



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 3

Laws of Minnesota 2018 Final Report

General Information

Date: 11/09/2023

Project Title: Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 3

Funds Recommended: \$1,786,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 4(d)

Appropriation Language: \$1,786,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Land Trust to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance prairie, wetland, and other habitat in high-priority wetland habitat complexes in the prairie and forest/prairie transition regions. Of this amount, up to \$240,000 is to establish a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of proposed conservation easement acquisitions and restorations and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

Title: Director of Land Protection

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Location Information

County Location(s): Grant, Big Stone, Otter Tail, Douglas and Pope.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Through its Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 3 grant, the Minnesota Land Trust protected 666 acres and restored/ enhanced 954 acres of high priority wetland habitat complexes in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition areas by securing permanent conservation easements within scientifically prioritized habitat complexes and working with partners in restoration/enhancement. The Land Trust used its market-based landowner bid model to maximize both conservation benefit and financial leverage in conservation easement project selection; over the duration of the grant, landowners donated over \$10,300,000 in easement value to the program (4,619% of that proposed).

Process & Methods

Wetlands and shallow lakes provide the essential backbone for the survival of waterfowl and other important wildlife species. In fact, more than 50% of Minnesota's Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) use wetlands during their life cycle. Most of the plans developed to protect Minnesota's wildlife—including Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, and the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan—cite the protection and restoration of the state's remaining wetlands as one of the top priorities to achieve the State's conservation goals. Moreover, these plans cite the use of conservation easements on private lands as one of the primary strategies to protect important wetland and shallow lake habitat.

Minnesota Land Trust's Wetlands Habitat Protection Program area extends from Meeker northwest to Becker County, located along a vast glacial moraine system at the edge of the of western Minnesota. This prairie pothole country is the core of Minnesota's "duck factory" and is central to one of North America's most important flyways for migratory waterfowl. Through Phases 1 and 2 of this program, the Land Trust procured 10 conservation easements protecting nearly 1,800 acres of habitat and 70,000 feet of shoreline.

Phase 3 will build on these accomplishments by broadening the Program's focus to include – along with wetland protection – habitat restoration and enhancement. Through a partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, the Land Trust restored/enhanced 954 acres of important prairie and wetland habitat on private lands already protected within the Program area. In addition, the Land Trust protect 666 acres of new priority wetland and associated upland habitat through conservation easements. The Program was closely coordinated with other public agencies, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders to ensure this Program meets multi-agency conservation goals.

The Land Trust implemented a criteria-based ranking system and market approach for purchasing conservation easements. The Program targeted projects that helped complete gaps in existing public ownership, were of the highest ecological value, and provided the greatest leverage to the state. The Land Trust sought donated easements in these areas whenever possible but also purchased easements that help complete key complexes.

To focus our easement protection work, we used the Minnesota Prairie Plan and other data sets/plans to shape our Wetlands Program plan and identify important wetland complexes based on the intersection of high-quality habitat, existing protected areas, and restorable agricultural lands. These complexes included a mosaic of wetland, prairie/grassland, and forest habitats, and at times agricultural land. Outcomes from this project included: 1) healthy wetland habitat complexes and associated populations of waterfowl, upland birds, and SGCN; 2) improved water quality; 3) increased participation of private landowners in habitat conservation projects; and 4) enhancement of prior public investment in wetland and upland habitat protection.

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?

This program addresses LSOHC priorities by protecting and restoring shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and associated species.

Wetlands are essential to the health and diversity of Minnesota's wildlife. This project directly benefited numerous SGCN and other important game/non-game species by minimizing the potential threats to their habitat caused by detrimental agricultural practices, residential or commercial development, or imprudent land management. Wetland habitat complexes were targeted for protection through a ranking system that prioritized projects based on three primary ecological factors: 1) quality of habitat; 2) proximity to other protected lands; and 3) size of the parcel.

Five properties totaling 666 acres were protected through conservation easement under this grant, including:

Pelican Lake (Pelican River Land Company) - A 165-acre property in Otter Tail County protecting maple-basswood forest, wetlands, and 11,404 feet of shoreline along Fish Lake. The easement was fully donated by the landowner.

Minnesota Woman (Peterson) - A 314-acre project in Otter Tail County protecting grasslands, deciduous forest, wetlands, and 19,151 feet of shoreline along the Pelican River and two unnamed lakes.

