



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas IV  
ML 2025 Request for Funding

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### General Information

**Date:** 05/29/2024

**Proposal Title:** Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas IV

**Funds Requested:** \$3,592,700

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** \$357,200

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Alexandra Wardwell

**Title:** Prairie Project Manager

**Organization:** Audubon Upper Mississippi River

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### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Norman, Mahnomen, Polk and Red Lake.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

**Activity types:**

- Restore
- Enhance

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

**Narrative****Abstract**

Audubon Upper Mississippi River (Audubon) is requesting funds to enhance 2,800 acres and restore 200 acres of significant wildlife habitat on public and permanently protected private lands. Our project and parcel prioritization criteria places an emphasis on Important Bird Areas (IBA) and priority areas identified by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, within the 8 most northwestern Minnesota counties associated with the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region, the Prairie Parklands region, and the northwestern edge of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest.

**Design and Scope of Work**

Audubon will advance conservation in northwestern Minnesota with the fourth phase of Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas (IBA). This Program will continue to expand the Outdoor Heritage Funds legacy of restoration and enhancement of Minnesota's natural heritage. Our Program places an emphasis on Minnesota's IBAs as they are essential to maintaining healthy and diverse bird populations in the state. The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) region alone supports over 279 bird species (143 regular breeding species, 22 permanent residents, and over 114 migrants or winter residents) including sandhill cranes, waterfowl, northern harrier, yellow rail, and greater prairie chicken. Gray wolves, moose, elk, whitetail deer, fisher, and the American badger are among other wildlife found in the region. The Prairie Parklands supports 140 regular breeding species, 23 permanent residents, and over 115 species that do not breed in the region but depend on critical habitats for migration. The Prairie Parklands is important to 139 species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). This geography contains the meeting point of three of the four ecological regions in Minnesota creating a mosaic of diverse habitats in close-proximity.

While enhancing and restoring habitats within IBAs is a primary goal, we recognize that some of the greatest conservation opportunities exist within the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan due to the loss of grassland and wetland habitats in recent years. In phase four, we will focus on two Prairie Parkland/Eastern Broadleaf Forest counties (Mahnommen and Norman) and the northwestern counties that compose the TAP (Polk, Red Lake, Pennington, Marshall, Kittson, Roseau).

We will expand the available habitat for priority grassland bird species by utilizing a variety of activities: native seed enhancements, management of brush and tree species, invasive species control, as well as prescribed fire. Projects will be targeted and selected based on a prioritization model that focuses on core habitat, conservation estate, acres of remnant habitat, and habitat condition. Restoration and enhancement projects will include a site assessment, including a rapid analysis of habitat suitability for priority species and habitat condition as well as documentation of prescribed habitat management actions (photo points) and recommended follow up actions for future management.

We will continue to work closely with local U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources staff to identify habitat needs on public lands in these key geographies. Audubon will write Habitat Management Action Plans, get necessary permits, and complete enhancement and restoration work to create better habitat for target species.

Audubon, with assistance from the MN Natural Resources Conservation Service, will conduct outreach to private landowners with Wetland Reserve Program Easements (WRP/WRE) that have Wetland Reserve Plans of Operations. These plans are road maps for habitat work for each specific easement. Audubon will assist with habitat identification and prioritization, develop Habitat Management Action Plans for a select number of easements, and conduct habitat work.

These partnership efforts will deliver effective means of enhancing and restoring ecologically significant land for the benefit of birds, wildlife, and people in northwestern Minnesota.

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

Through the development of our Minnesota Blueprints for Bird Conservation, Audubon has identified a group of breeding bird species known as priority species. This group highlights species that have experienced significant declines in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands regions, are dependent on vulnerable habitat, and have been recognized as priorities by various state and federal resource agencies. The purpose of identifying priority species is to be strategic about identifying a small number of species that should be the focus of conservation efforts in the short term. Based on our priority species for the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parkland regions, there are 32 Species of Greatest Conservation Need that would benefit from this grassland and wetland habitat restoration and enhancement program, such as the Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Green-winged Teal, and Black Tern. In addition, there are 11 bird species that are MN State Listed Species including the: Greater Prairie Chicken, Horned Grebe, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Yellow Rail, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Short-eared Owl, Nelson's Sparrow, Marbled Godwit and Trumpeter Swan.

