

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fiscal Year 2022 / ML 2021 Request for Funding



Date: June 18, 2020

Program or Project Title: Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program - Phase III (PA09)

Funds Requested: \$9,996,000

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County Locations: Big Stone, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, and Swift.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie

Abstract:

This Phase 3 partnership will accelerate USFWS wildlife habitat easements to protect and restore 3,000 acres of private grasslands and pothole wetlands in west-central Minnesota, and restore an additional 300 prairie-wetland acres. These "working land" conservation easements allow delayed haying and grazing while protecting restored wetlands and prairie grasslands for nesting ducks, pheasants, and other wildlife. By restoring and protecting grassland and wetland habitat while allowing for continued landowner use of these working private lands, USFWS habitat easements fill an important prairie landscape conservation niche that complements other more restrictive easements and fee-title public lands, and buffers existing habitats.

Design and scope of work:

Ducks Unlimited (DU) and Pheasants Forever (PF) will purchase and then transfer wildlife habitat conservation easements to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) for long-term perpetual monitoring and enforcement in west-central Minnesota using federally-approved USFWS habitat conservation easement language and federal payment rates. DU and PF will restore drained wetlands and cropland back to prairie grassland. DU will purchase and hold easements through its Wetlands America Trust (WAT), DU's supporting land-holding fiduciary organization, of which DU is the sole corporate member. By purchasing easements and restoring grasslands and wetlands for USFWS with OHF support, DU and PF will effectively accelerate the rate at which USFWS can protect grassland and wetlands in key focus landscapes in which there are also many state and federal wildlife lands owned and managed in fee-title, and other lands protected by more restrictive conservation easements. These are some of the most productive landscapes in the state for breeding waterfowl and other prairie wildlife including pheasants, and these private working land conservation easements complement other federal, state, and private conservation easement options available to landowners.

USFWS habitat conservation easements not only include protection measures that prevent wetland/prairie conversion and land development/subdivision, but importantly, they also secure rights to restore wetlands and prairie grassland where feasible too - which is the primary purpose of this OHF easement program. DU/PF will help USFWS conduct landowner outreach, prioritize offers of federally-approved easement payments, and conduct landowner negotiations, boundary survey, environmental review, title review, and other legal tasks, and purchase the easement for USFWS. DU/PF will protect via easement (and restore where needed) 3,000 acres of prairie and wetlands for USFWS. DU/PF will also use OHF grant funds to restore 300 additional prairie and wetland acres on land eased directly by USFWS as leverage. DU/PF will restore eased lands in partnership with the USFWS with technical guidance from their private lands biologists. DU engineers will survey/design larger complex wetland restorations, and manage restoration contracts to private earth-moving firms.

USFWS "Habitat Easements" have been used here for over two decades, and are designed to provide a habitat protection conservation tool to complement public lands habitat complexes such as federal Waterfowl Production Areas and state Wildlife Management Areas, by keeping privately owned restored grassland and wetland habitat intact and on county tax rolls while allowing for working use of the land. These easements provide landowners with the option of either delayed haying (after July 15) or both grazing and delayed haying, which results in adequate habitat for wetland and upland nesting birds and a working land use option that appeals to some private landowners. Importantly, these working land easements also help manage plant succession on their land, which is critical to preventing the encroachment of volunteer trees and invasive plant species. Well-managed grazing, delayed haying, and USFWS prescribed fire also benefits those grassland bird species that prefer more open prairie habitats, such as northern pintail, marbled godwit, snipe, and many other prairie species.

How does the proposal address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species:

This proposal will purchase habitat easements to restore to prairie grasslands and wetland complexes. USFWS easements can be grazed and delay hayed, land uses which are compatible with grassland nesting birds as per scientific research. Prairies and emergent marshes are identified as critical habitats for many "Species of Greatest Conservation Need" listed in Minnesota's "Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild & Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife". Grassland nesting birds have shown the largest population decline of any of the bird species. Specific species listed in the Action Plan as requiring prairie (page 255) include seven species of butterflies and three bird species that are native prairie specialists: chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague's pipit, and Baird's sparrow. Specific species listed in the Action Plan as requiring emergent marshes (page 267) include least bittern, American bittern, marsh wren, and Virginia rail. The Prairie Parkland has 139 species listed on the SGCN with 13 of these species being unique to the section. Grasslands are also critical to a diverse suite of declining pollinator species.

In addition to these specific wildlife species listed as SGCN in the Action Plan, restored prairie and wetlands in the Prairie Parkland will provide habitat of significant value for other species listed in Appendix B of the Action Plan. Restored and protected prairie will provide habitat of significant value for other SGCN including bird species: upland sandpiper, bobolink, burrowing owl, Le Conte's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, swamp sparrow, sharp-tailed grouse, short-eared owl, northern harrier, dickcissel, Henslow's sparrow, and Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow. Upland nesting waterfowl will also benefit including waterfowl listed as SGCN; northern pintail and lesser scaup, which have both seen declines in continental populations. Wetland associated birds such as trumpeter swan, black tern, American bittern, Wilson's phalarope, and marbled godwit will benefit from wetlands restored and buffered in the prairie landscape through the habitat easements. Mammals including northern grasshopper mouse and Richardson's ground squirrels, reptiles such as lined snake and Blanding's turtle, and amphibians such as northern cricket frog and common mudpuppy are SGCN in the Prairie Parkland.

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

USFWS currently has a backlog of many landowners with thousands of acres who are very interested in protecting their grasslands and wetlands with USFWS habitat conservation easements. Increased interest will result from active easement promotion if state funding is provided to DU and PF, especially with many CRP contracts now expiring.

