

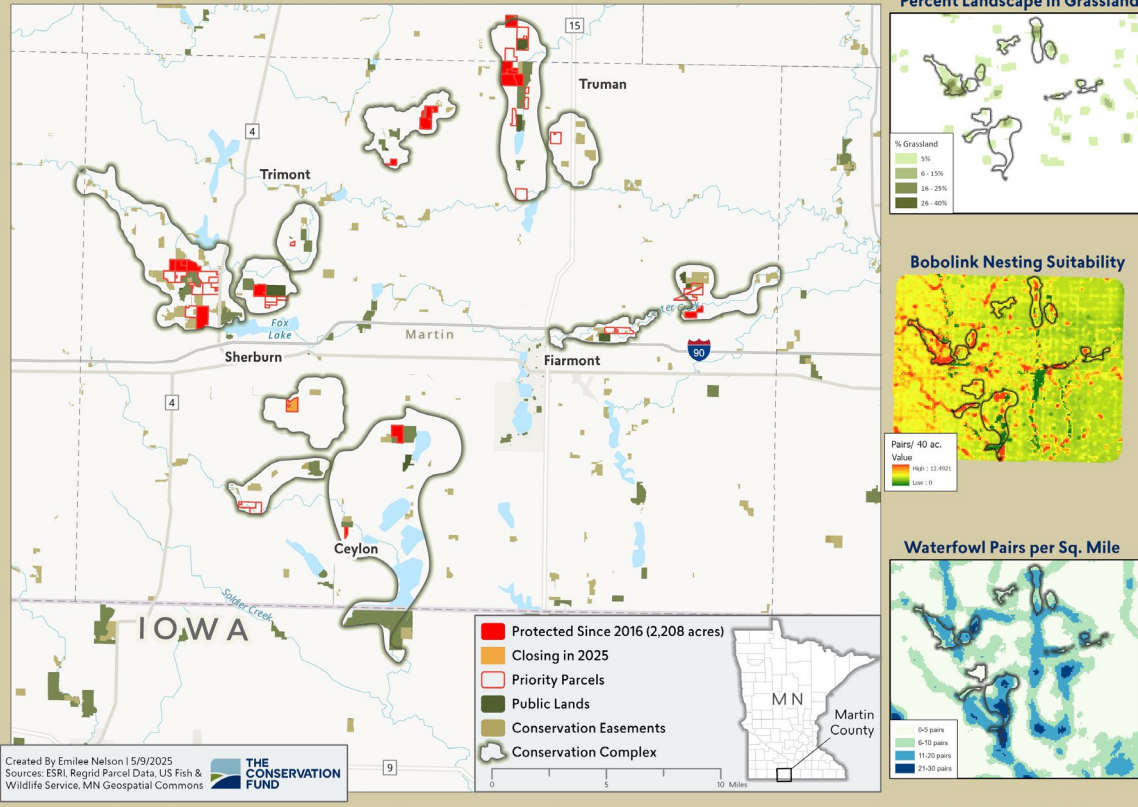
# How many ducks can you count on this Martin County wetland restoration?



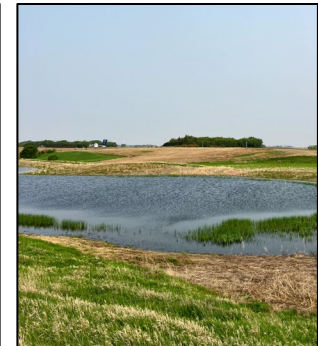


# Martin County WMA Acquisition

## Martin County Habitat



- ✎ 16 properties acquired since 2018
- ✎ 2,208 acres protected
- ✎ 52 wetland basins restored
- ✎ 180 acres of wetlands returned to the landscape
- ✎ 700 acres of prairie grasslands restored





