



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Final Report

General Information

Date: 05/06/2021

Project Title: Shallow Lake and Wetland Protection Program - Phase IV

Funds Recommended: \$9,040,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2015, First Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 4(b)

Appropriation Language: \$9,040,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Ducks Unlimited to acquire land in fee for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8. A list of proposed acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Nobles, Martin and Le Sueur.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Ducks Unlimited successfully completed this Phase 4 our land acquisition/restoration program to protect shallow lakes and restore wetlands by purchasing and restoring 1,004 acres of land with drained wetlands and land on shallow lakes as additions to state Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) for the MNDNR throughout southern Minnesota. This accomplishment exceeded our 900-acre goal, was \$81,225 under budget, and included a 644-acre parcel (one square mile) on the Swessinger WMA in Nobles County, a 285-acre parcel on the Rooney Run WMA in Martin County, and a 75-acre land parcel on Sanborn Lake WMA in Le Sueur County.

Process & Methods

This grant began in July 2015, and over the course of eight years, DU successfully acquired and restored three parcels of land totally 1,004 acres, and exceeded our 900-acre OHF grant goal. These land acquisition and restoration accomplishments through this ML2015 OHF appropriation included the 644-acre Jones Tract on Swessinger WMA in Nobles County purchased in October 2015, the 75-acre Gintner Tract on Sanborn Lake WMA in Le Sueur County purchased in December 2015, and the 285-acre Krahmer Tract on Rooney Run WMA in Martin County purchased in January 2016. DU worked diligently appraise and arrange for each of these land acquisitions through Phase 3 of our program so that each could be purchase in a timely manner shortly after this OHF grant for our Phase 4 program was was appropriated. All three tracts were transferred to the Minnesota DNR in spring 2016 as restoration planning and implementation began.

Restoration of the smaller 75-acre Gintner Tract on Sanborn Lake WMA in LeSueur County was completed promptly in spring 2016 by a contractor seeding 25 acres of cropland back to native prairie grass and forbs with a native plant seeding drill. No wetland restorations were possible on this relatively small parcel, but existing wetlands were protected, and the acquisition adds more WMA habitat land around Sanborn Lake, which DU subsequently enhanced through another OHF grant program.

Restoration of the other two larger parcels took longer to survey, design, plan, get permitted, and implement due to their size and complexity, and work continued through the end of 2020. In each case, DU purchased a diverse mix of native seed for each tract with guidance from Minnesota DNR prairie ecologists and biologists, and DU engineers were required to help restore multiple large wetlands on each.

On the 644-acre Jones Tract at Swessinger WMA in Nobles County, restoration work began with Minnesota DNR field staff seeding 52 acres of the tract back to native grass and forbs in December 2015. DU then purchased a large quantity of additional native seed (100 different species) to restore over 500 additional upland and wetland acres of the tract in fall 2016 (based on expert guidance from Minnesota DNR prairie ecologists and wildlife biologists), which Minnesota DNR Wildlife staff broadcast seeded onto the site in fall 2016. At the same time, a private contractor hired by DU began wetland restorations in November 2016 and work continued until the ground froze in December 2016. Most wetlands were restored on the site by end of December 2016 except three larger wetland basins affecting county and township roads, which were later restored in 2018 and 2019 after DU and DNR negotiated with Nobles County and Bloom Township to develop mutually-acceptable restoration plans for each basin that maximized wetland hydrology restoration while meeting road safety and integrity concerns of the local units of government. All wetland work was eventually completed in fall 2019.

On the 285-acre Krahmer Tract on Rooney Run WMA in Martin County, DU hired a private contractor to "snow-seed" native plant seed on 200 acres of former cropland on Rooney Run WMA in March 2016. Wetland restorations on Rooney Run WMA were complex and involved disrupting 30 miles of subsurface pattern tile and altering a large county drainage tile, which required extensive engineering, and approval of Martin County. DU worked closely

with Martin County, which approved legal judicial ditch modification required to alter county tile and restore wetlands, and DU hired a contractor to perform the wetland restoration work in summer/fall 2020. All work was completed by end of December 2020 as required, within 5 years of when the land was purchased in early January, 2016.

