that have: historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, MN County Biological Survey data, and/or rare, threatened and endangered species inventories:

This project will protect hundreds of acres of grassland, wetland and prairie habitat, as identified as a priority in the Outdoor Heritage Fund's 25-Year Framework, and more specifically identified in the Prairie Plan. This project will focus on lands that have been identified by scientists at DNR, USFWS, and our partners as necessary for the conservation of habitat for wildlife and species of concern. TCF and MLT is using MN County Biological Survey data as well as USFWS data to search out sites that are suitable for grassland game birds as well as non-game species such as the Dakota skipper and the Poweshiek skipperling, both recently listed as threatened by USFWS. Because the majority of prairie and grassland habitats are found on private lands, this project will help protect those habitats and

establish important connects to other protected lands, thereby creating larger complexes of protected grassland habitats.

What is the nature of urgency and why it is necessary to spend public money for this work as soon as possible:

The price of farmland has now stabilized from the recent boom, market conditions are conducive to an expanded and targeted acquisition effort. The conservation partners recognize the need to expand our efforts to include privately held land managed for grassland habitat. This has been a gap within the existing programs.

Describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

We will use existing conservation plans, such as the Prairie Plan, along with assessment of conservation professionals from USFWS, DNR, DU, PF, SWCDs and TNC to determine sites that complement their ongoing efforts. We will assess how our selection methods fill important gaps in current protected land and adjust accordingly.

Which sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are applicable to this project:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

Prairie:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

How does this proposal accelerate or supplement your current efforts in this area:

Just in the past year, TCF and MLT have been able to protect more than 500 acres in this region working with our partners at USFWS and BWSR through the pilot Grasslands Forever project funded by OHF funds and other efforts. The first phase of this project was largely a pilot project to determine how well received working grassland conservation would be in the region and what tools are necessary to successfully protect them. Now that we have a successful template that has been well-received by local landowners, we are quite confident that we can build upon this past success. We are encouraged to pursue this proposal by all our partner agencies and organizations to help fill an important gap in current protection strategies. We are also encouraged by the landowner interest and feel the time is right to expand beyond the pilot phase of the project.

Describe the source and amount of non-OHF money spent for this work in the past:

Not Listed

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

MLT is a nationally accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation. The conservation easements secured under this program will also require landowners to have robust habitat management plans to guide the ongoing management of the property.

TCF will transfer ownership of fee-acquired lands to the MN DNR for their stewardship.

Explain the things you will do in the future to maintain project outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2019	MLT internal funds	Completion of conservation easement, baseline documentation, habitat management plans, monitoring plans and other documents necessary for easement stewardship	Annual monitoring for compliance with terms of conservation easements	Defend easements as necessary

Activity Details:

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

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition - **Yes**

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

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing - **No**

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion - **Yes**

Land protected via conservation easement will be open to hunting as the landowner allows. Landowners with easements will be encouraged to open their land to hunting.

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

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

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the acquisitions on the parcel list - **No**

Will new trails or roads be developed as a result of the OHF acquisition - **No**

Accomplishment Timeline:

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
TCF to initiate landowner contact and negotiate base parameters of the conservation easement	June 2019
MLT to complete acquisition of conservation easements	June 2019

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/1/2019

Federal Funding:

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **No**

Outcomes:

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands TCF and MLT will seek lands that are suitable for conservation easements, either existing grasslands or croplands that can be converted to grasslands, which are situated as to complement existing protected areas. TCF will initiate the landowner contact with producers interested in pursuing working grassland easements and provide to MLT viable projects to pursue. MLT will obtain conservation easements ensuring permanent protection of the grasslands with habitat management plans.

Budget Spreadsheet

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

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

The fee acquisition of more than 1,100 acres has been removed. The number of acres for the conservation easements has been halved to 400 acres.

Total Amount of Request: \$ 1475000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$130,000	\$10,000	In-hand from foundation	\$140,000
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$1,160,000	\$40,000	Private-landowner donations	\$1,200,000
Easement Stewardship	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Travel	\$9,000	\$0		\$9,000
Professional Services	\$60,000	\$0		\$60,000
Direct Support Services	\$16,000	\$0		\$16,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$1,475,000	\$50,000		\$1,525,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Staff, Project management & legal	0.25	3.00	\$75,000	\$0		\$75,000
Conservation Associate	0.30	2.00	\$55,000	\$10,000		\$65,000
Total	0.55	5.00	\$130,000	\$10,000		\$140,000

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$75,000	\$0		\$75,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Minnesota Land Trust	\$1,160,000	\$40,000	Private-landowner donations	\$1,200,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$60,000	\$0		\$60,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$11,000	\$0		\$11,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$1,411,000	\$40,000		\$1,451,000

Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Staff, Project management & legal	0.25	3.00	\$75,000	\$0		\$75,000
Total	0.25	3.00	\$75,000	\$0		\$75,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	The Conservation Fund	\$55,000	\$10,000	In-hand from foundation	\$65,000
Contracts	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	The Conservation Fund	\$4,000	\$0		\$4,000
Professional Services	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Direct Support Services	The Conservation Fund	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	The Conservation Fund	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$64,000	\$10,000		\$74,000

Personnel - The Conservation Fund

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Associate	0.30	2.00	\$55,000	\$10,000		\$65,000
Total	0.30	2.00	\$55,000	\$10,000		\$65,000

Amount of Request: \$1,475,000

Amount of Leverage: \$50,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 3.39%

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	400	0	0	400
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	400	0	0	400

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	30
Enhance	0
Total	30

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	\$1,475,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,475,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$1,475,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,475,000

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	0	0	400	0	400
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	400	0	400

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	\$0	\$0	\$1,475,000	\$0	\$1,475,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,475,000	\$0	\$1,475,000

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	\$3688	\$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	\$0	\$0	\$3688	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

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

Big Stone

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #7	12245209	80	\$224,000	No	No	No

Lac qui Parle

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #6	11746235	162	\$453,600	No	No	Not Applicable

Pope

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #1	12337231	80	\$224,000	No	No	Not Applicable
Easement Parcel #2	12337226	40	\$112,000	No	No	Not Applicable
Easement Parcel #3	12439223	80	\$224,000	No	No	Not Applicable

Renville

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #4	11437214	400	\$1,120,000	No	No	Not Applicable
Easement Parcel #5	11437208	147	\$411,600	No	No	Not Applicable

Stevens

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #8	12643232	160	\$448,000	No	No	Not Applicable

Swift

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Easement Parcel #9	12237207	160	\$448,000	No	No	Not Applicable

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

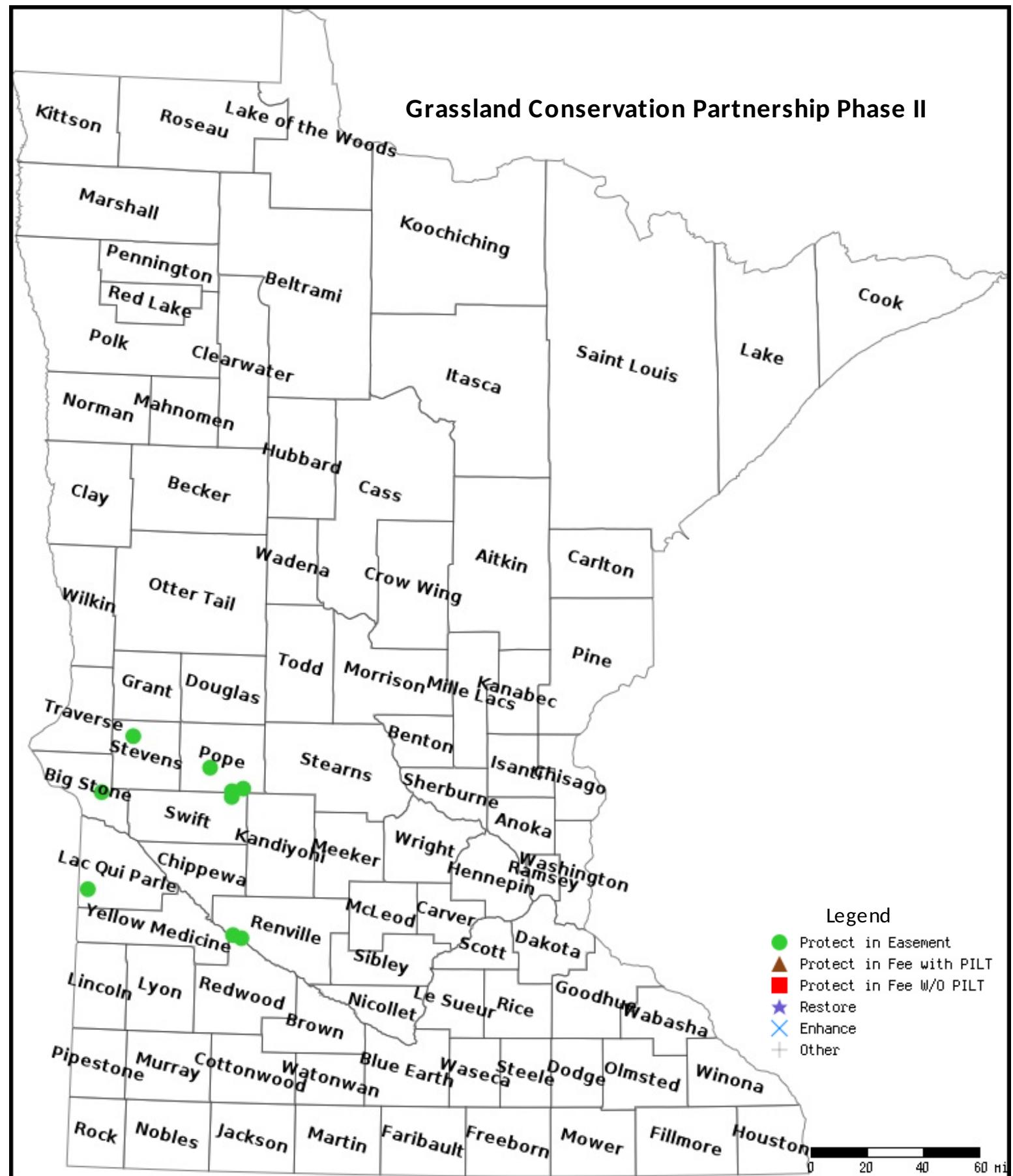
No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

Grassland Conservation Partnership Phase II



Data Generated From Parcel List

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Comparison Report

Program Title: 2016 - Grassland Conservation Partnership Phase II

Organization: The Conservation Fund

Manager: Steve Hobbs

Budget

Requested Amount: \$6,848,500

Appropriated Amount: \$1,475,000

Percentage: 21.54%

Budget Item	Total Requested		Total Appropriated		Percentage of Request	
	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Appropriated Amount	Anticipated Leverage	Percentage of Request	Percentage of Leverage
Personnel	\$140,000	\$50,000	\$130,000	\$10,000	92.86%	20.00%
Contracts	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$4,050,000	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	0.00%	0.00%
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,240,000	\$0	\$1,160,000	\$40,000	51.79%	-
Easement Stewardship	\$160,000	\$0	\$100,000	\$0	62.50%	-
Travel	\$10,000	\$0	\$9,000	\$0	90.00%	-
Professional Services	\$175,000	\$0	\$60,000	\$0	34.29%	-
Direct Support Services	\$63,500	\$0	\$16,000	\$0	25.20%	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	0.00%	-
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	-	-
Total	\$6,848,500	\$150,000	\$1,475,000	\$50,000	21.54%	33.33%

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

The fee acquisition of more than 1,100 acres has been removed. The number of acres for the conservation easements has been halved to 400 acres.

Output

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	0	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	1,090	0	0.00%
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	-
Protect in Easement	800	400	50.00%
Enhance	0	0	-

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	0	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	4,185,000	0	0.00%
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	-
Protect in Easement	2,663,500	1,475,000	55.38%
Enhance	0	0	-

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	0	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	1,090	0	0.00%
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	-
Protect in Easement	800	400	50.00%
Enhance	0	0	-

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	0	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	4,185,000	0	0.00%
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	-
Protect in Easement	2,663,500	1,475,000	55.38%
Enhance	0	0	-