



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Grassland Reserve

Laws of Minnesota 2019 Final Report

General Information

Date: 01/30/2024

Project Title: RIM Grassland Reserve

Funds Recommended: \$2,276,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2019, 1st Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd, 2(g)

Appropriation Language: \$2,276,000 the first year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance grassland habitat under Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.501 to 103F.531. Of this amount, up to \$39,000 is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Otter Tail, Mahnomen, Cottonwood and Becker.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Using the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, this project addressed the potential loss of grassland habitats from conversion to cropland and accelerated grassland protection efforts not covered by other programs. Focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan-identified landscapes and working in coordination with established Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), this project completed 7 RIM conservation easements permanently protecting 617 acres of grassland habitat, exceeding the accomplishment plan goal by 23%. In particular easement #44-01-19-14 in Mahnomen County was an exceptional project that was a roundout for a large habitat complex with many prairie remnants.

Process & Methods

In 2018 alone over 200,000 acres of CRP will expire in Minnesota. Over the next three years 347,000 additional acres will expire – in geographical terms, 15 townships or 542.47 square miles. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie. Today less than two percent remains. The few acres of native remnant prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops but not anymore. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

This project, working in partnership with Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), focused on protecting current grasslands and buffering native prairie that are within wildlife habitat complexes not covered by other conservation programs. There are programs for native prairie such as NPB and NTGP NWR and programs for cropland, but there are no programs for "in between" grasslands. As Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and LTTs reviewed these areas for possible enrollment, they found additional tracts of native prairie. With this project, some native prairie was included to square up parcels. In cases where larger tracts are identified, the SWCDs contacted the DNR's Biological Survey and Native Prairie Bank staff for a more formal botanical survey of the site.

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing northwest, western and southern Minnesota. This project protected 617 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) through private land easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

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?

Minnesota grasslands provide important habitat for a wide range of species of greatest conservation need. Consistent with guidance in The Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, the project sites were strategically selected to minimize landscape stressors and support plant diversity and long-term resiliency. More than 150 Species of Greatest Conservation Need use grasslands for breeding, migration, and/or foraging. Species that were targeted include: Greater prairie chicken, Eastern meadowlark, Western meadowlark, Grasshopper sparrow, Northern pintail, Northern black duck, Burrowing owl, Chestnut collared longspur, Bobolink, Wilson's phalarope, Sedge wren, Plains hog-nosed snake, American badger, Prairie vole, Plains pocket mouse, Eastern spotted skunk, Dakota skipper, Monarch butterfly, Power sheik skipper, Regal fritillary, Rusty patched bumble bee.

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.

Native prairies are often part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and wetlands. Using the MN Prairie Plan Framework, this project identified these complexes as the top priority. A preference was given to protecting expiring CRP with enrollment of adjacent remnant prairie as identified in the MN County Biological Survey. This focus on expiring CRP filled a niche that was not otherwise be filled by the Native Prairie Bank program. LTTs helped guide restoration strategies such as prescribed burning, conservation grazing, and woody tree removal to be used to restore the conditions of moderate quality prairies. In addition, the LTTs identified remnant prairie sites that were not listed on the MN County Biological Survey and update the survey accordingly. The LTTs targeted parcels for protection and the resulting protected acres will be tracked and reported..

The MN DNR recently conducted genetic diversity research on Greater Prairie Chickens using a new approach that helps us understand how birds move through the landscape called landscape genetics. It found that prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. The project focused on connecting these areas with high quality habitat to allow more genetic mixing, potentially reduce stress and mortality, and eliminate the need for birds to travel long distances to find suitable habitat. This "follow the chicken" approach has worked remarkably well to identify, target, and protect areas that have positive impacts on a wide range of species of greatest conservation need.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Overall our partners within the 11 state Local Technical Teams(LTT's) areas and the individual lead organizers have been supportive and have had the opportunity to review and comment on landowner applications in there prairie core areas. Not all have responded when notified but they have been given the opportunity to contribute. The MNDNR Native Prairie Bank (NPB) staff have been supportive and have assisted with conducting vegetative surveys when asked by Soil & Water Conservation Districts for assistance in determining the quality of the vegetative cover. Most importantly private landowners have been very supportive and enthusiastic about protecting remnant native prairie and are pleased that there is a program available that will permanently protect this extremely important resource on their property. Government has repeatedly told landowners how valuable this resource is while not making available programs for landowners to do so.

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

The expectations of this program is that through word of mouth it will continue to grow as it becomes more familiar to private landowners throughout the state. Targeting non cropland for a program is new thinking and in itself has unique aspects that will take time for landowners to understand the need, opportunity and resources available under this program. The conservation planners and practitioners through SWCD's, and other local governments are learning and increasing outreach to landowners. One of the highest priorities of The Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funding to is to protect prairies. This program allows landowners to permanently protect prairies.

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?

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements.

Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$6,500 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Ongoing	Stewardship	Compliance checks first 5 years then every 3rd year	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$163,800	\$163,800	\$88,700	-	-	-	\$163,800	\$88,700
Contracts	\$12,600	\$12,600	\$12,000	-	-	-	\$12,600	\$12,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,034,800	\$2,034,800	\$2,027,500	-	-	-	\$2,034,800	\$2,027,500
Easement Stewardship	\$39,000	\$39,000	\$39,000	-	-	-	\$39,000	\$39,000
Travel	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$200	-	-	-	\$4,000	\$200
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$14,400	\$14,400	-	-	-	-	\$14,400	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,700	\$5,700	-	-	-	-	\$5,700	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,700	\$1,700	-	-	-	-	\$1,700	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,276,000	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400	-	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.25	5.0	\$74,500	-	-	\$74,500
Easement Processing	0.08	3.0	\$8,900	-	-	\$8,900
Engineering/Eco Services	0.03	3.0	\$5,300	-	-	\$5,300

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

This project was a success and completed 7 RIM conservation easements permanently protecting 617 acres of grassland habitat, exceeding the accomplishment plan goal by 23%. There were no challenges.