In summary, DU successfully completed acquisition and restoration of all three large land acquisition projects totaling 1,004 acres (above our 900-acre goal), transferred them to MNDNR, and completed restoration of each of them by December 31, 2020. DU completed restoration of all three parcels too. Total acres protected was 248 wetland acres and 758 upland acres, much of which required restoration as most of each tract was cropland, except for the Gintner Tract on Sanborn Lake WMA. This work was completed \$81,225 under OHF budget and included \$532,860 in non-state private DU and federal NAWCA funds. The \$81,225 unspent of this state appropriation was returned to the OHF, and was the result of competitive contractor prices to restore wetlands on Rooney Run WMA in Martin County in 2020 due to the C19 pandemic, along with an infusion of more private and federal NAWCA grant funds than originally anticipated (\$532,860, well above the \$60,000 in "leverage" originally pledged back in 2015).

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

In Prairie Minnesota, 90% of our prairie wetlands have been drained and 99% of our native prairie uplands lost to agriculture and development according to the Minnesota DNR. Ongoing loss of grasslands in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has exacerbated this problem in the last two decades. The prairie wetlands that remain are fragmented, and are often larger/deeper shallow lakes that are now degraded because they receive the runoff and drainage from the intensively cultivated landscape that surrounds them and invaded by common carp, especially in southern Minnesota. This has negatively affected many game and non-game species alike, including ducks as well as species of greatest conservation need such as black terns and other prairie wading birds and marsh species.

Restoration of smaller wetlands and prairie around existing larger wetlands and shallow lakes, most of which are on state or federal land, is required to both benefit our remaining larger wetlands nearby, and to also provide habitat for breeding birds that require prairie-wetland complexes and small "pair ponds" on which to feed and mate during the spring nesting season. Because most drained wetlands are located on unprotected private land, fee-title land and easement acquisitions are required to restore wetlands and prairie around our remaining small patches of existing public lands containing many of the wetlands remaining in southern Minnesota. Through this program, Phase 4 of our land acquisition/restoration program, DU protected and restored 1,004 acres of wetlands and prairie to add valuable breeding habitat for many wetland-dependent species that breed in the Prairie Pothole Region of southern Minnesota.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

Ducks Unlimited works with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's HAPET to focus our conservation efforts, and with Minnesota DNR to strategically focus our land acquisition and restoration efforts on sites of priority to DNR and those with restoration potential and which buffer shallow lakes and make enhancement projects possible, within the constraints of working with private willing-seller landowners and the temporal variability of when such private land purchase opportunities arise. The parcels DU purchased were adjacent to existing state WMA lands, and were strategically selected to expand the size and functionality of those small patches of wetland and prairie grassland habitat.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Southern Minnesota has few people and conservation supporters, but many are very passionate due to the massive loss of wildlife habitat and few public lands. In LeSueur County, the local Montgomery Sportsmen Club and local chapter of the Minnesota Waterfowl Association supported our acquisition on Sanborn Lake WMA (LeSueur County board was neutral when DU and MNDNR presented it to them in person). In Martin County, DU was strongly supported by the Fox Lake Conservation League (which arranged the land acquisition) and Martin County Conservation Club, and the Martin County board of supervisors expressed support for the Rooney Run WMA land acquisition when DU/FLCL/DNR presented it to them in person. On Swessinger WMA, Nobles County and Bloom Township expressed concern about the size of our 644-acre land acquisition and local drainage concerns, but DU worked closely with both to restore wetlands without flooding neighbors. NAWCA supported each project.

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

Two of these three parcels acquired by DU were large and cost millions to purchase and restore. The 285-acre parcel on Rooney Run WMA included 30 miles of small subsurface pattern tile that required disruption to restore wetlands and prairie grasslands, and a large County tile that required extensive consultation with Martin County to alter. On Swessinger WMA, the 644-acre parcel cost nearly \$5 million to purchase and about \$1 million to restore. Large Prairie Section land acquisitions and restorations such as these are relatively unique, but are hugely important since habitat patch size is very important to many, if not most, prairie wildlife species - both game and non-game alike.

What other funds contributed to this program?

- Other : Ducks Unlimited spent \$532,859 in other non-state funds to complete this work in addition to the state OHF grant funds appropriated, far surpassing the \$60,000 pledged at time this OHF grant was requested in 2014. Approximately \$400,000 of these "other funds" were federal North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant funds secured by DU in partnership with other NGOs.

How were the funds used to advance the program?