### **What are the elements of this proposal that are critical from a timing perspective?**

There has been a significant loss of grassland and wetland habitats essential to wildlife and bird populations in Minnesota and throughout the Mississippi Flyway. With the loss of adequate habitat, bird populations have plummeted. Wetlands, prairie grasslands and open woodlands once dominated the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region, a transition zone between the prairie and forest. Today, approximately 64% of the landscape has been converted to row crops and the hydrology has been highly altered, affecting woody plant species encroachment. Habitat loss is even greater in the Prairie Parkland, where an estimated 1/10th of 1% of remnant prairie remains. Prairie and grassland cover, even when protected, are in danger of becoming overgrown by woody species and invaded by exotic cool season grasses when there is a lack of disturbance. Over time, the cost of enhancement and restoration on these lands in need of disturbance becomes more costly and time consuming.

### **Describe how the proposal expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:**

All of the proposed parcels fall within the priority areas and build on past work and current partner efforts, decreasing fragmentation and increasing and enhancing the local conservation estate for grassland species.

In an effort to maintain some of the most unique wildlife habitat in Minnesota, our proposal focuses on Important Bird Areas and the Prairie Conservation Plan boundaries and prioritizes the six counties within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) and two counties in the Prairie Parklands/Eastern Broadleaf Forest region. Audubon and partners have identified 57 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Minnesota through a Technical Committee, comprised of bird experts and conservationists from across the state. IBAs have been identified in over 170 countries to provide essential habitat for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating bird species. It is a proactive and science-based program that works to identify, monitor and conserve the most essential habitats for birds. In short, these IBAs are

the most important areas in which to preserve Minnesota’s game and non-game avian legacy. Audubon sees tremendous opportunity for directing conservation resources to protection and management of habitats within IBAs and Prairie Plan priority areas. Audubon uses critical plans and analyses, like Minnesota’s Wildlife Action Plan, the Minnesota Biological Survey biodiversity significance status, and Natural Heritage Information System data to further refine the geographic scope of our efforts to yield the highest conservation return on investment.

In addition to the rigorous process used to designate IBAs, Audubon has developed the Blueprints for Bird Conservation, a comprehensive compilation of national, regional and state bird and habitat conservation plans that address Minnesota bird species and Minnesota landscapes. A particular emphasis was placed on bird conservation documents developed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). This Blueprint builds upon existing efforts by identifying the highest priorities in each ecological region and using select conservation focal species; synthesizing the best proven conservation practices for each species; establishing measurable goals for species’ population targets; and identifying key sites for conservation.

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

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Other : Minnesota Blueprints for Bird Conservation

**Explain how this proposal 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.**

This proposal enhances habitat resilience in northwest Minnesota by promoting habitat diversity and connectivity, which are vital for wildlife species adaptation to climate change. Northwest Minnesota is a dynamic landscape that Audubon predicts to be a climate stronghold for birds in the coming decades (Natural Climate Solutions Report). Intact prairie systems are naturally resilient to environmental changes and invasive species invasions if they are connected and healthy. Prairies and grasslands, thanks to extensive root systems, store about a third of the world’s land-based carbon making these systems a natural climate solution. This proposal works to maintain an open, connected, and thriving prairie system by working with partners in the same geographic area for the best outcomes for prairie grouse, grassland birds and other prairie reliant wildlife like moose and the American Badger. This proposal promotes habitat and species biodiversity and enhances habitat resilience against the impacts of climate change.

**Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?**

**Forest / Prairie Transition**

- Protect, restore, and enhance habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need

**Prairie**

- Restore or enhance habitat on public lands

**Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:**

Audubon will focus restoration and enhancement work on key habitats within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parkland areas, guided by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, Duck Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, and the Minnesota Blueprints for Bird Conservation. We collaborate with local, state and federal governmental and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary to those undertaken by others in the program area and meet their program standards and best management practices.

We work with conservation-minded landowners who have perpetual conservation easements and restoration and enhancement projects targeted at IBAs and existing prairie habitat complexes. Targeted outreach to private landowners with existing WRP/WRE easements in priority areas under this grant will be initially be conducted by MN NRCS. Audubon will serve as the point of contact with landowners regarding enhancement or restoration work during the duration of the projects. Audubon will prioritize properties that support species in greatest conservation need and contain sensitive habitat types as identified within the Prairie Plan and by Minnesota Biological Survey. This work will build high-quality habitat complexes with better connectivity for birds and prairie wildlife (see map). The USFWS, MN DNR, NRCS, other state and local partners, and Audubon are deeply committed to maximizing and building off these habitat investments over time. A recent publication by U.S. Geological Survey on Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, illustrates the importance of restoration and enhancement for long-term improvements in water quality, ground water recharge, a decrease in nutrient runoff, for surrounding communities.