Lake Christina (Johnson) - A 40-acre property in Grant County protecting 39 acres of forest, wetlands, and 2,893 of shoreline along Pelican Lake, a sister lake to Lake Christina, the renowned historic canvasback stopover. The property is within the Lake Christina Prairie Core Area of the MN Prairie Plan.

Pomme de Terre (Evavold) - A 73-acre property protecting rolling, forested hills, grassland, open water, and 6,699 feet of shoreline along two unnamed lakes. The property is within the Alexandria Moraine-Lake Christina Hills Corridor of the MN Prairie Plan.

Rocky Mountain Lake (Rocky Mountain Sportsmen) - A 75-acre project protecting deciduous forest and 9,796 feet of shoreline along Rocky Mountain and Skanning lakes in Pope and Kandiyohi counties. The property lies within the Glacial Lake Prairie Core Area of the MN Prairie Plan.

Fourteen properties totaling 954 acres of wetlands/prairie were restored or enhanced under this grant, 13 on USFWS easements and 1 on an MLT easement.

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.

This Wetland Habitat Protection Program is focused on procuring easements within priority complexes of wetlands and associated upland habitats, as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, Duck Plan and Prairie Plan. Specific parcels proposed by landowners for conservation easements were reviewed and prioritized relative to one another. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors (amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; the quality or condition of habitat; and the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas), and cost.

The Wetland Habitat Protection Program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, facilitating the protection and restoration of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. Minnesota Biological Survey data continues to be a cornerstone to our evaluation of potential conservation easement acquisitions and R/E projects. We also conducted field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition, as many private lands were not formally surveyed by the Minnesota Biological Survey.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

The Wetland Habitat Protection Program enjoys broad partnership and support from a variety of organizations and government agencies operating in the area, including local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and others who assisted in conducting landowner outreach, identifying potential projects, and otherwise strategically assisting in the direction of the program. This was the first grant in partnership with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service that forged a strong working relationship focused on habitat restoration and enhancement. The Land Trust encountered no opposition to the program, but rather a growing level of interest among landowners.

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

The Wetlands Habitat Protection Program - Phase 3 grant continued the success of the Phase 1 and Phase 2 programs in exceeding both the conservation goals (acres protected via conservation easement) and leverage (easement value donated by participating landowners) proposed for the grant. Five high-quality projects were protected via conservation easement through this grant, protecting a diversity of wetland habitats and associated uplands. Fourteen restoration and enhancement projects were completed. Landowner interest - both in terms of participating in the program and donating easement value as leverage into the program - exceeded expectations.

This was the first Wetlands grant with a Restoration/Enhancement component. We exceeded grant deliverables in both conservation goals (20% more acres) and in leverage brought to the projects through our partners. This grant has enabled us to begin building a solid foundation for future work in partnership with USFWS as seen in Wetland grant phases 4-9.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this program?

- N/A

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

The land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust 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. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, MLT assisted landowners in the development of comprehensive habitat management plans to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. USFWS and MLT (as easement holders on respective properties) will work with landowners in an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement and ongoing management of these properties.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2023 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Terms Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of conservation easements	Enforcement as necessary	-
Every 4-6 years	USFWS, Landowner, MLT	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$155,000	\$222,000	\$221,900	\$11,600	\$48,100	USFWS Staff In Kind	\$166,600	\$270,000
Contracts	\$457,000	\$399,900	\$399,600	-	\$35,100	USFWS R/E cash match	\$457,000	\$434,700
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$745,000	\$846,200	\$846,100	\$223,500	\$10,315,000	Private landowner donation of easement value	\$968,500	\$11,161,100
Easement Stewardship	\$240,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	-	-	-	\$240,000	\$120,000
Travel	\$14,700	\$11,700	\$9,500	-	-	-	\$14,700	\$9,500
Professional Services	\$130,500	\$78,000	\$80,900	-	-	-	\$130,500	\$80,900
Direct Support Services	\$41,800	\$61,400	\$59,900	-	-	-	\$41,800	\$59,900
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$2,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,000	-
Supplies/Materials	-	\$46,800	\$46,700	-	-	-	-	\$46,700
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,786,000	\$1,786,000	\$1,784,600	\$235,100	\$10,398,200	-	\$2,021,100	\$12,182,800