# PA05 Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge - Phase 16

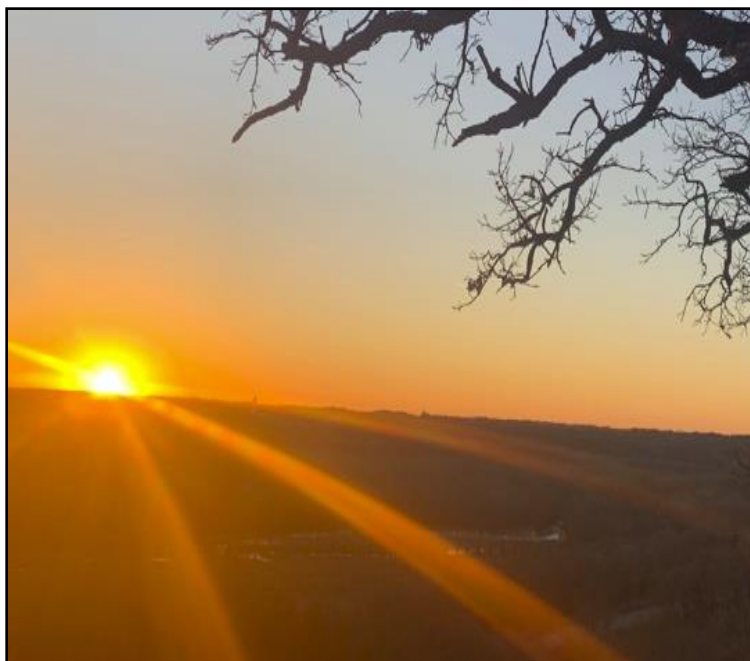
Funding Requested: \$9,886,200



## ML2026 Program Goals

The requested funding will allow us to protect approximately **1,092 acres** of native prairie and wildlife habitat in western and central Minnesota. Planned outcomes include:

- **1,500 acres of conservation easements**
- **225 acres of fee acquisition**
- **1,060 acres restored and enhanced**



## Program Accomplishments To-Date

- **Protection of 15,027 acres of native prairie & associated habitat in MN**
- **9,406 acres protected with OHF funding**
  - **5,956 acres of native prairie**
  - **791 acres of wetlands**
  - **31 miles of stream frontage**
  - **2.5 miles of lake frontage**

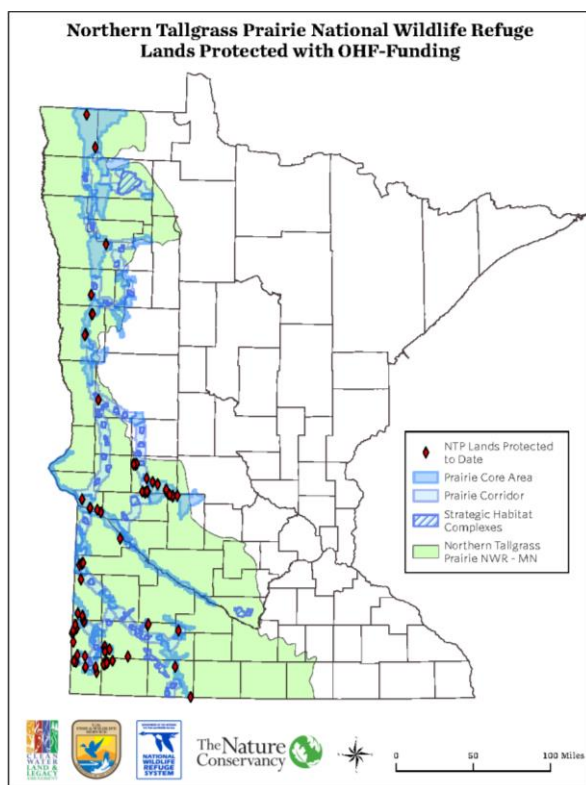


## Status of Unspent Prior Appropriations

Available funds in 5 open appropriations: \$12,978,400 of which:

- Signed & probable\* commitments: \$8,200,000
- Restoration/enhancement costs: \$2,200,000
- Acquisition support costs: \$1,800,000
- Returned funds from 2 appropriations: \$780,000
- *Remaining for future acquisitions:* -\$1,600

\*\$4.3M signed, \$7M proposed, \$11.3M total. The \$8.2M is a conservative estimate for signed & probable acquisition projects based on our history of converting proposed to signed.