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	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	500	617	0	0	0	0	500	617
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	500	617	0	0	0	0	500	617

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400	-	-	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400	-	-	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400

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	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	0	0	100	0	0	0	400	617	0	0	500	617
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	100	0	0	0	400	617	0	0	500	617

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$455,200	-	-	-	\$1,820,800	\$2,167,400	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$455,200	-	-	-	\$1,820,800	\$2,167,400	-	-	\$2,276,000	\$2,167,400

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

This project completed 7 RIM conservation easements permanently protecting 617 acres of grassland habitat, exceeding the accomplishment plan goal by 23%.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and nongame species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and nongame species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

Parcels

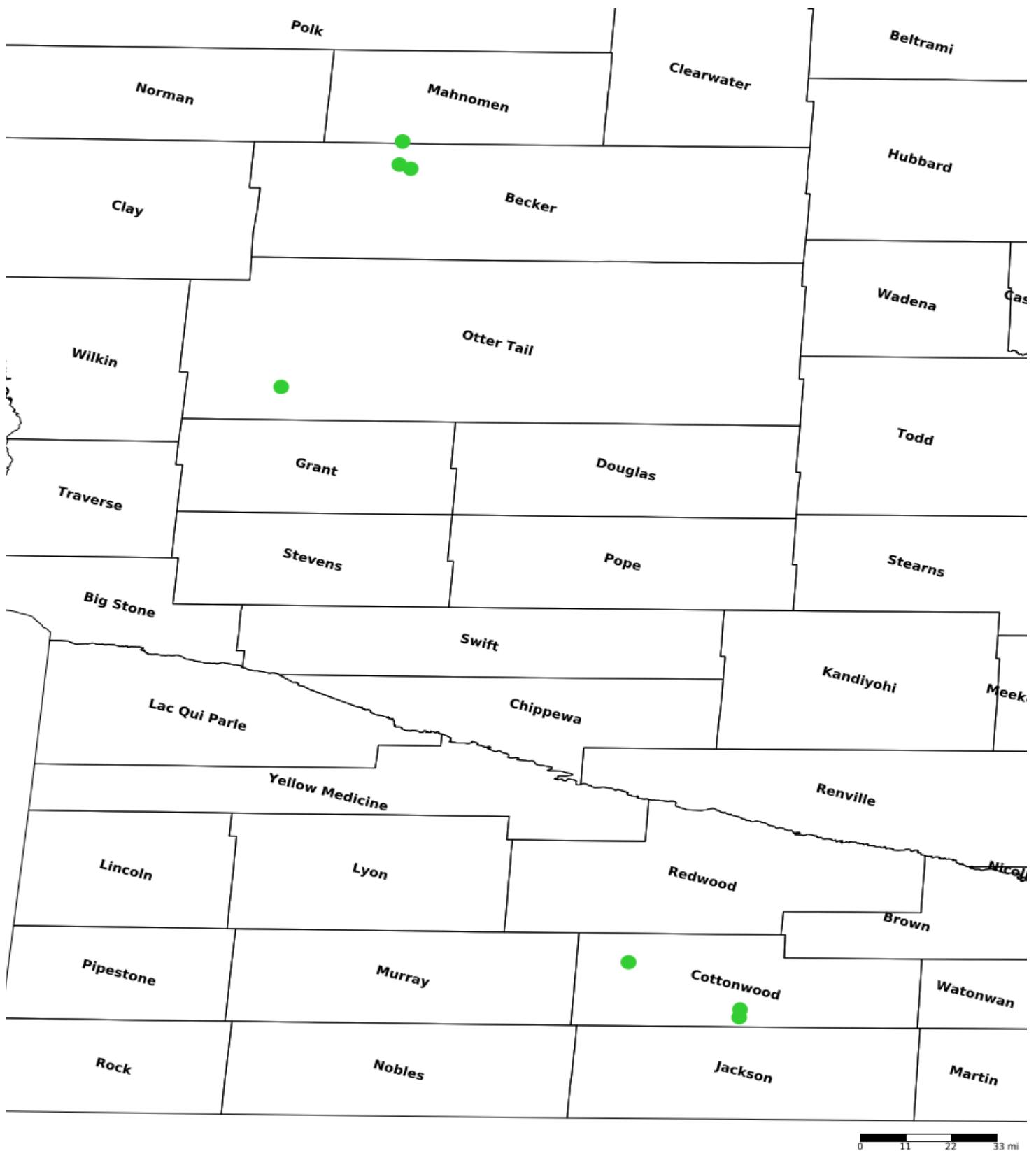
Sign-up Criteria?

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

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
03-02-20-14--	Becker	14241231	115	\$211,700	No
03-01-20-14--	Becker	14141205	41	\$68,500	No
17-01-20-14--	Cottonwood	10536221	71	\$337,100	No
17-03-20-14--	Cottonwood	10536209	42	\$192,400	No
17-04-20-14--	Cottonwood	10738211	41	\$193,200	No
44-01-19-14--	Mahnomen	14341231	80	\$127,400	No
56-01-20-14-W-	Otter Tail	13243221	227	\$760,900	No

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✖ Enhance
- ✚ Other