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Land Trust Protection Staff (Program Manager, Legal, Director of Land Protection, etc.)	0.42	4.0	\$167,200	-	-	\$167,200
Land Trust Restoration Staff (Program Manager, etc.)	0.12	5.0	\$54,700	\$48,100	USFWS Staff In Kind	\$102,800

Direct Support Services

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

In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The Land Trust was able to exceed its acreage goals for both easement acquisition and restoration/enhancement portions of the grant, achieving 666 acres protected versus 646 proposed (103% of target), and 954 acres

restored/enhanced versus 745 proposed (128% of goal). This success was facilitated by \$10,315,000 in donation of easement value from landowners, coupled with \$42,400 in-kind donation of USFWS staff time and \$35,061 of cash match from USFWS for restoration/enhancement projects.

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	28	54	60	439	0	0	367	0	455	493
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	73	0	314	0	279	646	0	646	666
Enhance	0	0	40	461	0	0	250	0	290	461
Total	28	127	100	1,214	0	279	1,263	0	1,391	1,620

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

Type	Native Prairie (AP)	Native Prairie (Final)
Restore	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0
Enhance	0	136
Total	0	136

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	\$37,400	\$27,000	\$27,400	\$219,600	-	-	\$338,700	-	\$403,500	\$246,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$195,400	-	\$569,800	-	\$542,200	\$1,287,900	-	\$1,287,900	\$1,307,400
Enhance	-	-	\$12,400	\$230,600	-	-	\$82,200	-	\$94,600	\$230,600
Total	\$37,400	\$222,400	\$39,800	\$1,020,000	-	\$542,200	\$1,708,800	-	\$1,786,000	\$1,784,600

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	180	177	0	0	275	316	0	0	455	493
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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	300	552	0	0	346	114	0	0	646	666
Enhance	0	0	40	40	0	0	250	421	0	0	290	461
Total	0	0	520	769	0	0	871	851	0	0	1,391	1,620

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	-	-	\$170,500	\$88,500	-	-	\$233,000	\$158,100	-	-	\$403,500	\$246,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$687,900	\$898,900	-	-	\$600,000	\$408,500	-	-	\$1,287,900	\$1,307,400
Enhance	-	-	\$12,400	\$20,000	-	-	\$82,200	\$210,600	-	-	\$94,600	\$230,600
Total	-	-	\$870,800	\$1,007,400	-	-	\$915,200	\$777,200	-	-	\$1,786,000	\$1,784,600

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

9.46 miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

The Land Trust received extraordinary donations of easement value through this grant totaling in excess of \$10,300,000; this enabled the completion of additional conservation easement projects and with that, our ability to exceed our proposed land protection goals. In addition, the USFWS provided considerable technical assistance and \$81,100 in cash and in-kind staff leverage to the grant, which enabled the Land Trust to achieve a greater and higher quality R/E footprint than would otherwise have been possible.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Improved aquatic habitat indicators ~ *This program permanently protected 552 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restored/enhanced 217 acres of wetlands and prairies in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*
- Wetland and upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands ~ *This program permanently protected 552 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restored/enhanced 217 acres of wetlands and prairies in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *This program permanently protected 114 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restore/enhance 737 acres of wetlands and prairies in the prairie region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