DU invested \$532,859 in private philanthropic funds and federal NAWCA grant funds in staff, travel and contract costs to protect and restore lands acquired, far surpassing the \$60,000 proposed at the time this OHF request was made in 2014. This included over \$400,000 in federal NAWCA grant funds that were secured by using state OHF expenditures on land acquisition to leverage federal NAWCA grant funds to help fund restoration of those lands acquired in subsequent years. DU partnered with other Pheasants Forever and The Nature Conservancy to secure federal NAWCA grant funds by pledging our state OHF and private expense cost to acquire lands through this appropriation to leverage federal funds to help pay for land restoration costs. This helped stretch our OHF grant budget further and fully cover land restoration costs while completing work under our OHF grant budget and returning \$138,925 in unspent state funds to the OHF. Federal NAWCA grant funds are difficult to pledge in OHF proposals before OHF grants are appropriated and land acquisitions are completed, as federal NAWCA grants are very complex, competitive and difficult to predict, with a full year federal grant proposal and approval process that requires at least a 2:1 non-federal match. Thus, lands must be first acquired with state OHF appropriation acquisition expenditures pledged as match before federal grant funds are approved to help pay for land restoration costs later.

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

Each parcel has been transferred to the Minnesota DNR for inclusion in the state's Wildlife Management Area system, and will be monitored and managed in perpetuity for the public by the MNDNR.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2021 and annually thereafter	Game & Fish Funds	MNDNR will monitor restored prairie and wetlands to maintain vigor and productivity, and look for invasive species - such as trees in restored prairie areas.	MNDNR will manage restored prairie and wetlands to maintain vigor and productivity, and remove invasive species where needed - such as trees in restored prairie areas.	MNDNR will annually maintain public access to these public lands to ensure they are enjoyed by both the public as well as used as habitat by wildlife.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Antic. Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$270,000	\$372,000	\$355,900	-	\$134,700	-	\$270,000	\$490,600
Contracts	\$1,000,000	\$850,000	\$810,000	-	\$388,600	DU private and NAWCA federal funds	\$1,000,000	\$1,198,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$7,500,000	\$7,233,000	\$7,233,000	-	-	-	\$7,500,000	\$7,233,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$23,600	-	\$9,600	DU private and NAWCA federal funds	\$30,000	\$33,200
Professional Services	\$40,000	\$90,000	\$92,300	-	-	-	\$40,000	\$92,300
Direct Support Services	\$30,000	\$37,300	\$34,100	\$60,000	-	-	\$90,000	\$34,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$20,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$50,000	\$370,000	\$352,200	-	-	-	\$50,000	\$352,200
DNR IDP	\$100,000	\$37,700	\$37,700	-	-	-	\$100,000	\$37,700
Grand Total	\$9,040,000	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800	\$60,000	\$532,900	-	\$9,100,000	\$9,491,700

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Biologist	1.0	5.0	\$87,700	-	-	\$87,700
Engineers	1.0	5.0	\$200,000	\$134,700	DU private and NAWCA federal funds	\$334,700
Program Manager	1.0	5.0	\$68,200	-	-	\$68,200

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?

Our DSS costs are pro-rated based on costs to support staff, and our methodology has been reviewed by Minnesota DNR.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

Ducks Unlimited successfully completed our work as proposed with a savings of \$81,225 in OHF funds unspent (returned to the OHF) by spending an additional \$532,860 in other private DU and federal North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant funds to complete our work, well above the \$60,000 in Leverage pledged.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

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

- E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	100	246	800	758	0	0	0	0	900	1,004
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	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	100	246	800	758	0	0	0	0	900	1,004

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$1,000,000	\$2,239,800	\$8,040,000	\$6,719,000	-	-	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$1,000,000	\$2,239,800	\$8,040,000	\$6,719,000	-	-	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	900	1,004	0	0	900	1,004
Protect in	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Fee w/o State PILT Liability												
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	900	1,004	0	0	900	1,004

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800	-	-	\$9,040,000	\$8,958,800

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$10,000	\$9,104	\$10,050	\$8,864	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

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)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$10,044	\$8,923	-	-

PILT Liability										
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Habitat is the limiting factor for wildlife in the Prairie Pothole Region of southern Minnesota, so our goal is simply to add more prairie and wetland habitat to the landscape strategically so that lands acquired and restored enlarge existing patches of public land on which most wildlife habitat currently exists, especially wetlands. Therefore, the outcome here is that DU acquired, restored, and protected 1,004 acres of prairie and wetlands habitat strategically located adjacent to existing state WMAs for both migratory and unique Minnesota species. The wildlife habitat outcomes will be measured and evaluated by the Minnesota DNR over time.*