## Prioritizing Projects

Guided by the MN Prairie Conservation Plan, each project is reviewed using the following criteria:

- Native prairie %
- Adjacency to native prairie
- Located in (or nearby) the MN Prairie Plan Core or Corridor areas
- Adjacency to existing complex of protected habitat
- Biodiversity significance as determined by the Minnesota Biological Survey and on-site evaluations:
  - Threatened and endangered species
  - Species of concern
  - Rare communities



The Nature  
Conservancy



## MN Prairie Recovery Program

Advancing the Protection, Restoration, and Enhancement of prairie habitat within prairie core and corridor landscapes. Our programmatic work focuses on 5 key prairie landscapes across western MN.

### Accomplishments to Date:

**Protected 8,179 acres**

**Restored 2,765 acres**

**Enhance 215,000 acres**

**Sequestered 1,700,000 tons CO<sub>2</sub>E**

**Tallgrass  
Aspen  
Parklands**



**Agassiz  
Beach  
Ridges**

**Glacial  
Lakes**

**Upper  
Minnesota  
River  
Valley**

**Prairie  
Coteau**

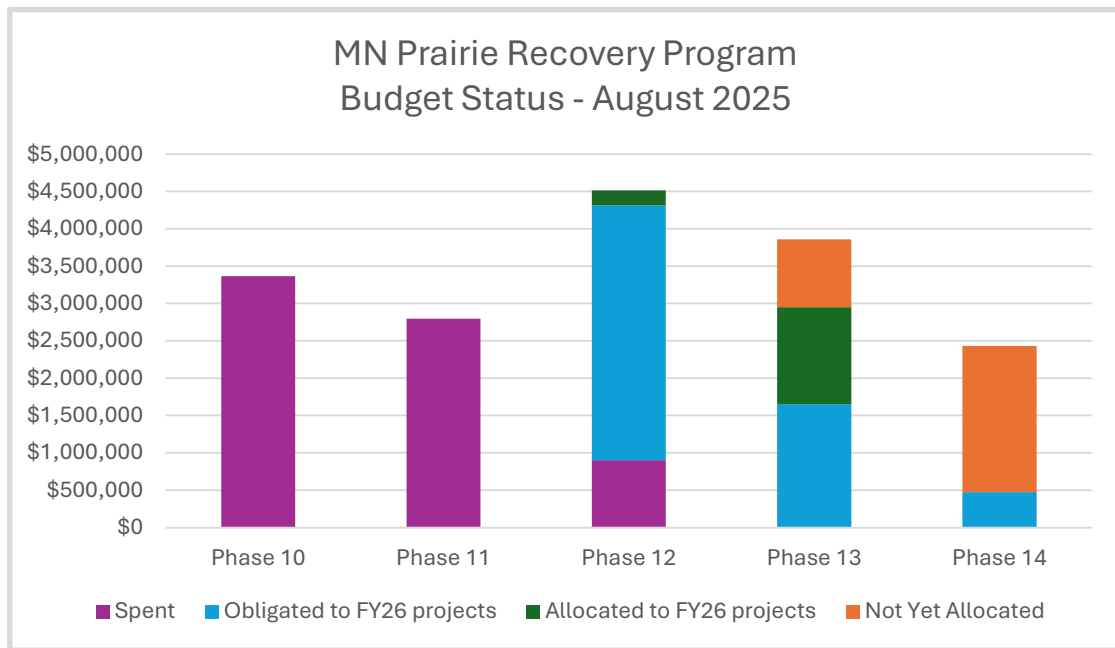


-  MN Prairie Plan Core Areas
-  MN County Boundaries

0 25 50 100 Miles







**Of the current \$9.9 million in existing unspent allocations, \$7 million is obligated or allocated to projects in FY2026 (July 1 – June 30), with less than \$2.9 million available.**

**Definition of Obligated:** Funds locked in via Purchase Agreements or signed Contracts for Services, along with personnel, supplies, equipment, travel required to support those projects.