**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 ~ *Outcomes can be measured by the number of acres impacted and the number and quality of projects Audubon restores or enhances. Habitat Management Action Plans will detail specific restoration or enhancement prescriptions for each project on public lands and permanent conservation easements. The quality of work and level of success of projects on USFWS lands, DNR lands, WRP/WRE easements will be monitored through various USFWS monitoring protocols, NRCS stewardship audits, and site visits. All of the project work undertaken can be assessed based on the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan goals as well as the Minnesota Blueprints for Bird conservation.*

**Programs in prairie region:**

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Outcomes can be measured by the number of acres impacted and the number and quality of projects Audubon restores or enhances. Habitat Management Action Plans will detail specific restoration or enhancement prescriptions for each project on public lands and permanent conservation easements. The quality of work and level of success of projects on USFWS lands, DNR lands, and WRP/WRE easements will be monitored through various USFWS monitoring protocols and NRCS stewardship audits respectively. All of the project work undertaken can be assessed based on the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan goals as well as the Minnesota Blueprints for Bird conservation.*

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

- Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund

**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.**

LSOHC funding is in addition to other funding sources, and does not supplant this work. Without LSOHC funding, Audubon would not have resources to implement vast enhancement and restoration projects for birds and wildlife, and would have greater challenges in funding personnel salaries associated with this conservation work.

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

Audubon is committed to working with our State and Federal partners to ensure management recommendations are understood and implemented to the highest degree. Enhancement and restoration that occurs on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) held lands will expand and bolster the habitat work being done on public lands for the benefit of game and non-game bird species. The USFWS, MN DNR, and NRCS have very successful stewardship programs that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, defending the resources, and site visits. USFWS monitors their landholdings closely with multiple site visits a year, habitat management prioritization models, and monitoring. In many cases, this enhancement and restoration work will improve habitat conditions for priority species and increase the efficiency of future actions with regards to invasive species and woody species encroachment. Any Outdoor Heritage Funds allocated will expedite and expand the breadth of the enhancement activities on these conserved parcels.

In addition, Audubon will prepare a habitat management action plan for each property, providing ecological management recommendations for the property over time to maintain and manage the land for grassland and wetland species, including focal species and species of greatest conservation need.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2025-2029	USFWS,LSOHC, MN NRCS, MN DNR	Site Visits, Develop Habitat Management Action Plans,Planning, Habitat Suitability	Conduct Enhancement and Restoration	Follow up Maintenance as needed
2030-2033	USFWS, MN NRCS, MN DNR	Plan updates or Amendments	Maintenance/Management	Partner Monitoring

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

This work will directly benefit indigenous communities in some of the counties where Audubon will restore and enhance public lands including at least two potential projects in Mahnommen County. Mahnommen County is the home of the White Earth Nation and the White Earth Reservation. Prairie and wetland restoration and enhancements benefit the overall health of the surrounding ecosystem and creates a more diverse habitat for both game and non-game wildlife species. In the past, indigenous cultures managed wild bison herds and used prescribed fire as an important tool to manage the land for game species. Today, indigenous cultures still manage livestock, use prescribed fire for habitat enhancement, and harvest many native plants such as wild rice and many wild fruits. Audubon’s restoration activities near the White Earth Nation will complement their own natural resource management activities and help to maximize the clean water benefits, as well as, preserving the cultural importance of the natural landscape for indigenous communities. Of the 8 counties proposed for projects, only one county (Polk County, East Grand Forks) is included as having a portion of the population in a metro. The majority of these 8 counties are largely rural with small towns. Hiring local Minnesota contractors can have a big impact on rural community economies.