Timing is critical for many landowners with expiring CRP contracts, business decisions related to expanding livestock operations, and sometimes estate planning or other family decisions. When USFWS is not able to move forward quickly enough, landowners may choose less ecologically desirable uses for their land that often include putting land back into row crop production, especially in the case of expiring CRP. Often, landowners cannot afford to forego annual income after CRP contracts expire, and without other options, are forced to return land to row crop production, even when doing so is not their preference.

Describe how the proposal uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

USFWS biologists score and rank each grassland habitat easement proposal based on ecological site attributes and landscape

juxtaposition of protected lands. This ranking process was designed to be relatively simple and evaluate the capability of the proposed easement to provide biological benefits for wetland and grassland dependent wildlife species by considering the habitat on the easement tract as well as its contribution and benefits to other protected lands in the surrounding area. Periodically, the USFWS Minnesota Wetland Acquisition Office in Fergus Falls uses these rankings to re-prioritize the proposals to assure that the USFWS is working on and purchasing the highest ranking proposals throughout the year. DU and PF will rely on the high level of science-based expertise of the USFWS to ensure that easement opportunities are prioritized, and will work closely as a partnership to share the workload and accelerate the easement program in west-central Minnesota. Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and USFWS will work together to use science-based targeting to focus promotion of this accelerated habitat conservation easement program, with focus on tracts near existing federal WPAs, state WMAs, and other permanent private land easements. High priority tracts will be those with restorable drained wetlands and converted prairie or expiring CRP that, once fully restored, will build and expand prairie-wetland complexes for ducks, pheasants, and migratory birds in landscapes with a high density of other protected habitats. Science-based models such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) "Thunderstorm Maps" and "Restorable Wetlands Inventory" will help us determine landscape importance to breeding waterfowl, as will the state Pheasant Plan and Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan that helps guide prairie conservation efforts within Complexes, Core, and Corridor areas of western Minnesota. Finally, parcels near sites with relatively high biological diversity and significance based on the Minnesota DNR County Biological Survey (MCBS) will be a priority, and parcels with unique ecological values will be shared with other conservation easement program partners to ensure collaboration, avoid duplication of effort, and that the best conservation easement program option is offered to private landowners.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN

Describe how your program will advance the indicators identified in the plans selected:

The goal of these conservation plans is to restore and protect prairie grasslands and wetlands in landscapes with existing prairie-wetland habitat complexes, which USFWS habitat conservation easements are designed to accomplish. Breeding ducks and pheasants require prairie-wetland complexes containing at least 20% upland nesting cover and small wetlands. Restoring and protecting viable patches of grassland with small wetlands around existing patches of habitat will create functioning prairie-wetland habitat complexes. By focusing our efforts to restore and protect grasslands and wetlands in close proximity to existing federal WPAs and state WMAs, and other private lands under restrictive conservation easements, these new USFWS habitat easements will increase the amount of permanently protected grassland and wetland habitat in close proximity to prairie-wetland habitat complexes that will directly benefit breeding migratory birds, pollinators, and resident wildlife species. Breeding habitat is the most limiting factor for both ducks and pheasants, and most other prairie birds.

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

Forest / Prairie Transition:

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Describe how your program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife as indicated in the LSOHC priorities:

This program will permanently protect grasslands with wetlands adjacent to existing state WMAs, federal WPAs, and other easement lands with permanent USFWS protection to increase their patch size and functional viability as habitat for prairie wildlife. The goal of this work is to create permanently protected and functioning prairie-wetland complexes for breeding and migrating waterfowl and other prairie wildlife species. Therefore, our work will result in a significant and permanent conservation legacy for the public, and in the long-term will result in improved and viable functioning habitat patches and complexes for both wildlife and people alike. By allowing for grazing and delayed haying land use, these permanently protected "working lands" habitat easements produce conservation legacy that complements other publically-funded conservation easements and public lands.

The critical conservation need in Minnesota's prairie region is more prairie grasslands and wetlands in landscapes with existing patches of prairie-wetland habitat. Breeding ducks and pheasants require prairie-wetland complexes containing at least 20% upland nesting cover and small wetlands. Restoring and protecting viable patches of grassland with small wetlands around existing patches of habitat will create functioning prairie-wetland habitat complexes. By focusing our efforts to restore and protect grasslands and wetlands in close proximity to existing federal WPAs and state WMAs, and other private lands under restrictive conservation easements, USFWS habitat easements on working private lands will increase the amount of permanently protected grassland and wetland habitat in close proximity to prairie-wetland habitat complexes that will directly benefit breeding migratory birds, pollinators, and resident wildlife species.

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

Describe the relationship of the funds:

Not Listed

Does this program include leverage in funds:

Yes

To help leverage this state request, the USFWS pledges to spend at least \$1 million in federal Migratory Bird Conservation Funds (federal "duck stamp") to directly purchase additional easements, and \$100,000 in federal staff time to assist DU and PF in the purchase, restoration, and transfer of easements to USFWS. DU and PF strive to use our non-federal private and state OHF grant expense as often as possible as match to leverage federal NAWCA grant funds to further our conservation missions. NAWCA is highly competitive and complex, and proposal success is uncertain. Therefore, DU and PF will work closely with Minnesota DNR, USFWS, and other NGO partners such as TNC to use state OHF grant expense as non-federal match to leverage federal NAWCA funds to help fund similar land restoration and protection work in the same landscapes where USFWS habitat conservation easements are being purchased and restored. This approach may include using OHF grant expense to leverage NAWCA funds to pay for more habitat easements, or to purchase lands in fee-title for DNR or FWS, or for restoration costs of lands purchased or protected by easements.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Any state agency or organization requesting a direct appropriation from the OHF must inform the LSOHC at the time of the request for funding is made, whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose:

This OHF funding request does not supplant or substitute for any previous funding. This new OHF funding will be used for new conservation work to accelerate USFWS conservation easement delivery in Minnesota to accelerate protection and restoration of wetlands and prairie, and provide "working land" conservation easements options for landowners.