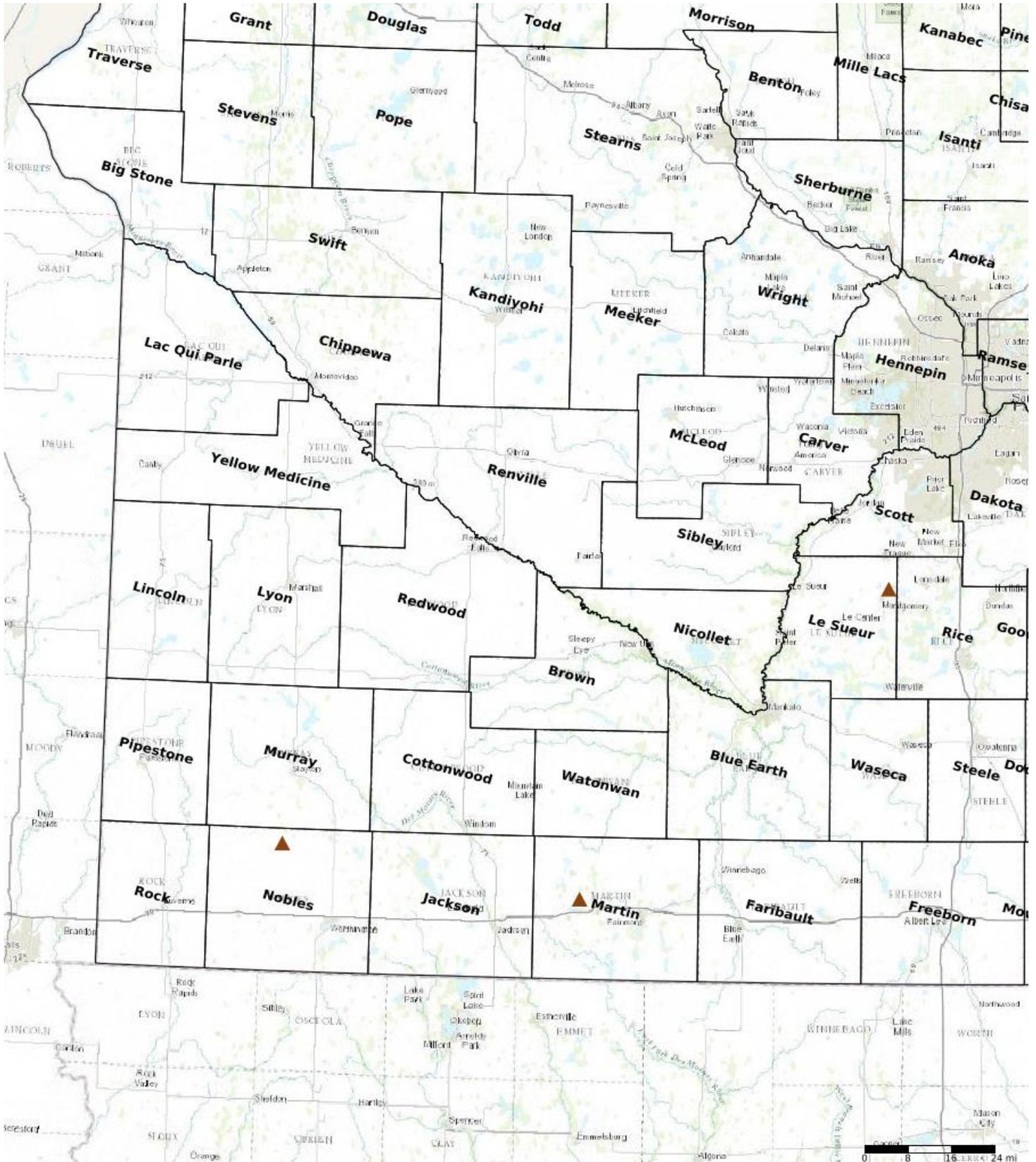
Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Sanborn Lake WMA - Gintner Tract 8	Le Sueur	11223235	75	\$295,000	No
Rooney Run WMA - Round Lake Krahmer Tract	Martin	10332228	285	\$2,100,000	No
Swessinger WMA - Jones Trust Tract	Nobles	10441217	644	\$5,000,000	No



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

Parcel Map
Shallow Lake and Wetland Protection Program -
Phase IV
(Data Generated From Parcel List)