**Definition of Allocated:** Funds budgeted for planned projects that are in the design or bidding phase and will soon be obligated to Contracts for Services.

**Examples of prairie habitat protected with Minnesota Prairie Recovery Program funds.**



Spring Prairie Preserve



Blazing Star Prairie





## PRE 01 2026 Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program

Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever propose to continue accelerating the US Fish & Wildlife Service's working lands habitat conservation easement program on private lands in western Minnesota by strategically restoring and enhancing 3,750 prairie and wetland acres.

- Phase 6 of successful partnership between DU, PF, and the USFWS focusing on restoring and enhancing working lands protected by USFWS easements.
- Improves wildlife habitat and outcomes while fitting into agricultural operations by allowing grazing and delayed haying.
- This program strategically focuses on critical private lands in western Minnesota within existing habitat complexes and near existing public lands.



### PRIMARY GOALS:

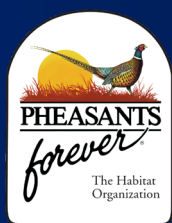
- Restore/Enhance 3,750 acres of high priority habitat
- Keep prairie and wetland habitats intact for breeding ducks, pheasants, and a wide array of non-game grassland wildlife such as Monarchs, Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, and many more.
- Help the USFWS protect private working lands by providing funding, personnel, and expertise for restoration work.

FOCUS AREA: Prairie and Transition sections of the Prairie Pothole region of western MN.

HABITAT OUTCOMES: 2,825 acres of prairie and 925 acres of wetlands enhanced or restored on habitat protected by the USFWS. Many of these lands will be managed long term by grazing or delayed haying.







## PRE 01 2026 Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program

BUDGET:	\$13,200,000 TOTAL REQUEST
Personnel:	\$1,400,000 for DU and PF biologists and engineers over 5 years
Contracts:	\$11,250,000 for enhancement and restoration contracts
In-State Travel:	\$105,000 for DU and PF biologists and engineers over 5 years
Direct Support Services:	\$150,000 for DU and PF support costs (legal, admin, and office)
Capital Equipment:	\$0, DU and PF are utilizing existing capital equipment
Other Equipment/Tools:	\$115,000 for GPS survey equipment and other tools
Supplies/Materials:	\$180,000 for native seed materials and restoration supplies
LEVERAGE:	\$1,200,000 Confirmed Federal Funds, \$300,000 Anticipated Funds



### PRIOR APPROPRIATION SPENDING AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **ML2018 – Phase 1: Fully spent out.** Closed out the grant this spring and sent remaining moneys back to the council (1171 acres protected of our 720 acre goal). *At last years hearing we were 89% spent out.*
- **ML2020 – Phase 2: 94% spent out** (\$3,006,900 of \$3,187,000). The remaining dollars are all under contract to be complete by fall of 2025. We anticipate closing out this grant by spring of 2026. (860 acres protected of a 775 acre goal). 406 acres restored surpassing our 50 acre goal). *At last years hearing we were 83% spent out.*
- **ML2021 – Phase 3: 91% spent out** (\$4,302,700 of \$4,752,000) A few projects are left to complete on this grant, but are all being actively worked on. (1554 acres protected of a 1400 acre goal, 97 acres restored of a 140 acre goal) *At last years hearing we were 64% spent out.*
- **ML2023 – Phase 4: 21% spent out with another 20% under contract** (\$2,075,000 of \$5,077,000). Have lots of projects on the ground currently. The program is spending Phase 4 at a high rate, and nearly all the spending on this phase has occurred since last years hearing (539 acres if 1950 acre goal). *At last years hearing we were 3% spent out.*
- **ML2025 – Phase 5:** Just awarded in July of 2025. We are already working on projects under this phase and moving forward with designs on our first projects.