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

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
2010-2019	U.S. Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (federal Duck Stamp)	Over \$6 million

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

Easements secured will be transferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for long-term annual monitoring and enforcement. The terms of the easement allow limited delayed haying after July 15 or delayed haying and grazing, but require wetlands and grasslands to be maintained by the private landowner. The easements also allow DU and PF, and subsequently the the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service after transfer, to restore and help enhance wetland restorations or improve grasslands in the future when determined by the Service to be necessary for wildlife habitat management purposes.

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

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2020	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	Annually Monitor Easements	Identify Problems, if any	Work with Private Landowners to Resolve

Identify indicator species and associated quantities this habitat will typically support:

Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever propose to protect and restore USFWS Habitat Easements on 3,300 acres of prairie grassland and wetlands, with an estimated ratio of at least 20% prairie pothole wetlands 80% grass uplands, near existing federal WPAs and state WMAs to improve their function as prairie-wetland habitat complexes for waterfowl and many other prairie and wetland-dependent wildlife species. Science-based guidance provided by Minnesota DNR suggests that 825 acres of wetlands and 2,475 acres of prairie uplands are estimated to:

Support approximately 334 pairs of breeding mallards based on the biological model of the Upper Mississippi River Great Lakes Joint Venture of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan that indicates one pair of mallards needs 2.47 acres of wetlands with adequate adjacent upland nesting habitat to support population growth;

Support at least 5.5 or more pairs of trumpeter swans assuming one pair for every 150 wetland acres, depending on the size, type, and number of wetland basins restored or enhanced;

Support up to 1,456 pairs of bobolinks and 1,179 pairs of grasshopper sparrows, based on guidance that breeding territory size of bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows is 1.7 and 2.1 acres, respectively, in high quality habitat in Wisconsin;

Produce approximately 825 harvested rooster pheasants based on ratios of CRP acres to pheasant harvest in Minnesota, and possible prairie chicken habitat too;

Contribute 7,425 to 19,800 monarch butterflies to the overwintering population, assuming 100-250 stems of milkweed plants per prairie acre.

Activity Details

Requirements:

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

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection - **No**

Some tracts to be eased may already have USFWS wetland easements on them that protect intact and restored wetlands from being drained, burned, or filled, but otherwise allows for their agricultural use (haying and farming thru them during dry years). The federal payment for these new habitat easements will take into account the value of the land with those wetlands permanently protected. These new USFWS Habitat easements will overlay, and protect and restore uplands in addition to previously protected wetlands.

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program - **Yes**

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 - **Yes (Permanently Protected Conservation Easements)**

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **Yes**

Are the funds confirmed - **Yes**

Documentation

What are the types of funds?

Cash Match - \$1000000

In-Kind Match - \$100000

Land Use:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **Yes**

Explain

Some very limited duration crop planting may be required as site preparation for prairie restoration on parcels where herbicides with long (18+ month) residual carryover have been used, where conversion of old fields infested with invasive plants such as smooth brome and reed canary grass may require a year of cropping with herbicides for restoration purposes. No food plots are planned through this program.

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

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

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

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this proposals funding and availability? - **Yes**

Land Use:

Have you received OHF dollars in the past through LSOHC? - **Yes**

Past appropriations and spending to date:

Apprp Year	Approp Amount Received	Approp Amount Spent to Date	Leverage as Reported in AP/th>	Leverage Realized to Date	Total Acres Affected in AP	Total Acres Affected to Date	Program Complete and Final Report Approved?
2018	2960000	1860000	300000	899700	720	574	No
2020 - Phase 2	3187000	0	264000	0	825		No

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Co mpleted
Easement offers made to private landowners for parcels prioritized by USFWS and using payments calculated by USFWS	December 2022
Easement boundary surveys, consulted phase 1 environmental reviews, and legal title clearance completed by DU and PF	June 2023
Easements purchased and recorded by DU and PF	June 2024
Easements transferred from DU and PF to USFWS	June 2025
Easement wetlands and prairie grasslands restored by DU and PF	December 2029

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$9,996,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$600,000	\$100,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$700,000
Contracts	\$1,375,000	\$0		\$1,375,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$7,500,000	\$1,000,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$8,500,000
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$62,000	\$0		\$62,000
Professional Services	\$225,000	\$0		\$225,000
Direct Support Services	\$69,000	\$0		\$69,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$160,000	\$0		\$160,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$9,996,000	\$1,100,000		\$11,096,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Ducks Unlimited Biologists, Land Specialist, and Wetland Engineers	1.50	3.00	\$500,000	\$100,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$600,000
Pheasants Forever Biologist, Land, and Legal Staff	0.33	3.00	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Total	1.83	6.00	\$600,000	\$100,000		-\$700,000

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Ducks Unlimited	\$500,000	\$100,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$600,000
Contracts	Ducks Unlimited	\$825,000	\$0		\$825,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Ducks Unlimited	\$5,000,000	\$1,000,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$6,000,000
Easement Stewardship	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Ducks Unlimited	\$50,000	\$0		\$50,000
Professional Services	Ducks Unlimited	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000
Direct Support Services	Ducks Unlimited	\$50,000	\$0		\$50,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Ducks Unlimited	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	Ducks Unlimited	\$65,000	\$0		\$65,000
DNR IDP	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$6,643,000	\$1,100,000		\$7,743,000

Personnel - Ducks Unlimited

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Ducks Unlimited Biologists, Land Specialist, and Wetland Engineers	1.50	3.00	\$500,000	\$100,000	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	\$600,000
Total	1.50	3.00	\$500,000	\$100,000		-\$600,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Pheasants Forever	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Contracts	Pheasants Forever	\$550,000	\$0		\$550,000

Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Easement Acquisition	Pheasants Forever	\$2,500,000	\$0	\$2,500,000
Easement Stewardship	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Travel	Pheasants Forever	\$12,000	\$0	\$12,000
Professional Services	Pheasants Forever	\$75,000	\$0	\$75,000
Direct Support Services	Pheasants Forever	\$19,000	\$0	\$19,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Capital Equipment	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Pheasants Forever	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,000
Supplies/Materials	Pheasants Forever	\$95,000	\$0	\$95,000
DNR IDP	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total		\$3,353,000	\$0	\$3,353,000

Personnel - Pheasants Forever

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Pheasants Forever Biologist, Land, and Legal Staff	0.33	3.00	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Total	0.33	3.00	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000

Amount of Request: \$9,996,000
Amount of Leverage: \$1,100,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 11.00%
DSS + Personnel: \$669,000
As a % of the total request: 6.69%
Easement Stewardship: \$0
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -%

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

Minnesota DNR grants staff previously reviewed and approved DU accounting methodology for Direct Support Services, which are calculated and included in DU staff costs. DU Direct Support Services constitute approximately 10% of DU overall staff costs on average among DU conservation staff billing categories. DU breaks out and invoices for Direct Support Service expenses approved by DNR for reimbursement separately from Personnel expenses. In accordance with 2 CFR 200, DU uses the direct allocation method of allocating costs to programs and final cost objectives. This process of allocating costs is accomplished through the use of hourly rates. The direct cost of activities, including direct support expenses, is included in these hourly rates. The rates are comprised of costs for salaries, benefits, office space, general insurance, support staff, office supplies, and other various direct expenses incurred at the regional offices and conservation department at the home office. All costs are assigned to conservation projects (net of applicable personnel and other costs that are non-conservation related.) Hourly charges represent the amount that DU charges conservation projects per hour for each staff member working on the project. These costs represent expenses that directly support the labor cost necessary for the development of a specific water/wetlands conservation project.

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 4.12%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel, and will donate the difference in-kind.

What is included in the contracts line?

Yes, all of the Contracts line item is for prairie and wetland restoration work contracted to private sector firms and individuals, and includes activities such as field site preparation, tree removal, prairie grass seeding, ditch plugging, tile disruption, sediment removal, dike and berm construction, water control structure installation, and wetland vegetation restoration.

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental? - No

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging:

None - all travel funding will be used for in-state mileage, meals, and lodging, as necessary.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan: - Yes

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service will spend \$1,000,000 or more of federal funds appropriated from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund to purchase additional conservation easements directly, and will provide at least \$100,000 in-kind federal USFWS staff cost to assist the purchase, restoration, and transfer of easements.

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable? - Yes

Tell us how this project would be scaled and how administrative costs are affected, describe the "economy of scale" and how outputs would change with reduced funding, if applicable:

This program will be scaled proportionately to the level of funding recommended in terms of both expense and outputs, with some base level of personnel funding maintained to manage required administration.

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past? - Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?

DU and PF strive to complete one phase of this program before starting the next, to minimize overlap. Furthermore, staff charge time to site specific easement projects with unique numbers, which are only billed to one grant or another, therefore staff charges can be spread among multiple projects funded by multiple grants.

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	75	225	0	0	300
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	750	2,250	0	0	3,000
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	825	2,475	0	0	3,300

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	\$370,000	\$130,000	\$0	\$0	\$500,000
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	\$2,396,000	\$7,100,000	\$0	\$0	\$9,496,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$2,766,000	\$7,230,000	\$0	\$0	\$9,996,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	120	0	180	0	300
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	1,200	0	1,800	0	3,000
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1,320	0	1,980	0	3,300

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$200,000	\$0	\$300,000	\$0	\$500,000
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	\$3,796,000	\$0	\$5,700,000	\$0	\$9,496,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$3,996,000	\$0	\$6,000,000	\$0	\$9,996,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$4,933	\$578	\$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	\$3,195	\$3,156	\$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	\$1,667	\$0	\$1,667	\$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	\$3,163	\$0	\$3,167	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Automatic system calculation / not entered by managers

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

I have read and understand Section 15 of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Statute 97A.056, and the Call for Funding Request. I certify I am authorized to submit this proposal and to the best of my knowledge the information provided is true and accurate.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Wetland and upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands *USFWS habitat easements will add restored and protected grassland and small wetland acres to augment existing public lands and other permanent easements to create prairie-wetland complexes with a more diverse mix of habitats and conservation options for private landowners. The measure of success will be the number of functioning prairie wetland complexes that provide adequate wetland and grassland acres within a landscape. This is a long-term, programmatic landscape conservation effort that will take time to achieve.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected *This outcome will be measured by the sheer number of expiring CRP acres that will be protected through USFWS easements, and the protected grassland and wetland habitat that will not be subject to future conversion to intensive row crop agriculture. By offering private landowners a working lands conservation easement option, landowners in need of an annual income stream from their land will be incentivized to keep grasslands intact and restore wetlands.*

Parcel List

Explain the process used to select, rank and prioritize the parcels:

USFWS biologists score and rank each grassland habitat easement proposal based on ecological site attributes and landscape juxtaposition using a scoring process that is developed internally with science-based guidance from their Habitat & Population Evaluation Team science staff in Fergus Falls. This ranking process was designed to be relatively simple and evaluate the capability of the proposed easement to provide biological benefits for wetland and grassland dependent wildlife species by considering the habitat on the easement tract as well as its contribution and benefits to other protected lands in the surrounding area. Periodically throughout the year, the USFWS Minnesota Wetland Acquisition Office in Fergus Falls uses these rankings to re-prioritize the proposals to assure that the USFWS is working on and purchasing the highest ranking proposals throughout the year. DU and PF will rely on the high level of science-based conservation expertise of the USFWS to ensure that easement opportunities are prioritized appropriately.