## Activity Details

### Requirements

**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?**

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- WPA
- Refuge Lands
- WMA
- SNA
- Public Waters
- State Recreation Areas

### 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?**

No

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

No

### Other OHF Appropriation Awards

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

Yes

**Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?**

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2022	\$2,140,000	\$323,847	\$1,816,153	15.13%
2018	\$829,000	\$745,400	\$83,600	89.92%
2015	\$1,730,000	\$1,676,500	\$53,500	96.91%
Totals	\$4,699,000	\$2,745,747	\$1,953,253	58.43%

**Timeline**

<b>Activity Name</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
Implement a portion of the Habitat Management Action Plans for restoration and enhancement recommendations on public lands and permanent conservation easements to benefit targeted bird species and other prairie wildlife.	June 2027
Conduct landowner outreach for enhancement and restoration on permanent conservation easements (ongoing). Utilize prioritization ranking and habitat suitability assessments for grassland and wetland birds.	June 2027
Conduct habitat restoration and enhancement of both public and permanently protected private lands. Complete restoration and enhancement habitat projects. Management summary of habitat suitability for targeted grassland bird and wildlife species.	June 2029
Make future maintenance and habitat recommendations for continued benefits to grassland birds and prairie wildlife.	June 2029



**Budget**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$563,800	\$235,000	USFWS	\$798,800
Contracts	\$2,900,000	-	-	\$2,900,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$25,000	-	-	\$25,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$93,900	\$122,200	Audubon Upper Mississippi River	\$216,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$3,592,700</b>	<b>\$357,200</b>	-	<b>\$3,949,900</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Manager	0.3	4.0	\$146,800	-	-	\$146,800
Conservation Director	0.15	4.0	\$85,500	-	-	\$85,500
Prairie Project Manager	0.9	4.0	\$295,600	\$235,000	USFWS	\$530,600
Grant Administrator	0.08	4.0	\$35,900	-	-	\$35,900

**Amount of Request:** \$3,592,700

**Amount of Leverage:** \$357,200

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 9.94%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$657,700

**As a % of the total request:** 18.31%

**Easement Stewardship:** -

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$357,200	\$357,200	100.0%	-	0.0%

**Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:**

Leverage is provided by Audubon from unrecovered DSS and federal in-kind match.

Audubon's Confirmed Leverage: \$122,215

Confirmed Federal in-kind match from USFWS:

\$235,000

**Does this proposal 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?**

This project is scalable; the number of acres could be reduced proportionally. Acres of restoration and enhancement projects would be reduced if the project received 50% of requested funding.

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

Based on our experiences with the first three LSOHC phases, personnel and dedicated support staff are important to project success and more difficult to scale down, though possible.

**If the project received 30% of the requested funding**

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

This project is scalable; the number of acres could be reduced proportionally. Acres of restoration and enhancement projects would be reduced if the project received 30% of requested funding.

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

Based on our experiences with the first three LSOHC phases, personnel and dedicated support staff are important to project success and more difficult to scale down, though possible.

**Personnel**

**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?**

Phases are billed in order as they are completed, including staff salaries. Audubon's conservation staff work together to design and implement habitat plans and on-the-ground restoration or enhancement projects and bill their time to the associated Phase of work accordingly.

**Contracts**

**What is included in the contracts line?**

The contract line is directed to enhancement and restoration projects. We will use local Minnesota-based contractors whenever possible for aspects of project work, including brush mowing, tree removal in prairies, selective herbicide use for invasive plant species management/site preparation, purchasing native seed from growers and vendors, and prescribed fire.

## Travel

**Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?**

Yes

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

Audubon staff may rent vehicles for grant-related purposes as needed.

**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?**

Our Direct Support Services is based on Audubon's federally negotiated indirect cost rate of 25.49%. In this proposal, we are requesting reimbursement of 10% of eligible costs from LSOHC and matching with the remaining 15.49%.

DSS of 10% was used for the personnel line item and on 10% of each contract amount up to \$25,000.

## Other Equipment/Tools

**Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?**

Field gear, field guides, office supplies for fieldwork and file management, smartphone applications or fees related to mapping or plant ID, maps, and plat books.

## Federal Funds

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

Yes

**Are the funds confirmed?**

Yes

- In Kind : \$235,000

**Is Confirmation Document attached?**

[Yes](#)

## Output Tables

### Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	200	200
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	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	2,800	2,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,000</b>	<b>3,000</b>

### Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$417,500	\$417,500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$3,175,200	\$3,175,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,592,700</b>	<b>\$3,592,700</b>

### Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	200	0	0	0	200
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	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	2,400	0	400	0	2,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2,600</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3,000</b>

### Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$417,500	-	-	-	\$417,500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$2,724,500	-	\$450,700	-	\$3,175,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,142,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$450,700</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,592,700</b>

### Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$2,087
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$1,134

**Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$2,087	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,135	-	\$1,126	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

