

Program Manager Notes Attachment

Neal Feeken

Nature Conservancy

PA 04 MN Prairie Recovery Program, Phase XII

Thanks for the opportunity to further explain our reapportionment rationale, particularly as it relates to personnel and how that breaks down.

One of the most beneficial things about multi-phase programs is the ability to moderate the ebb and flow of funding allocations across multiple years. This function allows us (and similar programs) to maintain consistent staffing across funding cycles without needing to continuously be re-hiring and re-training new staff every year or two. This fact more than anything is responsible for the consistent, effective and cost-efficient on-the-ground results that the Prairie Recovery Program (PRP) has been able to deliver over the last decade plus.

Most of the personnel costs allocated in the proposed accomplishment plan are split between the four full-time Prairie Recovery Field Biologists and what I somewhat generically termed "Habitat Crews". The "Habitat Crews" are what we've taken to labelling our seasonal, temporary crews. These crews consist of around 15 individuals distributed across our prairie stewardship programs. The seasonal crews are hired on for anywhere from 4-6 months during the prescribed fire and invasive control seasons. Employing these seasonal crews is crucial to meeting the conservation objectives articulated in the Accomplishment Plan.

This same line item also includes a 10-month restoration coordinator, whose primary responsibility is managing a roving seed-harvest crew, subsequently collecting hundreds of pounds of hard to source (and expensive) local ecotype native seed for restoration work on permanently protected, primarily public, lands. We've presented on this component of the work several times to the Council, and while the acres don't readily show up in reports, we and our partners think this is one of the biggest value add offered by PRP.

New to the Habitat Crew line item for this Phase – and this is what I should have elaborated on both in the proposal and in the AP – is our desire to hire a "Conservation Grazing Specialist" to facilitate increased conservation grazing on public lands in western MN. We consistently hear from our USFWS and DNR land manager partners the need to do more grazing on public grasslands for habitat and species diversity. And while the desire and need is there nobody has sufficient capacity to really focus on this aspect of enhancement work. The Prairie Recovery Field Biologists have been carrying the bulk of the workload for new grazing projects in their respective landscapes but it's simply falling short of the need. Our rationale for testing this model is that by maintaining the Conservation Grazing Specialist, the program and other programs in the prairie landscape, will have an efficient management tool that can reduce per acre management costs in the future while improving habitat quality on partner lands where grazing is used.

Therefore I included 2 years of funding for a dedicated grazing specialist in the Habitat Crew line item, but in hindsight neglected to call it out explicitly.

The grazing specialist salary/benefits is the primary factor for not strictly cutting the personnel line item proportionally with the decreased funding from proposed. If the Council adamantly wants us to cut all line items proportionally I'd likely eliminate the grazing specialist and some of the seasonal staffing to get us to 38% of original proposal. I'd add that money back to the contracts line-item which would bring us pretty close to across the board proportional cuts. In either case I'm confident we can still meet our stated deliverables but would greatly prefer giving the grazing specialist a two-year test run.

I plan to be listening in to the next Council meeting and am always happy to answer any questions you or they have. Thanks again for the chance to clarify these points. Please let me know if they would like any additional information. –Neal

June Mathiowetz
Washington County
HA 10 Washington County Habitat Protection & Restoration Partnership

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the question of why our proposal did not have proportional reductions in Personnel and DSS costs. We note this was signaled in our original proposal and in our Accomplishment Plan as copied below.

To expound further on the matter and as we noted in our presentation, County personnel costs listed are fixed and necessary for program success. The County's land protection efforts rapidly grew as we approached our 20-year mark, outpacing staffing levels due to increased popularity with our cities and residents. As such, we are still building the structure and capacity needed to handle the demand. Current county staffing for the program includes one full-time administrator of the program and part-time work by a Public Works Acquisition Manager and Assistant Attorney. The current lead of the program is at capacity with the program having closed on a record 8 projects last year. Engaging in a slate of new land projects will require additional land protection staff for the duration of the funding period to assure we can meet the deadlines. The Council's support on this will provide the funding to leap the program into its next iteration of growth and position the work well for even more to be accomplished in the future.

MLT's costs on Personnel and DSS costs have been further adjusted downward to 61% of the original request to accommodate the Council's request.

Washington County Habitat Protection and Restoration Program

PROPOSAL LANGUAGE:

If the project received 50 or 70% of the requested funding

*"Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Acre scaling will be approximately proportional. R/E project selection will be based on priorities; scaling may not be proportional. Activities will be curtailed, but less than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success."*

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed."

ACCOMPLISHMENT PLAN LANGUAGE:

"How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount? The program has been scaled proportional to awarded funding, for the most part. Personnel and DSS were scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Acres protected and restored have been scaled relative to revised budgets."

We appreciate the work of the Council and hope the members will agree providing these Personnel costs are critical to timely land protection success.

John P. Lenczewski
Minnesota Trout Unlimited
HRE10 Enhancing Metro & North Shore Trout Stream Habitats

Thank you for contacting me to learn why MNTU could not simply reduce its personnel costs in proportion to the overall reduction in budget from original proposal to Council recommendation. As we discussed, to do so would require MNTU to slash a new program which will give members of the BIPOC community opportunities to explore careers in conservation.

Our proposal includes several standalone projects, including one designed to recruit members of the BIPOC community to a conservation corps that will tackle a backlog of habitat work within in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Crew members will be seasonal employees of Trout Unlimited, and its leader a year-round employee. We intend to retain this portion of our FY2023 proposal in its entirety. The personnel costs associated with this project are more than 90% of our total personnel costs. Consequently, we cannot proportionally reduce the personnel costs (and DSS tied to it) unless we drastically reduce the scope and impact of this important project. We trust that the Council agrees that this project should not be slashed. The individual projects we cut or scaled back to meet the reduced funding target had little personnel costs associated with them.

Please let me know if the Council needs any additional clarification.

Best regards,

John