# Northern Forests Legacy

Protecting 19,140 acres of forestland in St. Louis County

St. Louis County and MN DNR partnership

## Strong Local & Statewide Support

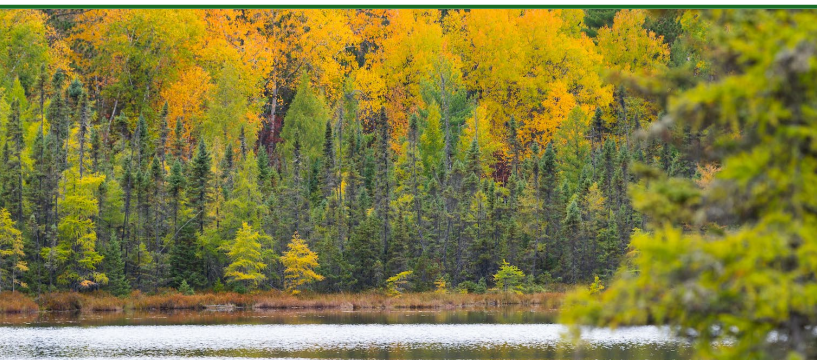
15 letters of support have come from conservation groups, local governments, higher education, and community members.



**BACKCOUNTRY  
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**  
MINNESOTA



**South St. Louis**  
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT



## Habitat & Forest Stewardship

**19,140 acres** will be **protected** and **managed sustainably** to support **healthy forests** and **critical habitat**, connecting to nearby public lands and strengthening larger habitat complexes.

## Hunting & Recreation

Lands will be **open to the public** for **hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing**, supporting outdoor access and local economies.