-

Parcels

**Sign-up Criteria?**

No

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

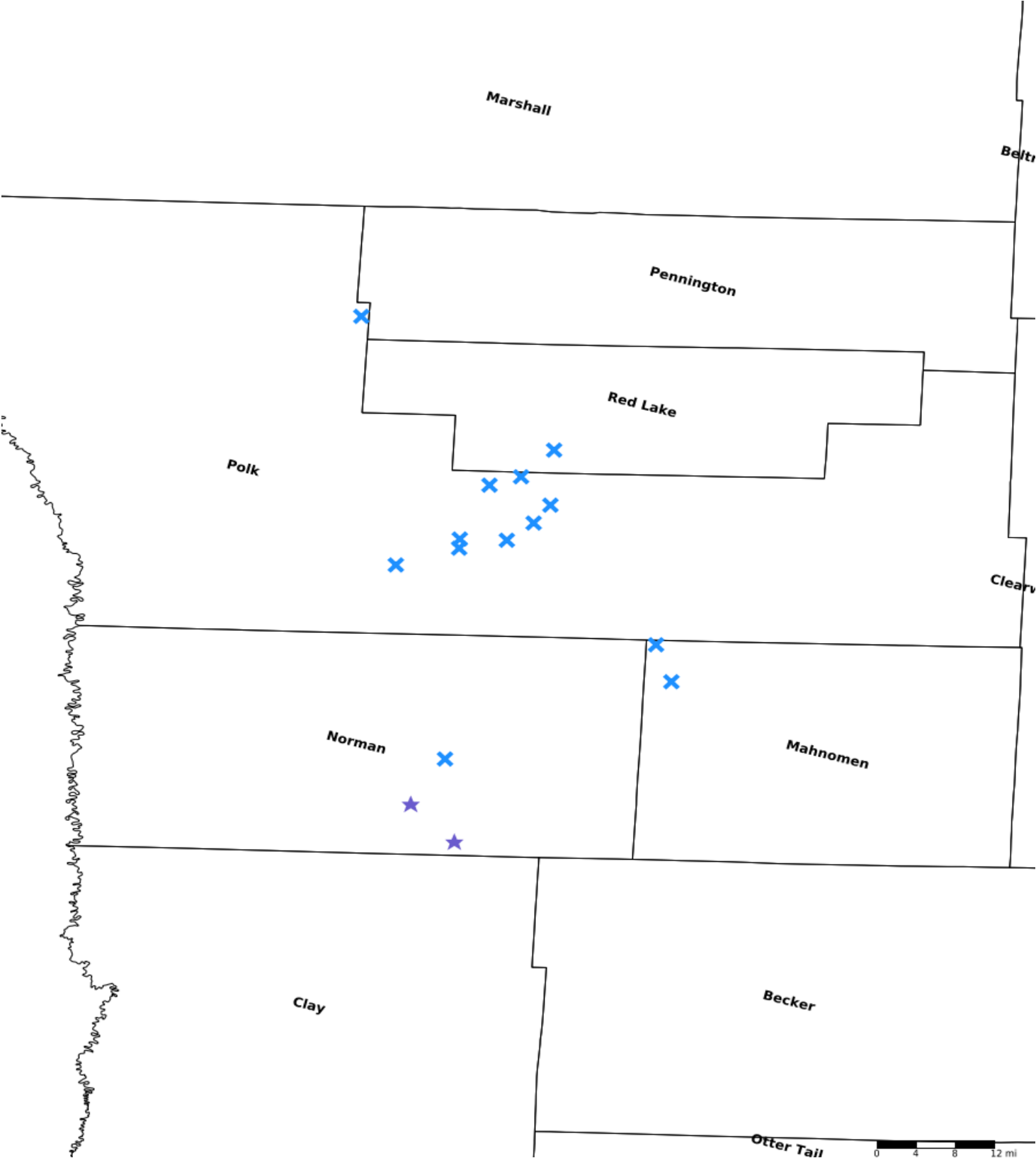
Audubon collaborates with partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources-Division of Wildlife, the Natural Resource Conservation Service to identify priority parcels for enhancement and restoration projects. Projects were targeted and selected based on a prioritization model that focuses on core habitat, geography, conservation estate, target bird species suitability, acres of remnant habitat, and current habitat condition. Additional parcels may be added as specific prioritization mapping, site visits, project cost, and habitat assessments further narrow our focus.