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?
Dillan Roggenbuck Habitat Easement	12246236	75	\$120,000	No	No	No
Jim Nelson Habitat Easement	12246226	197	\$390,000	No	No	No

Douglas

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Hanson Trust Habitat Easement	13040217	67	\$150,000	No	No	No

Grant

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Terry Giese Habitat Easement	12841232	100	\$425,000	No	No	No
Todd and Mitch Ronhovde Habitat Easement	12742226	240	\$800,000	No	No	No

Otter Tail

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Arlene Delp Habitat Easement	13644216	80	\$220,000	No	No	No
Bluebill Research Habitat Easement	13143219	150	\$340,000	No	No	No
Dave Lindig Habitat Easement	13244227	160	\$490,000	No	No	No
Lori Krog Habitat Easement	13343212	120	\$380,000	No	No	No

Pope

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Charles Schwartz Habitat Easement	12637236	41	\$125,000	No	No	No
Dale Pederson Habitat Easement	12338205	96	\$220,000	No	No	No
Holzheimer Habitat Easement	12440211	80	\$75,000	No	No	No
Mark Anderson Habitat Easement	12640224	45	\$180,000	No	No	No
Myrom Habitat Easement	12437217	79	\$160,000	No	No	No
Nelson Brothers Habitat Easement	12338231	120	\$280,000	No	No	No

Swift

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Gerald Thompson Habitat Easement	12238226	295	\$380,000	No	No	No

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

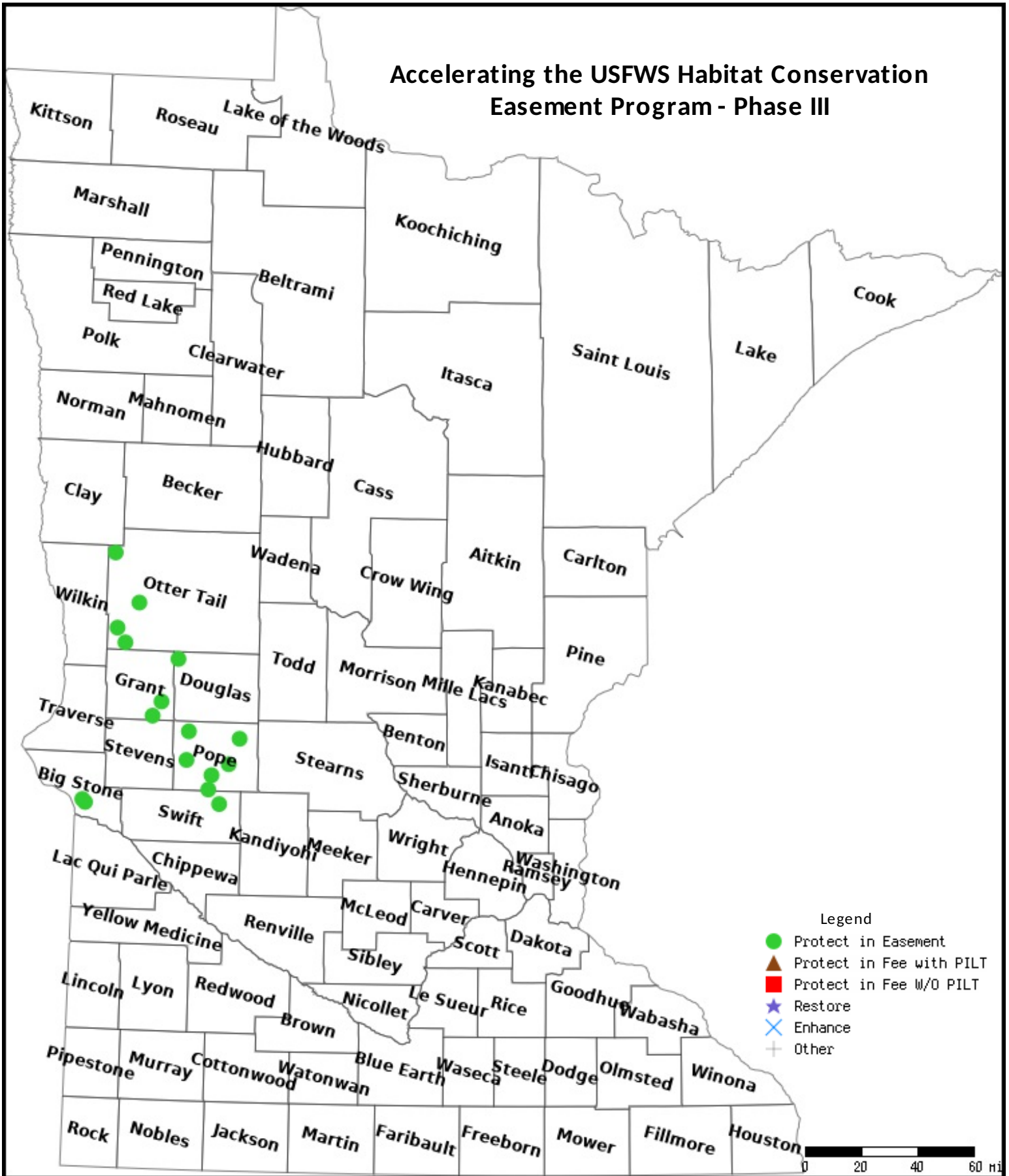
No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

