



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area Program - Phase XVI
Laws of Minnesota 2024 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/26/2024

Project Title: Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area Program - Phase XVI

Funds Recommended: \$5,315,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2024, Ch. 106, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(b)

Appropriation Language: \$5,315,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Pheasants Forever to acquire in fee and restore and enhance lands for wildlife management area purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquiring lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96, or lands adjacent to protected native prairie.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN Public Lands Manager

Organization: Pheasants Forever, Inc.

Address: 14241 Steves Rd SE

City: Osakis, MN 56360

Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org

Office Number: 320-250-6317

Mobile Number: 320-250-6317

Fax Number:

Website: pheasantsforever.org

Location Information

County Location(s): Nobles, Jackson, Brown, Mower, Meeker, Lyon, McLeod, Kandiyohi and Mahnommen.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie
- Metro / Urban

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie
- Wetlands

Narrative

Abstract

In this phase of Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area Program, Pheasants Forever (PF) seeks to protect, enhance, and restore wildlife habitat in the prairie, prairie forest transition, and metro regions of Minnesota. Acquired parcels will either be adjacent to or between existing public lands to create larger complexes or corridors for a variety of wildlife species. These properties will be restored to their greatest potential with regard to time and budgets.

Design and Scope of Work

This proposal represents the latest phase of Pheasants Forever's Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area program. The longtime goal of this program is to prevent future loss of wetland and grassland habitat and improve public access in the prairie, forest-prairie transition, and metro regions. This mission helps to expedite goals set out by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (MPCP), and Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years plan. Concurrently, this proposal achieves three priority actions set by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council's Ecological Vision and Priorities as part of its FY2025/ML2024 Call for Funding. To date we've successfully protected and restored over 15,000 acres of priority wildlife habitat and wish to protect additional acres under this phase.

When selecting parcels for acquisition, PF and the MN DNR will approach willing sellers who often wish to leave their conservation legacy by providing wildlife habitat for all Minnesotans to enjoy. Factors considered when prioritizing parcels include location relative to other public land complexes, corridors, and habitat priority areas. Breeding waterfowl density, restoration potential, and the presence of threatened or endangered (T/E) species or species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) as identified by surveys such as the Minnesota Biological Survey are also parameters considered when evaluating the value of parcels. Criteria used to develop the potential project list including: 1) Does the parcel contain habitat restoration potential that will result in an increase in wildlife populations? 2) Does the parcel build upon existing investments in public and private land habitat (landscape scale significance)? 3) Does the parcel contain significant natural communities, or will it protect or buffer significant natural communities? 4) Does the parcel have the potential and focus for habitat protection and restoration in the future? 5) Does the parcel provide multiple benefits (recreation, access, water control, water quality, wellhead protection, riparian protection, local community support, etc.)? Upon purchase, PF and the MN DNR will work together to create a plan that ensures habitat is restored to the highest quality as funds and time allow. Plans may include farming current cropland for 1-2 years to mitigate any herbicide present in the soil or manage non-native species, planting high-diversity native seed mixes, restoring drained wetlands, and removing invasive trees when appropriate. Tracts will ultimately be transferred to the MN DNR to be enrolled in the Wildlife Management Area program or held as an HMA by PF (in which case the property will be permanently protected by PF or transferred to another agency to hold in perpetuity). In both cases, tracts will be open to the public to be used in accordance with state law.

Explain how the plan addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation

Pheasants Forever works closely with the MN DNR and other partners to identify priority areas and habitat to protect in the prairie, forest/prairie transition, and the metro areas. This is done using up to date GIS data provided by the DNR and the USFWS that identify areas where rare, T/E, and SGCN are present. Priority is given to areas that will directly benefit rare, T/E, or SGCN. Tracts that provide the most wildlife benefit are often close to or directly adjacent to large complexes. This is a function of complex size and lack of habitat fragmentation, and landscape characteristics that are necessary for priority species. Providing additional and/or protecting current habitats aid in population expansion and stabilization for sensitive species in the area.

What are the elements of this plan that are critical from a timing perspective?

These funds will not be available for use, from the time of writing this proposal, until July 2024. Because of this we cannot know what time sensitive projects we will pursue. Any potential seller in May 2023 will almost certainly have moved on by July 2024. Properties with incredible habitat value are coming on and off the market in weeks or months, not years. In order to seize these time sensitive opportunities it is critical that this funding be utilized in a programmatic way allowing older grant funds to be spent on the most appropriate and time sensitive opportunities. In July of 2024 there will be incredibly important and time sensitive properties for sale and this funding will allow us to acquire those properties.