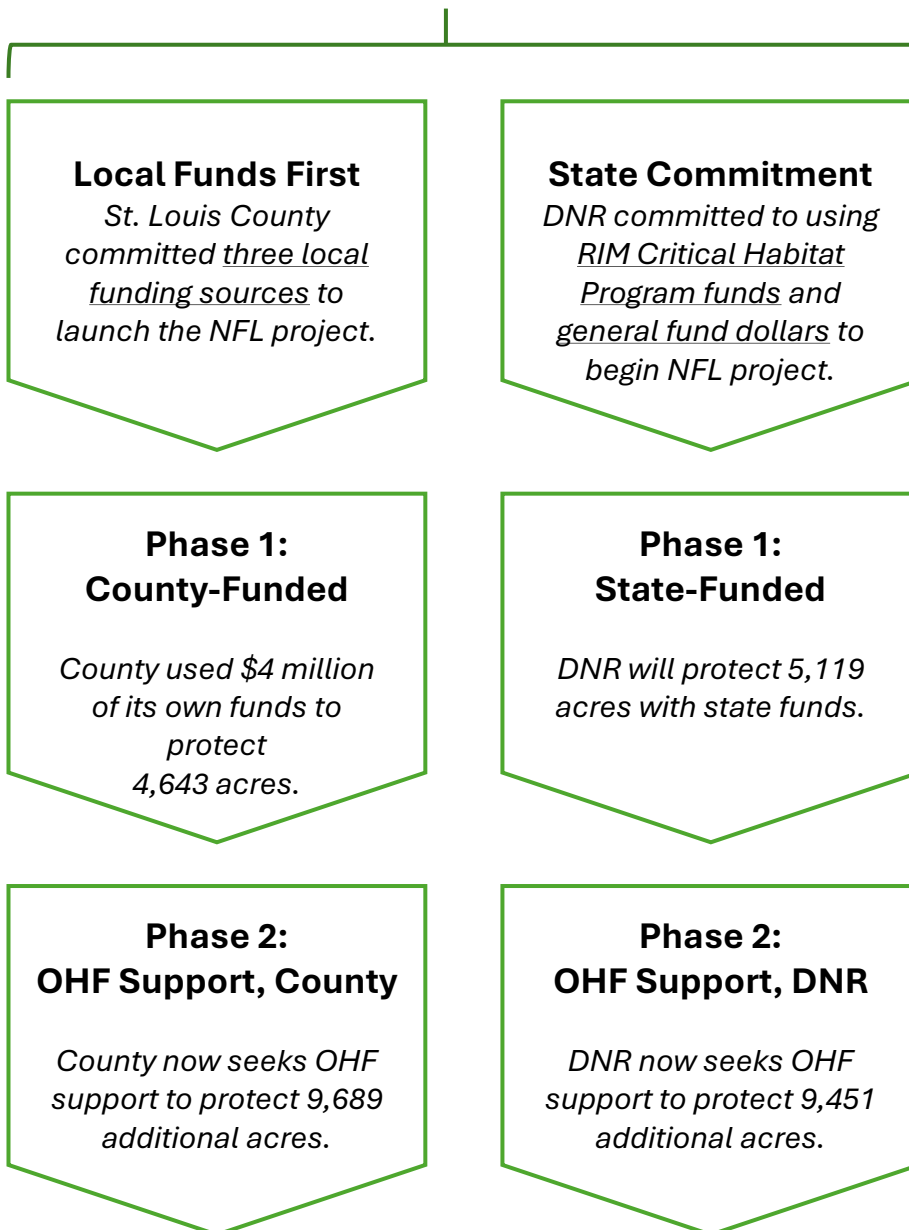




# Leveraging Local, State & Federal Commitment

This proposal **builds on the momentum** and **locally funded success** of Phase 1 and includes more than **\$500,000 in formal matching funds**, as noted in the proposal.

## “Acquisition Match”



## “Dollar Match”



## Scalability Update

When the proposal was submitted, the project was not considered scalable. Since then, the seller has confirmed that a two-year phased approach is possible. However, **full funding is strongly preferred** because it:

- **Capitalizes on strong local support** while it is in place
- Reduces overall project costs
- Streamlines due diligence and administration



## DNR Forest Enhancement and Restoration – Phase 6

- Minnesota forests and the important habitat they provide are under great stress from a changing climate, forest pests, invasive species, lack of management for some species, market pressures and changing markets for timber, and absence of fire in fire dependent communities.
- These stressors have contributed to habitat loss and altered ecosystem function.
- While we continue to utilize commercial timber harvesting to accomplish some habitat goals, many needs cannot be accomplished with timber harvesting alone —supplemental funding sources are needed to fill in where timber harvesting by itself cannot be used to enhance or restore forested habitat, or where timber harvesting is not a suitable option.
- This proposal requests funding to expand habitat projects in the forest of Minnesota to help offset the stresses on the forest and provide critical habitat for deer, moose, grouse and other forest dependent species.
- This proposal reflects valued partnerships, advocacy, and forest management efforts of the DNR Fish and Wildlife and Forestry Divisions. We work with our division partners to accomplish habitat goals.



Collared Moose in the snow

### This grant will:

- Regenerate browse and establish and enhance winter cover for deer and moose.
- Plant berry producing shrubs and release trees to benefit a wide variety of wildlife species.
- Enhance oak regeneration to benefit deer, bear, turkeys and other species that eat acorns.
- Enhance brushland for sharp-tailed grouse and other open/brushland species.
- Diversify tree species in emerald ash borer-threatened wet forests and forests impacted by spruce budworm.
- Treat invasive species.
- Restore fire to fire-influenced forested landscapes.



Tree protection is applied to conifer seedlings to protect future trees.



## Prescribed fire as a tool for habitat enhancement

- Prescribed burning in Minnesota's State Forests is a key tool to enhance forest ecosystems through restoration of a natural disturbance process on which these systems, and the species associated with them depend. While many forest habitat functions can be approximated through the use of mechanical and chemical treatments, prescribed fire introduces biological and physical elements that cannot be replicated exactly through other means.
- Using DNR staff is the most cost-effective and safest way to conduct burns in the forest (prairie burns that are contracted out are often less complex).
- DNR has trained expert fire personnel but lacks funding to implement prescribed burns in forest habitats, particularly paying for staff time that exceeds a normal working day (common when conducting burns).
- DNR possesses the proper equipment to conduct prescribed burns, however this equipment's primary use is wildfire suppression and wildfire suppression funding cannot be used to pay fleet costs associated with prescribed fires. Habitat enhancement grant funding will be used to pay for fleet costs associated with prescribed burns.