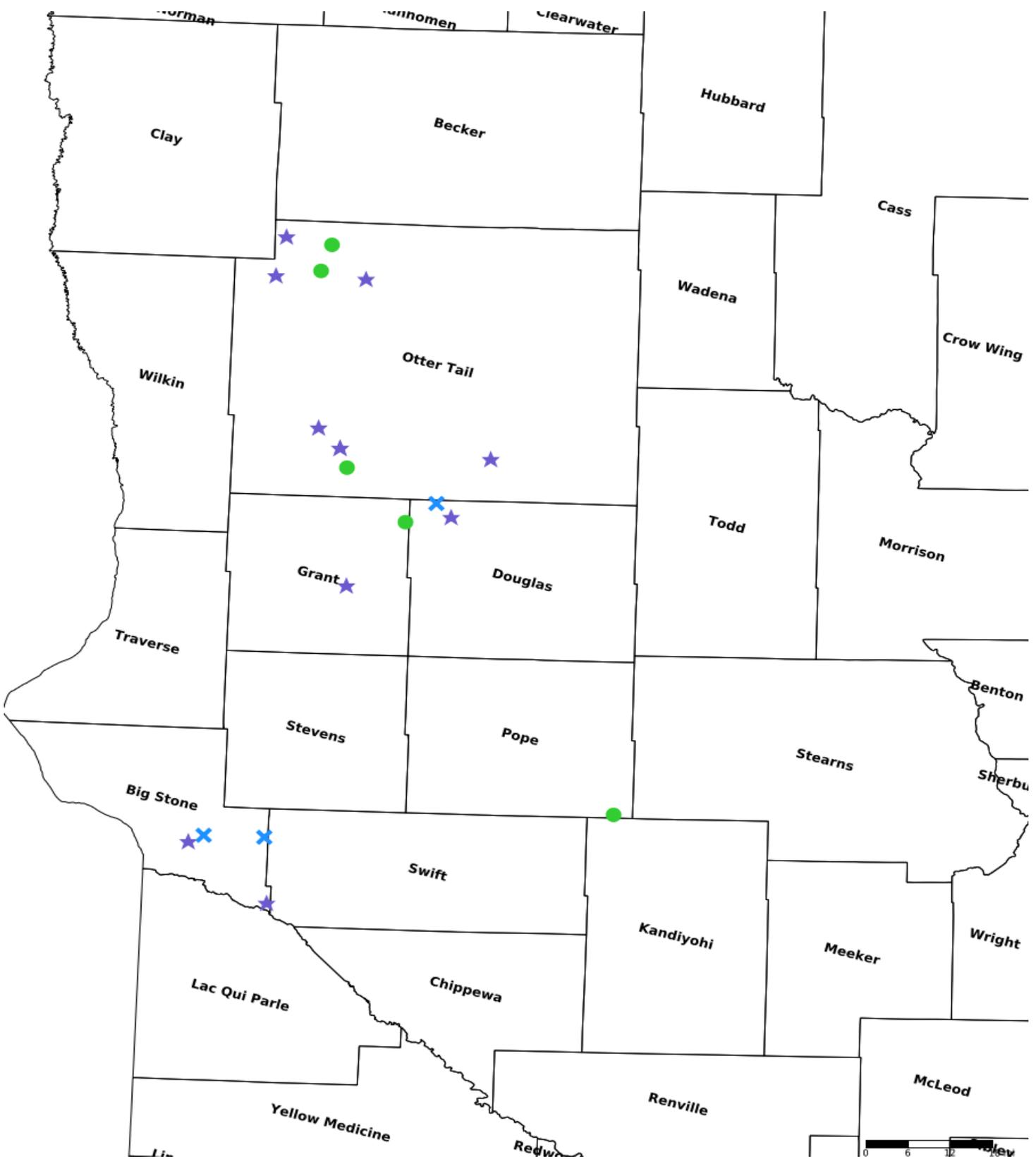
Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
CVac	Big Stone	12044213	65	\$17,789	Yes
HD/R	Big Stone	12244225	69	\$10,731	Yes
HFarms et al	Big Stone	12245227	146	\$27,600	Yes
Sit (W3)	Big Stone	12245232	206	\$28,926	Yes
GLil	Douglas	13040203	40	\$12,600	Yes
MOls	Douglas	13040213	67	\$63,100	Yes
JLue	Grant	12842210	150	\$64,700	Yes
WVal #2	Otter Tail	13242228	3	\$9,100	Yes
DKlu	Otter Tail	13642213	8	\$8,700	Yes
WVal	Otter Tail	13242228	31	\$43,700	Yes
DHes	Otter Tail	13243212	7	\$16,200	Yes
CSha	Otter Tail	13644213	60	\$47,600	Yes
JOle	Otter Tail	13239235	5	\$14,650	Yes
BStef	Otter Tail	13743217	97	\$35,100	Yes

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Lake Christina (Johnson)	Grant	13041224	39	\$119,500	No
Pomme de Terre River (Evavold)	Otter Tail	13142210	73	\$117,000	No
Pelican Lake (Pelican River Land Company, LLC)	Otter Tail	13742220	165	\$0	No
Minnesota Woman (Peterson)	Otter Tail	13643212	314	\$447,500	No
Rocky Mountain Lake (Rocky Mountain Sportsmen, Inc.)	Pope	12336234	75	\$132,000	No

Parcel Map



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