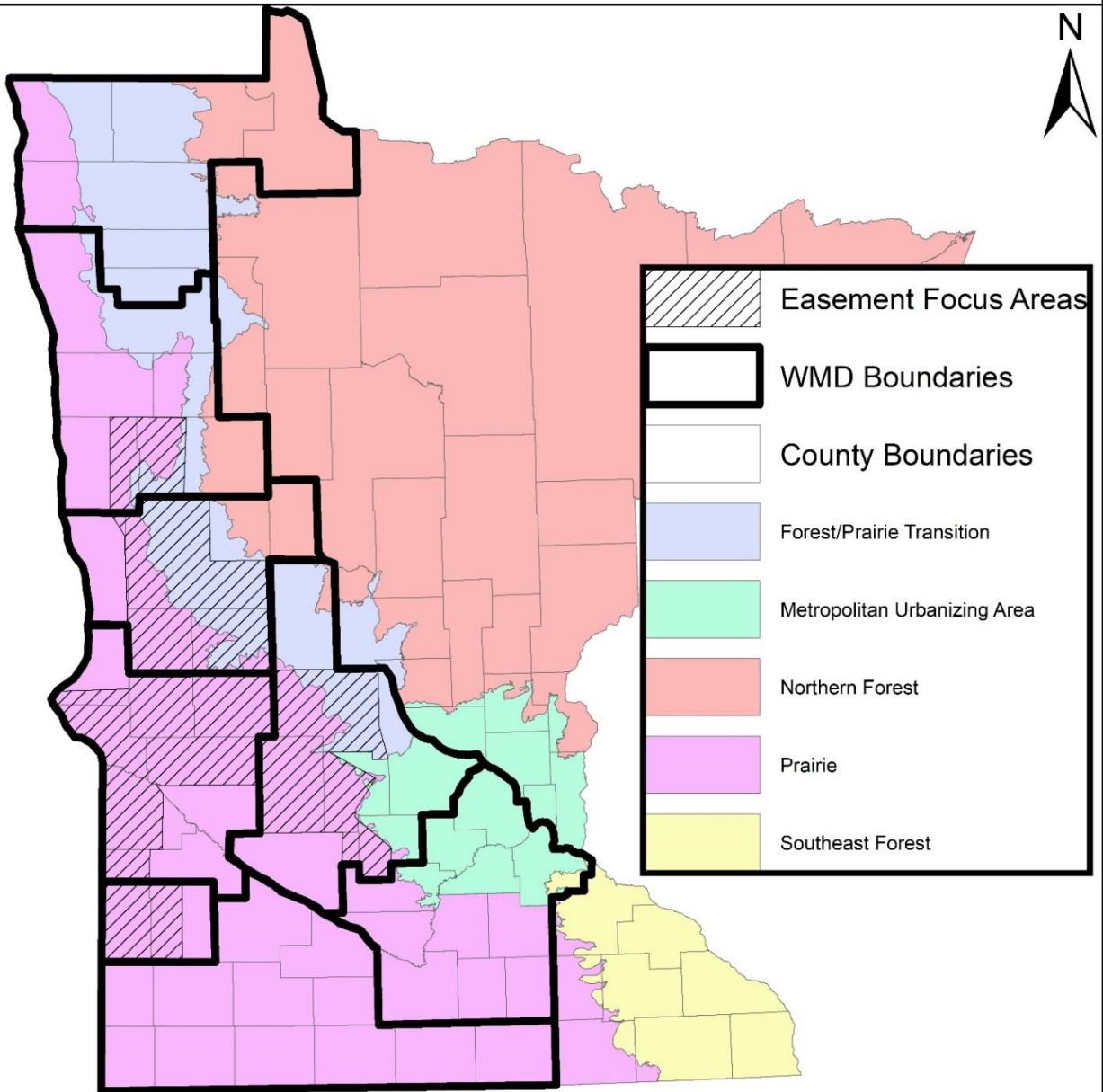
Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program - Phase III

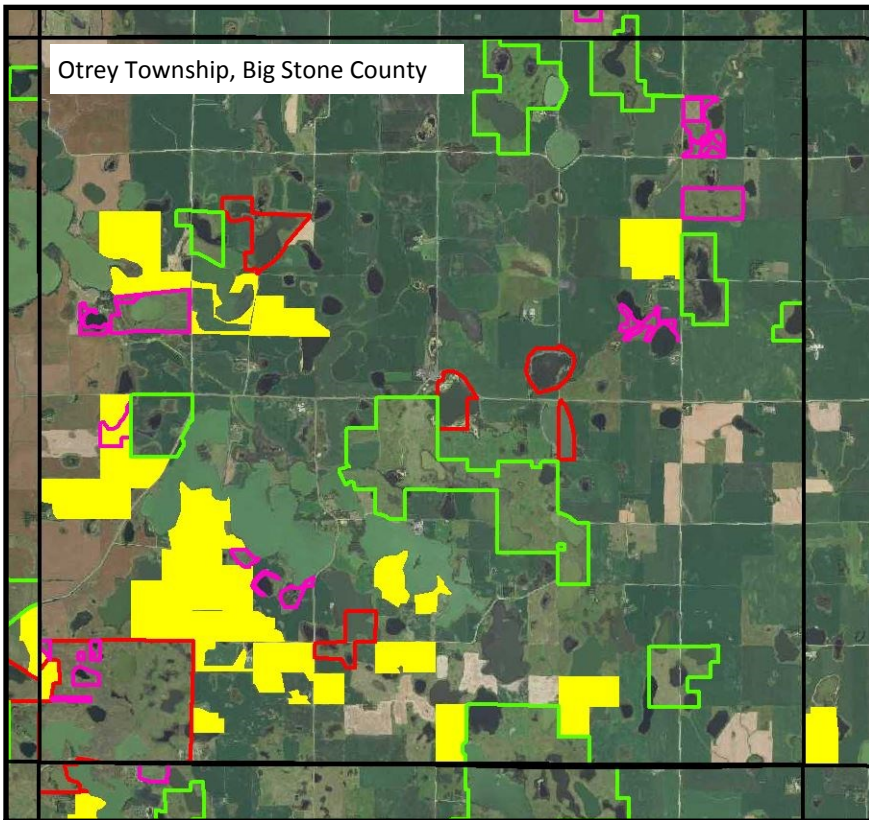


Data Generated From Parcel List

Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Easement Program

FWS Wetland Management Districts: Big Stone, Detroit Lakes, Fergus Falls, Litchfield, Minnesota Valley, Morris, Windom