**Restore / Enhance Parcels**

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Dittmer WMA	Mahnomen	14642206	75	\$25,000	Yes	Woody species management in native prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife.
Bejou WMA	Mahnomen	14642229	75	\$25,000	Yes	Woody species management in native prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife.
Twin Valley WMA	Norman	14344230	160	\$150,000	Yes	Prescribed burn and interseeding enhancement in prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife.
Ida WMA	Norman	14445212	30	\$25,000	Yes	Woody species and Common Buckthorn control in native prairie to benefit breeding and migrating birds and prairie wildlife.
Rockwell WMA	Norman	14345203	35	\$35,000	Yes	Prescribed burn and interseeding enhancement in prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife.
Crookston Unit-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14943219	225	\$200,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.

Luxemburg-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14944202	30	\$25,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.
Pembina WMA	Polk	15246212	100	\$125,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie.
Chicog WMA	Polk	14845229	100	\$125,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie.
Burnham-Trail WMA	Polk	14845213	100	\$125,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie.
Oak Ridge West-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14944236	100	\$60,000	Yes	Woody species management in prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.
Burnham-Creek-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14845212	100	\$60,000	Yes	Woody species management in prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.
East Haul Road-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14944209	100	\$60,000	Yes	Woody species management in prairie to benefit breeding/migrating grassland birds and prairie wildlife. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.
Godfrey-Glacial Ridge NWR	Polk	14844209	300	\$200,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens, Sharp-tailed grouse, and grassland-dependent birds and wildlife through woody species control in prairie. Prescribed burn in-kind from USFWS.
Marcoux WMA	Red Lake	15043219	100	\$125,000	Yes	Improve habitat for Greater Prairie Chickens and grassland-dependent birds through woody species management in prairie.

Parcel Map



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



# Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas

## Tallgrass Aspen Parklands – Phase IV



MN Tallgrass Aspen Parkland. Justin Meissen. Flickr. 2010

With LSOHC support, Audubon will continue expanding habitat enhancement and restoration on permanently protected land within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands, a unique and critical habitat for many wildlife species. Projects will be targeted and selected based on a prioritization model that focuses on suitability for priority bird species, core habitat, conservation state, remnant habitat, and habitat condition.

**Funding Request:** \$3,592,700 **Match Contributions:** \$357,200

**Impact:** 2,800 Acres Enhanced, 200 Acres Restored

### **Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands**

The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands regions in Northwestern Minnesota represent a highly unique ecological mix of wetlands, grasslands, and woodlands. Significant landscape-level changes have been documented within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands, marking impacts on the many grassland and wetland birds that depend on this habitat, including species like sharp-tailed grouse, upland sandpiper, American bittern, and countless other wildlife.

Through Phase IV, Audubon will continue to expand the Outdoor Heritage Fund's legacy of restoration and enhancement of Minnesota's natural heritage. Our Program places an emphasis on Minnesota's Important Bird Areas and the Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan, as they are essential to maintaining healthy and diverse bird populations in the state. We have restored or enhanced 3,690 acres through previous project phases. Project habitat management strategies will include brush and tree management, native seed enhancements, invasive species control, and prescribed fire.



Funding for this program provided by the Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

**Partners**

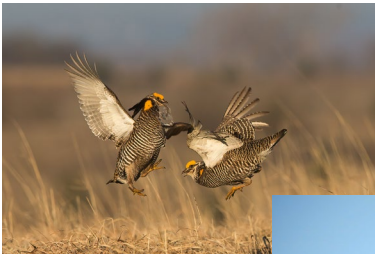


**Project Importance to Local Bird Populations**

Tallgrass Aspen Parkland: 143 Breeding Species, 22 Resident Species, 114 Migrant Species.

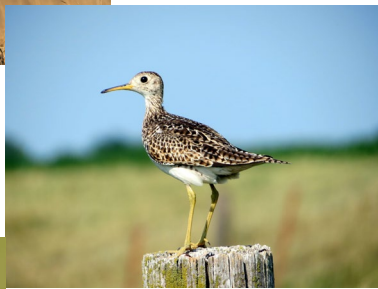
Prairie Parklands: 140 Breeding Species, 23 Resident Species, 115 Migrant Species.