Describe how the plan expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:

Proximity to and position relative to habitat corridors and complexes are part of our criteria when selecting tracts to purchase. Our partnership utilizes the latest geospatial data to inform decisions related to an acquisitions potential for increasing an existing complex size, adding another "stepping stone" to a corridor, and it's ability to reduce the impact of habitat fragmentation. Most often, highly sought after tracts meet one of these three characteristics as they provide the most benefit for fish and wildlife, reduce cost of future management (as a function of proximity), and provide high-quality areas for the public to enjoy.

Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years

Explain how this plan will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.

Healthy, robust, native habitats are the most resilient to climate change. With little to no room for invasive species to become established (due to interspecies competition) these ecosystems provide the best refuge for native populations of fish, game & wildlife, particularly those species that have specific habitat requirements or are endemic to a particular area. Although these systems require regular maintenance (e.g. fire, grazing, etc.), management frequency and costs are reduced compared to systems in poor health. High-quality native grasslands and fully functional wetland systems also buffer the effects of climate change by converting CO₂, cycling nitrogen and phosphorus, and preserving ground water recharge cycles which also mitigates effects of extreme drought and flooding. This proposal will protect and restore tracts to healthy, functional ecosystems that are both resilient to climate change, and provide a refugia for area fish and wildlife species.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

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

Metro / Urban

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Outcomes will be measured by overall acres protected in prairie core areas or acres added to complexes. Lands will be transferred to the state as a WMA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and the Minnesota Pheasant Action Plan.*

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- Protected habitats will hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting ~ *Parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be transferred to the state as a WMA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR. Outcomes (restoration and protected acres) will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and the Minnesota Pheasant Action Plan 2020-2023.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be transferred to the state as a WMA to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and the Minnesota Pheasant Action Plan 2020-2023.*

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain 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 proposal supplements past investments and is aimed at accelerating the protection and restoration of strategic parcels.

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

Lands purchased to be donated to the state Wildlife Management Area system will be managed in perpetuity by the Minnesota DNR. All lands purchased as Pheasants Forever HMA's will have a deposit made into PF's Forever Stewardship Fund to pay for holding costs. All acquisitions will be restored to as high-quality habitat as practicable. In addition, our local PF chapter members and volunteers maintain a high interest in seeing the habitat and productivity of acquired parcels. They have a long history of providing sweat equity on PF owned parcels. PF and partners will develop an ecological restoration and management plan for each parcel. Grant and partner dollars will also be used for the initial site development and restoration/enhancement work.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Post Transfer	State of MN	Monitoring	Maintenance	Habitat Management

Provide an assessment of how your program celebrates cultural diversity or reaches diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:

The goal of this program is to protect and restore wildlife habitat and make these areas accessible to all Minnesotans, regardless of cultural background or fiscal standing. Properties acquired under this program will be free and open to access by all. These properties can be recreated on by all levels of income from free hiking/wildlife watching to expensive hunting practices. This program spans all of the Prairie, Forest-Prairie, and Metro regions. Some acquisitions will be nearby areas with diverse or low-income communities. This program engages with everyone who wants to participate in public lands and the outdoors.

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

At a minimum PF and/or MN DNR will notify local government in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the state and follow up with questions prior to acquisition. In cases where there is interest, we will also indicate our willingness to attend or ask to attend county or township meetings to communicate our interest in the projects and seek support.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection?

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

A limited number of the parcels may have a federal or state easement on a portion of the tract which

provides permanent protection for wetlands or grasslands. If a parcel has one of these encumbrances, and is still deemed a high priority by the partnership, we will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed, or use non-state funding to acquire the residual value of the protected portion of the property.

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 or on lands to be acquired in this program?

Yes

Where does the activity take place?

- WMA
- WPA
- Refuge Lands

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?

Yes

Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:

This proposal may include initial development plans or restoration plans to utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest to prepare the seedbed for native seed planting. In these restorations, PF's policy is to use non neonicotinoid treated seed and no herbicides other than glyphosate. On a small percentage of WMAs and HMAs, farming may be utilized to provide a winter food source for a variety of wildlife species in agriculture-dominated landscapes largely devoid of winter food sources. There are no immediate plans to use farming for winter food on any of the parcels in this proposal.

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?

No

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

There will be no variation from the State of Minnesota regulations.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- State of MN

- NGO

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WMA
- Other

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

3-4

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

No

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

Yes

All properties will have wetlands and upland habitats restored to the greatest extent possible with consideration to the timeline and budgets.

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this program's funding and availability?

Yes

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Complete restoration	6/30/2028
Close on tracts	1/1/2028
Purchase agreements	9/1/2025
Contract appraisals ordered	4/1/2025
Re-evaluate tract priority	2/14/2025
Purchase agreements	2/1/2025
Contract appraisals ordered	9/1/2024
Identify priority acquisitions	7/1/2024

Date of Final Report Submission: 06/30/2032

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7.

Availability of Appropriation

(a) Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Money appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

(1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2028;

(2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is

available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2032;
(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2029;
(4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and(5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$170,400	-	-	\$170,400
Contracts	\$661,700	-	-	\$661,700
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$3,670,000	\$527,900	PF, Federal, Private	\$4,197,900
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$521,400	\$527,900	PF, Federal, Private	\$1,049,300
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,800	-	-	\$2,800
Professional Services	\$133,300	-	-	\$133,300
Direct Support Services	\$27,100	\$16,500	PF	\$43,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$128,300	-	-	\$128,300
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$5,315,000	\$1,072,300	-	\$6,387,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
PF Field Staff	0.33	5.0	\$147,500	-	-	\$147,500
PF Grant Staff	0.04	5.0	\$22,900	-	-	\$22,900

Amount of Request: \$5,315,000

Amount of Leverage: \$1,072,300

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 20.17%

DSS + Personnel: \$197,500

As a % of the total request: 3.72%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?

Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?

If this project is reduced by 70% we would scale down all acres/activities and dollar amounts proportionately.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?

Personnel and DSS will be scaled down proportionately.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

We anticipate that all contract funding will be used for restoration, enhancement, and initial development of the protected acres and \$15,800 for adjacent protected lands. This could include but is not limited to wetland/grassland restoration, tree removal, prescribed fire, building removal, posts, signs, and other development needs.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

3-4

Travel

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

n/a

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

Yes

Direct Support Services

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

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 3.97%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.5% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference-in-kind.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?

7/1/2026

Output Tables**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	17	-	-	17
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	56	502	-	-	558
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	8	71	-	-	79
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	64	590	-	-	654

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$15,800	-	-	\$15,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$465,900	\$4,192,800	-	-	\$4,658,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$66,500	\$574,000	-	-	\$640,500
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$532,400	\$4,782,600	-	-	\$5,315,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	17	-	17
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	55	166	-	337	-	558
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	8	24	-	47	-	79
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	63	190	-	401	-	654

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$15,800	-	\$15,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$465,900	\$1,397,600	-	\$2,795,200	-	\$4,658,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$56,500	\$189,600	-	\$394,400	-	\$640,500
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$522,400	\$1,587,200	-	\$3,205,400	-	\$5,315,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	\$929	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$8,319	\$8,352	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$8,312	\$8,084	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$929	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$8,470	\$8,419	-	\$8,294	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$7,062	\$7,900	-	\$8,391	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

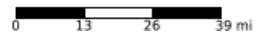
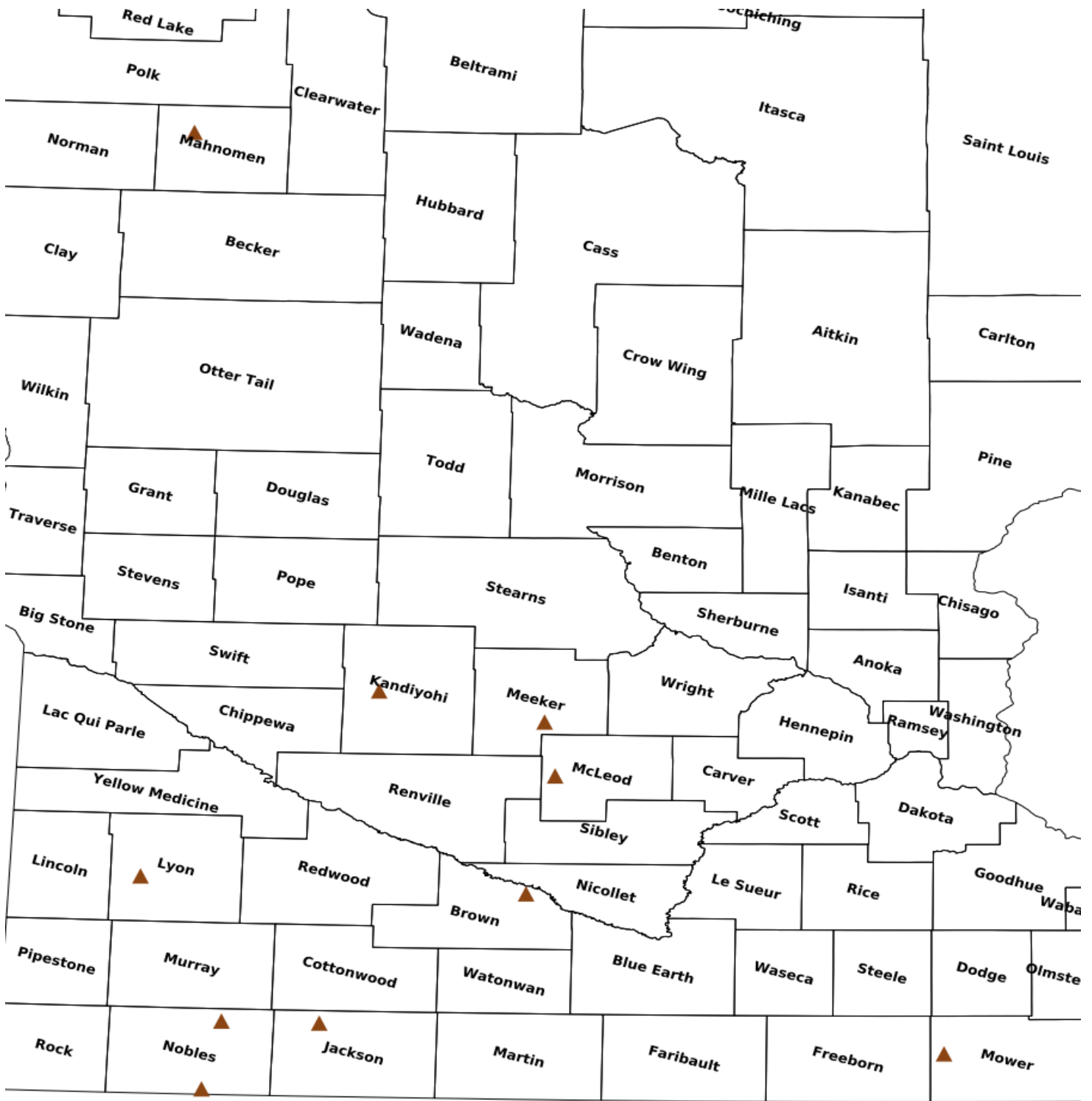
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Parcels are identified and strategically prioritized using the best science and decision support tools (e.g. HAPET Thunderstorm Maps) available. Preference is given to project sites that help deliver the goals of other recognized conservation initiatives and plans. Data layers (i.e. MN Biological Survey, Natural Heritage Database, MN Prairie Plan, Wellhead Protection Areas, Pheasant Action Plan, existing protected land, etc.) are used to help justify projects and focus areas as well as to inform decisions on top priorities for protection and restoration efforts.

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Lambrecht WMA Addn	Brown	11031215	36	\$357,210	No
Heron Lake WMA	Jackson	10437221	95	\$954,000	No
Rau Prairie Pothole WMA Addn	Kandiyohi	11935206	178	\$1,150,000	Yes
Prairie Marshes WMA Addition	Lyon	11143236	40	\$200,000	No
Wambach WMA Addn	Mahnomen	14541207	80	\$280,000	No
Ras-Lynn WMA Addn	McLeod	11630233	155	\$816,000	No
Prairie -Big Woods WMA Addn	Meeker	11830218	128	\$832,260	No
Murphy Lake WMA	Mower	10318228	143	\$900,000	No
Bigelow WMA Addn	Nobles	10141225	150	\$900,000	No
Lone Tree WMA Addition	Nobles	10440221	57	\$640,000	No

Parcel Map



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