Otrey Township, Big Stone County



Alex Galt

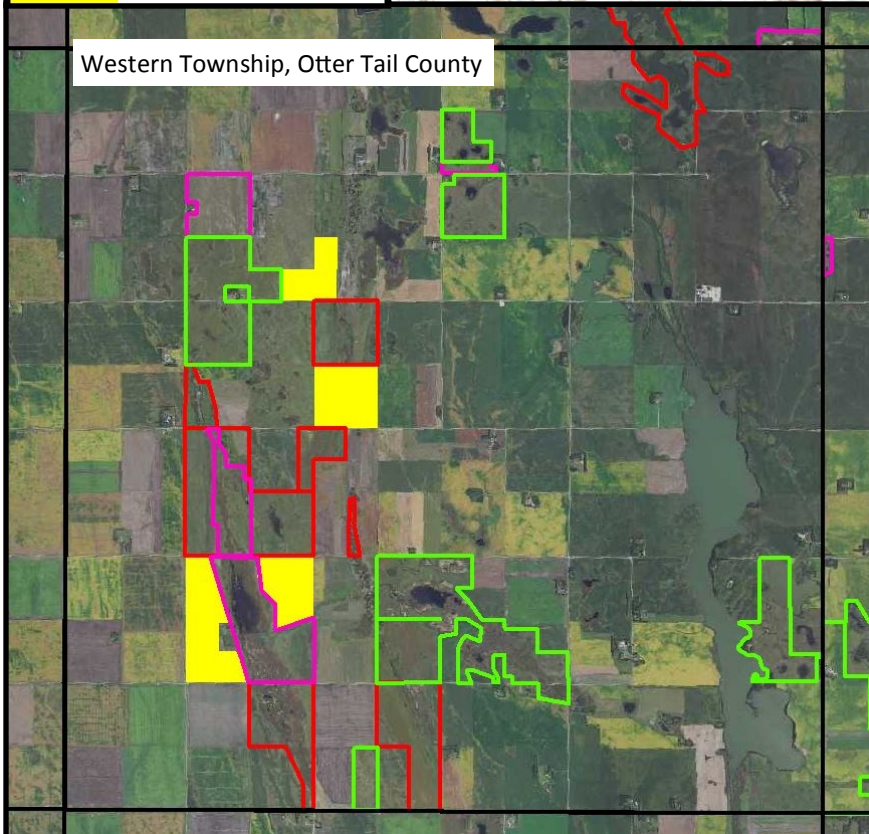
-  Township Boundary
-  WPA Boundaries
-  RIM Easements
-  WMA Boundaries
-  Habitat Easements



Alex Galt



Rex Johnson



Western Township, Otter Tail County



Shawn May



Stacy Salvevold

Biological Prioritization Tool – Form for Habitat Easement Proposals:

Tract _____ County _____ Date _____

The easement tract must possess a minimum 1:1 upland/wetland ratio. Exceptions may be considered. Justify below.

1. Waterfowl pair potential based on “Restorable Wetlands” model:

- 0-40 pairs – Low (5 pts)* *41-60 pairs – Medium (15 pts)* *61-80 pairs – High (25 pts)*
- 81-100 pairs – Highest (35 pts)* *>100 pairs – Exceptional (40 pts)*

2. Including tract, adjoins (within ¼ mile) a contiguous complex of perpetually protected lands totaling:

- 5 - 159 acres – Low (5 pts)* *160 - 639 acres - Medium (15 pts)*
- 640- 1119 acres – High (25 pts)* *1120 + acres – Highest (35 pts)*

3. Tract contains remnant native prairie totaling:

- 0 – 9 acres (0 pts)* *10-39 acres (10 pts)* *40+ acres (20 pts)*

4. Bonus Points: Does the tract possess recent documentation of a federally listed species or critical habitat (T&E), present a significant risk of habitat loss if protection is delayed, involve multiple landowners, or contribute additional non-MBCF funding ? Justify below:

No (0 pts) Yes (5 pts):

Notes:

- 1. _____ pts
- 2. _____ pts
- 3. _____ pts
- 4. _____ pts

Total score: _____

PPJV Habitat Easement and Fee Title Acquisition Prioritization Tools

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) National Wildlife Refuge System stations within the Prairie Pothole Region have teamed with the Habitat And Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) to develop a new set of tools for use by Refuges to prioritize the purchase of grassland easements and fee title lands across the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) area. These tools were developed to assist managers in ranking potential land acquisitions and to create a transparent and consistent process for acquiring land interests.

These science-based spatially explicit tools integrate multiple priorities (e.g. waterfowl, threatened and endangered species, grassland birds, habitat, etc.) into user-friendly products that are readily updated and adaptable for differing initiatives. The spatially explicit tools are designed to provide further resolution to managers in making acquisition decisions for multiple high value parcels. Further, the tools are designed to incorporate our conservation partners' priorities into our decision making by aligning with the 2017 PPJV Implementation Plan and addressing PPJV priority species. The tools also incorporate the most current data available for federally listed threatened and endangered species provided by FWS Ecological Services for use in these specific applications. These tools are considered living documents and updates will be provided to stations as models or priorities are updated.

The Eastern PPJV tool is comprised of six sections (or steps). Four of these sections use spatially explicit models or data and two sections require user derived input. The evaluation is hierarchical in structure, starting with waterfowl, but can be adjusted based upon the initiative or funding source goals and objectives.

Section I: Ducks, Breeding Pair Accessibility to Uplands: This tool uses priority zones based upon the availability of uplands to potential waterfowl pairs looking to nest. The priority zones are based upon the accessibility of 37.58 acre landscape units to the combined predicted pairs for mallard, northern pintail, blue winged teal, northern shoveler and gadwall.

Section II: Grassland Birds: Priority zones were developed for grassland birds that the PPJV had identified as priority species and habitat models were available. For any area to be a top priority in the combined species map, an area needs to have at least one top priority zone for one of the three species modeled, Bobolink, Clay-Colored Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow

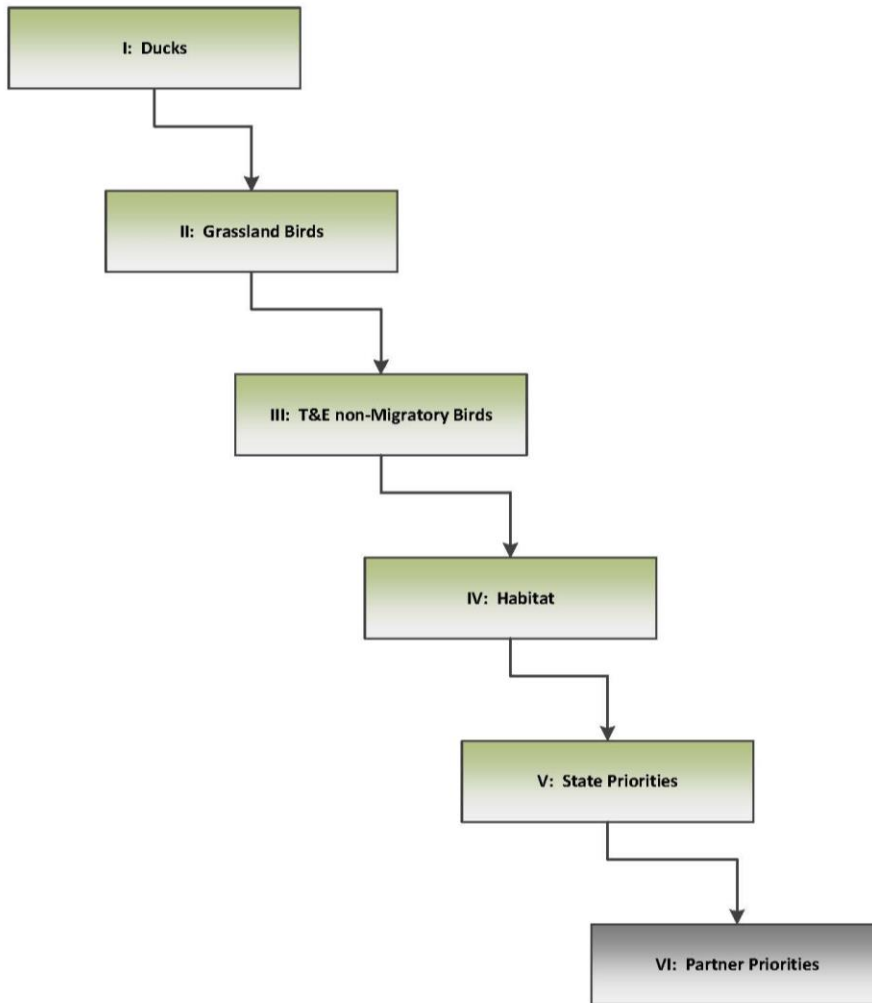
Section III: T&E non-Migratory Birds: Priority areas identified by Ecological Services (specifically for use in this prioritization process) were used for the following federally listed species: Prairie bush clover; Western prairie fringed orchid; Dakota skipper; Poweshiek skipperling; Rusty patched bumble bee; and Topeka shiner.

Section IV: Habitat: This section requires manual user input to prioritize habitat present on a tract. Native habitats are prioritized higher than restored or non-native habitat, and these are organized into four categories.

Section V: State Agency Priorities: Priority areas for Minnesota included all areas identified in the Minnesota Prairie Plan. Priority areas for Iowa included all areas identified as Prairie Pothole Region priority areas in the Iowa State Wildlife Action Plan.

Section VI: Partner Priorities: In the future, this section may include spatial data provided by any partner who wishes to provide such data. Currently, managers may manually enter Priority 1 for a parcel if they are aware that it is a priority for a specific partner.

HIERARCHICAL PRIORITIZATION STRUCTURE





United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

5600 American Boulevard West, Suite 990
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/IR3/NWRS/

Mr. Jon Schneider
Director Conservation Programs
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
311 East Lake Geneva Road
Alexandria, Minnesota 56308

Dear Mr. Schneider:

The purpose of this letter is to confirm our continued support and cooperation on our joint partnership involving Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC), funding for “Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program”.

For your FY2022 grant application, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), commits \$100,000 of in-kind staff support and \$1 Million of our Migratory Bird Conservation Funds for the acquisition of both fee and easement lands here in Minnesota. These dollars can be used by Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU) and Pheasants Forever, Inc. (PF) as “leveraged” Federal dollars for this grant application. Service field staff (i.e. Realty and land management staff), will work to identify private landowners willing to sell their lands, or interests in their land, to a conservation organization. We encourage DU and PF staff to also share willing seller interest with Service staff. Once acquired by DU and PF, grasslands and wetlands on these properties will be restored or enhanced using an array of funding sources and then donated to the Service for inclusion into the National Wildlife Refuge System. Subsequent operation and management of these properties will be the responsibility of the Service.

We appreciate this partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Pheasants Forever, Inc., and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and look forward to our continued efforts to conserve, restore, and enhance native grassland and wetland habitats in Minnesota for the benefit of wildlife and the enjoyment of the American public. Thank you again for your continued support!

Sincerely,

Suzanne C. Baird
Regional Chief