**Examples of Project Priority Bird Species**



Greater Prairie Chicken.  
Photo: William Pobley

Upland Sandpiper.  
Photo: Nick Varvel

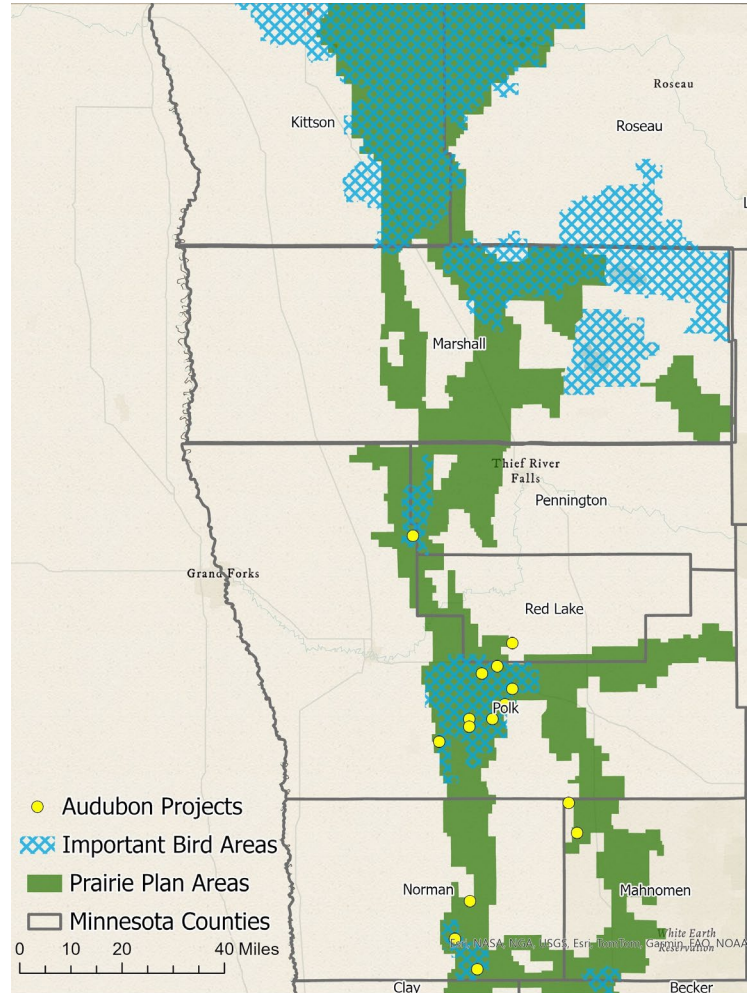


Grasshopper Sparrow  
Photo: Susan Ward

**Project Management**

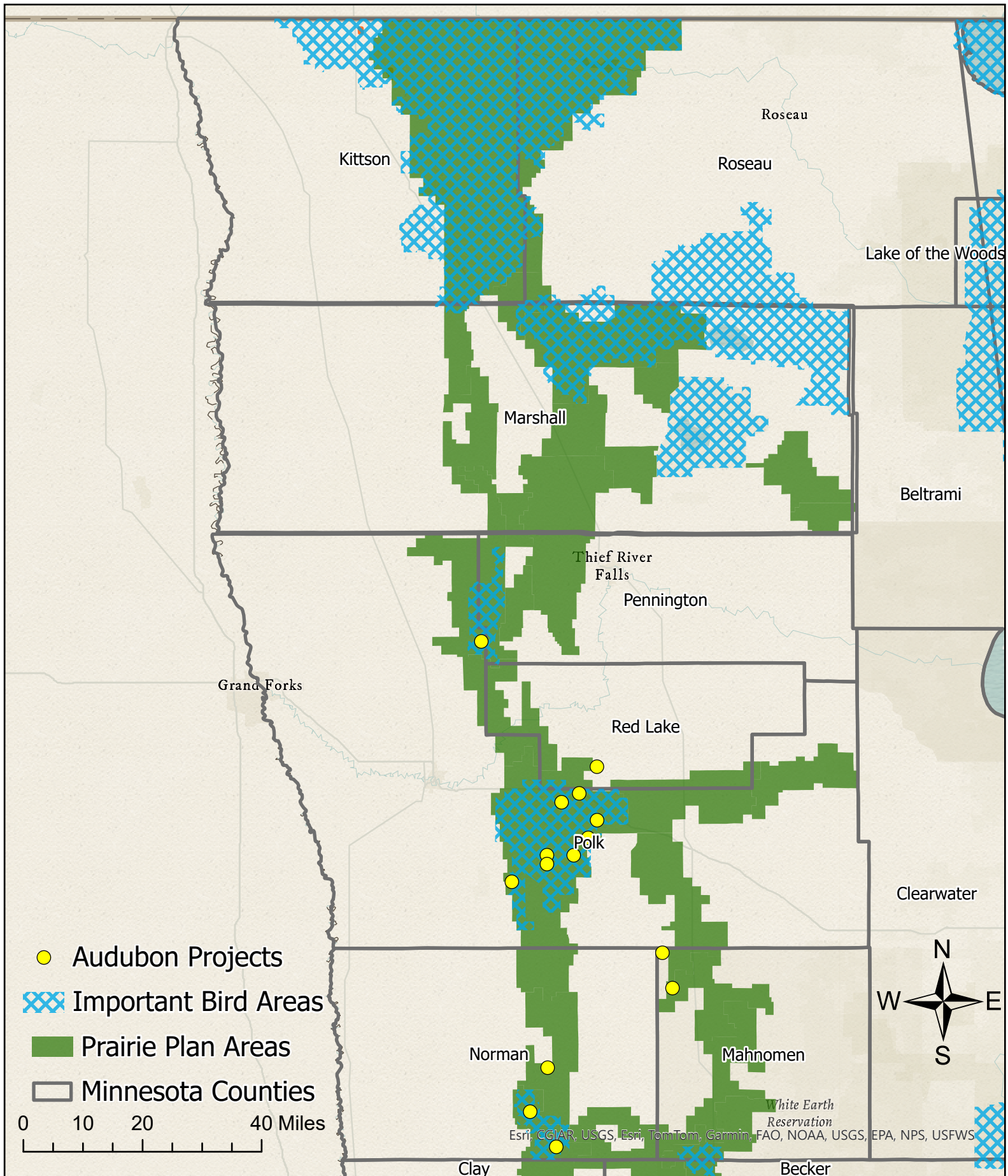
Alexandra Wardwell, Prairie Project Manager,  
[Alexandra.wardwell@audubon.org](mailto:Alexandra.wardwell@audubon.org)

Rob Schultz, Executive Director and Vice President,  
[Rob.schultz@audubon.org](mailto:Rob.schultz@audubon.org)



Audubon Upper Mississippi River is the regional office of the National Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, working in the states of Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri. The National Audubon Society protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation. [umr.audubon.org](http://umr.audubon.org)

# Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase IV





# United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Rydell and Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuges  
17788 349<sup>th</sup> St. SE  
Erskine, MN 56535  
218-687-2229

May 21, 2024

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council,

I would like to express my utmost support for Audubon Upper Mississippi River's *Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase IV* proposal. If awarded, funding will focus in part on restoration and enhancement work on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) owned land in northwestern Minnesota. This work will focus on several Audubon Important Bird Areas, including the globally significant Glacial Ridge Important Bird Area which includes Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. Planned conservation work as part of this proposed grant will include restoring and improving habitats for a variety of grassland- and wetland-dependent migratory bird species. These species are considered USFWS Trust Species and are our highest priority fauna for conservation and management actions.

The work will be focused within the boundaries of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan priority areas and Audubon's Important Bird Areas. Planned conservation work will include pre- and post-assessments of habitat suitability for various species, utilizing Audubon's Blueprints for Bird Conservation documents.

As the manager of two national wildlife refuges in northwestern Minnesota and as someone who has worked closely with Audubon Upper Mississippi River staff on past conservation efforts, I can speak to the quality of work and level of dedication exhibited by their staff and organization in their work to protect, restore, and enhance natural landscapes throughout this part of Minnesota.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any more information about my experiences working with Audubon Upper Mississippi River staff to promote conservation within Minnesota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory A. Knutsen".

Gregg Knutsen, Refuge Manager  
218-686-4329 (cell)  
gregg\_knutsen@fws.gov



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Minnesota State Office

375 Jackson Street  
Suite 600  
Saint Paul, MN, 55101

ALEXANDRA WARDWELL

Prairie Project Manager  
Audubon Upper Mississippi River  
2355 Highway 36 West, Suite 400  
Roseville, MN 55113

May 24, 2024

Dear Alexandra Wardwell,

This letter is in response to your request for a letter of collaboration from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Minnesota for your upcoming Lessard-Sam's Outdoor Heritage funds regarding Audubon's proposal - Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase IV.

We are encouraged by your organization's proposal and feel there is value to delivering conservation in a coordinated effort to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through enhancement and restoration of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easements.

Minnesota NRCS looks forward to future potential collaborations with Audubon to advance conservation along with improvements to habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Sincerely,

**Keith Kloubec**

Assistant State Conservationist - Programs