Fire hollows out a dead tree, creating a potential den site.



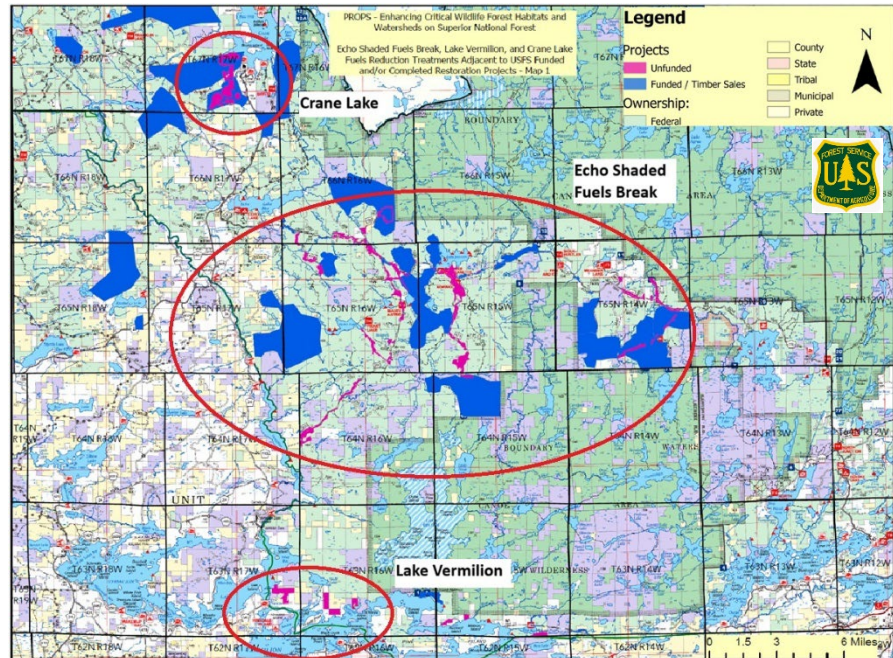
A wildland fire fighter uses a tracked vehicle to contain a prescribed fire in a forest.

Within three years, Patriot Restoration OPS (PROPS) will improve a minimum **2,630 acres of forest, watershed, and wildlife habitat** via forest thinning and removal of overabundant/diseased trees.

Requested treatment costs are “not-to-exceed” that price estimate. We anticipate on-the-ground cost conditions to be lower, allowing more acres to be treated for the same original estimate (maybe up to 20-30% more) as site conditions allow. Any additional treatment savings will be used to treat more acres.

## LSOHC Northern Forest and Project Benefits

- 1) **Enhances forest, watersheds, and wildlife habitat** forest floor sunlight for grass and forb regeneration, which increases water filtration, downstream water recharge, and evapotranspiration water availability.
- 2) **Strengthens wildlife habitat** at **High Biodiversity Significance** sites and adjacent Outstanding Biodiversity Significance Habitats (MN Biological Survey).
- 3) **Increases safety and access** for wildlife and public at **several popular outdoor recreation areas**.
- 4) **Reduces wildfire risks** for public forests, watersheds, wildlife, and adjacent mixed lands/communities.
- 5) **Improves healthier and diverse open habitat** for nesting, forage, migration, and water quality/quantity for **Endangered (E), Threatened (T), iconic, and 40+ US Forest Service (USFS) Regional Sensitive** wildlife and vegetation species: Northern long-eared bat (E), gray wolf (E), Canada lynx (T), **moose, bald eagle**, northern goshawk, game, songbirds, neotropical migratory birds, pollinators, etc.
- 6) **Reduces urgent spruce budworm spread impacts** - tree mortality/defoliation (712,000 acres in 2024, MN DNR)
- 7) **Decreases USFS public costs for long-term maintenance** and future reintroduction of prescribed fire

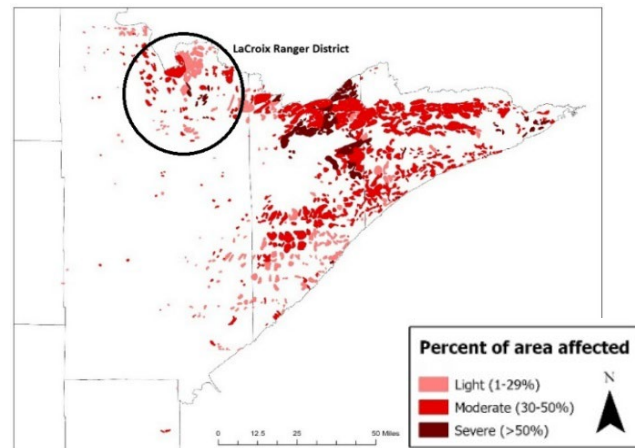


Aerial view of Oregon forest after 2021 Bootleg Wildfire showing thinning only treatment (left), thinning and prescribed fire (middle), and no treatment (right). This project will perform forest fuels reduction/thinning with the longer-term goal of USFS reintroducing prescribed fire to the forest post-treatment. (Picture – Steve Rondeau, Klamath Tribe)





*Spruce budworm  
(MN DNR)*



*Left - Aerial view of spruce budworm spread (brown trees) on Superior National Forest (USFS)*

*Right – Tree mortality/defoliation from spruce budworm spread on Superior National Forest and LaCroix Ranger District (MN DNR)*

### **Project treatment details for all sites**

This **scalable** project will **increase wildlife and outdoor access** to popular sites: **Lake Vermilion, Crane Lake, and Echo Shaded Fuels Break (Echo Trail, Jeanette Campground, and Lake Jeanette)**. The Echo Shaded Fuels Break treatments will also increase **moose and game habitat** access.

It is far easier and cheaper to increase immediate and long-term forest and wildlife habitat health and resilience now instead of after a catastrophic wildfire has significantly impacted wildlife forage, habitat, air quality, and sedimentation/flood risks.

- 1) Unit layout (up to 2,000 acres)** **July 2026 - 2027**  
 Important resources (cultural, tribal etc) and project boundaries will be marked/flagged to reduce resource impacts, track acre progress, and verified by PROPS and USFS inspections.
- 2) Forest & wildlife habitat treatments via forest thinning (2,630 or more acres)** **July 2026 - 2029**  
 Forest fuels reduction/thinning will occur using mechanical and/or hand treatments to reduce overly abundant tree density and damaged/diseased trees to reduce spruce budworm spread on the forest. USFS and NEPA will guide specific allowable treatments such as cut/pile, mastication, etc. Acres treated progress will be tracked and verified by PROPS and USFS. Once treated, USFS will oversee long-term maintenance and future prescribed fire return.
- 3) Forest treatment evaluation/monitoring (2,630 or more acres)** **July 2026 - 2029**  
 Before, during, and after-treatments will be evaluated and monitored at each site. Acres treated progress will be documented via PROPS and USFS pictures, inspections, etc. USFS will perform long-term evaluation, monitoring, and maintenance at each site with PROPS support as requested.



*Unit layout flagging*



*Forest thinning hand treatment with cut/piles*



*Post-treatment cut/piles*



# SHALLOW LAKES & WETLANDS PROTECTION & RESTORATION **PHASE XV**

WA 03

**Ducks Unlimited proposes to strategically acquire and restore 1,000 acres of prairie and wetlands for inclusion in public state WMAs and federal WPAs, including 200 acres of wetlands and 800 acres of upland prairie.**

- Phase 15 of Ducks Unlimited's ongoing programmatic land acquisition and restoration program.
- Focus: Restorable prairie-wetland complexes on state WMAs and federal WPAs.

## Primary goals:

- ