



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Habitat Protection/Restoration in Dakota County-Phase 5

Laws of Minnesota 2014 Final Report

General Information

Date: 01/05/2022

Project Title: Habitat Protection/Restoration in Dakota County-Phase 5

Funds Recommended: \$1,190,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2014, Ch. 256, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 5(c)

Appropriation Language: \$1,190,000 in the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for a contract with Dakota County to acquire permanent conservation easements and land in fee and to restore and enhance habitats in rivers and lake watersheds in Dakota County. Up to \$15,000 to Dakota County is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Lands acquired or lands with easements acquired with this appropriation may not be used for emergency haying and grazing in response to federal or state disaster declarations. Conservation grazing under a management plan that is already being implemented may continue. A list of proposed land acquisitions and restorations and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Lisa West

Title:

Organization: Dakota County

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Location Information

County Location(s): Dakota.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Metro / Urban
- Southeast Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

During this grant funding timeline, this project only protected one 14-acre, permanent natural area conservation easement; but was able to restore and enhance way more than the anticipated 178 acres and 157 acres, respectively, of wildlife habitat, by restoring a total of 696 acres and enhancing 251 acres prior to the funding deadline.

Process & Methods

Through the Dakota County Land Conservation Program, the County has been protecting high-quality natural areas for wildlife habitat and improved water quality, outside its regional park system, since 2003.

As with many conservation acquisition efforts during the term of this grant, modifications were made to accommodate evolving circumstances. As a result, Dakota County acquired only one conservation easement that protected 14 acres of: wetlands (8.4 acres); a small portion of Chub Creek (145 feet); and 5.5 acres of cropland restored to natural vegetation. The County's voluntary program can be unpredictable. An application round is held each year to accept submittals for potential conservation easement projects. Project Prioritization Criteria are used to score and rank project applications. Some projects move through the process to closing, and some stall-out or are withdrawn for a variety of reasons. It's strange that only project was completed during the acquisition phase of this grant; which is why in future grants, the County extended the window of time to complete acquisitions, because sometimes it just takes more time to get to the closing. An extended acquisition timeframe will provide greater flexibility in completing projects.

Regarding restoration efforts, the County successfully restored 696 acres, involving 15 parcels. The County requires not only Natural Resource Management Plans (NRMPs) for each natural area easement, but requires that landowners sign a Management Agreement (MA) that outlines restoration and maintenance activities, who is responsible for the work, and how each activity will be funded, using cost estimates from accepted contractor proposals. Restoration work involved enhancement of 251 acres of parcels that include 7 miles of shoreline. Restoration activities included: restoring agricultural land to natural vegetation; removing of invasive species, like buckthorn; establishing test areas to determine the most effective way(s) to remove invasive species; and forest and prairie seeding to re-establish or enhance native species diversity.

Significant habitat restoration and enhancement occurred at Whitetail Woods-Vermillion Highlands in the central part of Dakota County. The largest, highest quality natural area within the Vermillion River Corridor is Vermillion Highlands. The 437-acre Whitetail Woods-Vermillion Highlands Habitat Project site is owned by Dakota County and is part of a larger landscape of protected lands encompassing more than 4,000 acres, including the adjacent Vermillion River WMA and AMA, and the Vermillion Highlands Research, Recreation and Wildlife Management Area. This project restored or enhanced the following habitat types at the site:

- Prairie: 117 acres restored and 37 acres enhanced
- Forest: 113 acres enhanced
- Wetlands: 11 acres restored and 101 acres enhanced

This site currently supports populations of Blandings turtle, eagle, sandhill crane, deer, eastern cottontail, wild fur-bearing game (fox, coyote, mink, and beaver), wild turkey, pheasant, wood duck, and other waterfowl. Restoration and enhancement activities anticipate an increase in the populations of these and many other species, which will augment populations on the adjacent WMA and AMA areas. In addition, the project anticipates more diverse populations of non-game species. Baseline populations will be monitored.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Relative to land protection acquisitions, the LSOHC and our landowners are the County's partners. However, the Land Conservation Program (Program) is supported by local governments within Dakota County, in part, because the Program results in land remaining in private ownership that still generates tax revenue for local governments.

Relative to restoration and enhancement, the County has partners that provide resources and opportunities to improve natural habitats throughout the County, including the LSOHC, the MN DNR, non-profits organizations (e.g., Friend of the Mississippi River), and easement landowners. Again, opposition is virtually non-existent, with all parties recognizing the benefits of working together to improve natural resources.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

Working with a variety of landowners on acquisition projects is challenging. Processes don't always go as planned; timelines can get stalled, side-tracked, altered, and extinguished. For a variety of reasons, only one permanent natural area conservation easement acquisition resulted from County staff efforts during this grant period. This was an extremely disappointing outcome, and impossible to predict. The fact that budget category funding can be shifted is very helpful, and allowed the County to funnel greater resources toward habitat restoration and enhancement efforts, significantly increasing the number of acres restored/enhanced during the grant period. And, although not anticipated, this was an acceptable and beneficial outcome. Habitat restoration work can be unpredictable, no matter how well-planned. The weather can derail anticipated restoration activities, and did the spring of 2019. County staff and contractors found themselves scrambling to replace anticipated restoration activities with acceptable alternatives that resulted in full grant expenditure.

What other fund may contribute to this program?

- Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund
- Parks and Trails Fund

How were the funds used to advance the program?

Past investments of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) provided Dakota County with the opportunity to develop the Farmland and Natural Area Protection Plan and the Vermillion River Corridor Plan, which provided the foundation for a comprehensive and integrated countywide land conservation vision and priorities and implementation strategies. The initial funding led to the successful passage of a \$20 million bond referendum in 2002 that has resulted in 123 conservation projects that have been completed or are in varying stages of completion that have/will protect over 11,500 acres and 57 miles of shoreline with an estimated fair market value of nearly \$80 million.

Current ENRTF allocations include habitat areas along the Vermillion River that are included in this proposal.

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

The majority of land protection work occurs on private land, designed to achieve maximum conservation benefits, with short- and long-term fiscal efficiency. By primarily focusing on easements on private property, management responsibilities remain with private landowners, creating less of a financial burden on the County. The relationship-building, developing and implementing a Natural Resource Management Plan, strategic assistance, and subsequent monitoring provide opportunities to share updated natural resource information and best management practices with landowners and achieve a higher likelihood of increased private stewardship. This comprehensive wildlife habitat and water quality approach provides the best opportunity to effectively protect these community assets and past public investments. By comprehensively and intensely restoring and enhancing priority habitat areas, this project is a cost-effective way to create and sustain more resilient landscapes that provide multiple public benefits and likely require lower future management costs. The County has a dedicated fund within its five-year capital improvement program for monitoring easements. The County's comprehensive Natural Resource Management System Plan establishes natural resource management goals, policies, standards, and practices for public and private land that provides the foundation for maintaining and even expanding wildlife habitat.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Antic. Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$40,000	-	-	\$100,000	\$245,700	Dakota County	\$140,000	\$245,700
Contracts	\$800,000	\$1,110,400	\$1,112,400	\$80,000	\$195,800	Dakota County	\$880,000	\$1,308,200
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$315,000	\$34,600	\$34,600	\$150,000	\$39,200	Dakota County	\$465,000	\$73,800
Easement Stewardship	\$15,000	-	-	\$15,000	-	Dakota County	\$30,000	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$20,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$20,000	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	\$45,000	\$44,200	-	-	-	-	\$44,200
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,190,000	\$1,190,000	\$1,191,200	\$345,000	\$480,700	-	\$1,535,000	\$1,671,900

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
County staff	2.0	4.5	-	\$245,700	Dakota County	\$245,700

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

Budget success was a result of the ability to shift funds from one or more budget categories into others, to accommodate shifts in the County's ability to spend funds in originally anticipated categories. The County was unable to expend anticipated funds in acquisition areas, but was able to shift unspent funding into restoration and enhancement categories. This resulted in full expenditure of the grant, and expenditure of County grant-match that exceeded County expectations. The ability to amend the budget provides needed flexibility in what has always and continues to be an unpredictable County program, based on its voluntary nature.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	11	178	319	0	68	0	298	178	696
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	135	14	135	14
Enhance	61	101	10	37	86	113	0	0	157	251
Total	61	112	188	356	86	181	135	312	470	961

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	\$25,200	\$421,000	\$109,100	-	\$53,600	-	\$260,700	\$421,000	\$448,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$390,000	\$34,600	\$390,000	\$34,600
Enhance	\$154,000	\$137,000	\$10,000	\$105,800	\$215,000	\$464,000	-	-	\$379,000	\$706,800
Total	\$154,000	\$162,200	\$431,000	\$214,900	\$215,000	\$517,600	\$390,000	\$295,300	\$1,190,000	\$1,190,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	178	601	0	0	0	95	0	0	0	0	178	696
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	135	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	135	14
Enhance	157	251	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	157	251
Total	470	866	0	0	0	95	0	0	0	0	470	961

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban (AP)	Metro/Urban (Final)	Forest/Prairie (AP)	Forest/Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	\$421,000	\$408,000	-	-	-	\$40,600	-	-	-	-	\$421,000	\$448,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$390,000	\$34,600	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$390,000	\$34,600
Enhance	\$379,000	\$706,800	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$379,000	\$706,800
Total	\$1,190,000	\$1,149,400	-	-	-	\$40,600	-	-	-	-	\$1,190,000	\$1,190,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

7.0

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *From a quantifiable perspective, the County measures outcomes via acres and shoreline miles protected, which result in positive impacts on habitat and water quality. County program buffer requirements establish 150-foot wide buffers on both sides of public waterways, but allow buffer averaging to a minimum of 75-foot buffer widths. Many projects result in protecting lowland and upland areas beyond required buffers. Land protection is supplemented with required Natural Resource Management Plans and Management Agreements that outline restoration priorities, activity responsibilities, joint funding sources, and ongoing management/maintenance of restored areas. The anticipated results are permanently protected and restored/enhanced habitat.*
- Core areas protected with highly biologically diverse wetlands and plant communities, including native prairie, Big Woods, and oak savanna ~ *From a quantifiable perspective, the County measures outcomes via acres and shoreline miles protected, which result in positive impacts on habitat and water quality. County*

program buffer requirements establish 150-foot wide buffers on both sides of public waterways, but allow buffer averaging to a minimum of 75-foot buffer widths. Many projects result in protecting lowland and upland areas beyond required buffers. Land protection is supplemented with required Natural Resource Management Plans and Management Agreements that outline restoration priorities, activity responsibilities, joint funding sources, and ongoing management/maintenance of restored areas. The anticipated results are permanently protected and restored/enhanced habitat.

- *Game lakes are significant contributors of waterfowl, due to efforts to protect uplands adjacent to game lakes ~ From a quantifiable perspective, the County measures outcomes via acres and shoreline miles protected, which result in positive impacts on habitat and water quality. County program buffer requirements establish 150-foot wide buffers on both sides of public waterways, but allow buffer averaging to a minimum of 75-foot buffer widths. Many projects result in protecting lowland and upland areas beyond required buffers. Land protection is supplemented with required Natural Resource Management Plans and Management Agreements that outline restoration priorities, activity responsibilities, joint funding sources, and ongoing management/maintenance of restored areas. The anticipated results are permanently protected and restored/enhanced habitat.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

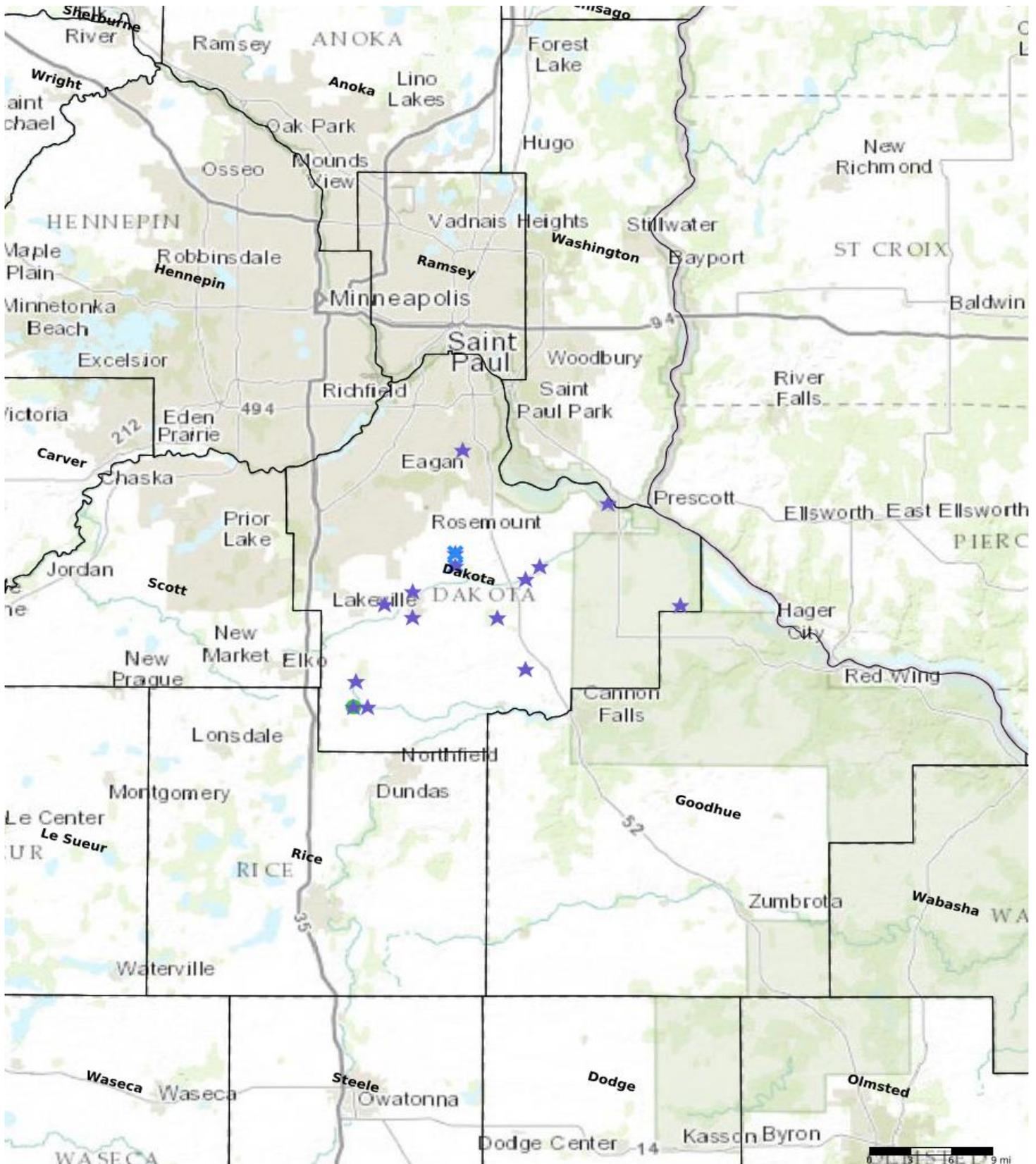
No

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Ag Society	Dakota	11319206	140	\$34,587	Yes
Sipe-Schumacher	Dakota	11318228	32	\$30,056	Yes
Jennings	Dakota	11320233	78	\$47,371	Yes
Betzler	Dakota	11416232	3	\$5,925	Yes
Finden	Dakota	11419230	28	\$71,254	Yes
Hampton Woods	Dakota	11318206	60	\$38,570	Yes
Stoffel	Dakota	11418215	48	\$103,600	Yes
Johnson	Dakota	11220210	20	\$33,537	Yes
Weiss	Dakota	11517221	5	\$9,140	Yes
Whitetail Woods	Dakota	11419215	155	\$560,302	Yes
Whitetail Woods	Dakota	11419210	48	\$171,719	Yes
Whitetail Woods	Dakota	11419215	89	\$256,029	Yes
Whitetail Woods	Dakota	11419210	88	\$146,458	Yes
Knutson - Dutch Creek	Dakota	11220209	14	\$6,039	Yes
South Creek	Dakota	11420235	24	\$100	Yes
Wilmar	Dakota	11418221	14	\$5,000	Yes
Grannis	Dakota	02722220	102	\$92,578	Yes

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Knutson - Dutch Creek	Dakota	11220209	14	\$27,500	No



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

Parcel Map
Habitat Protection/Restoration in Dakota County-
Phase 5
(Data Generated From Parcel List)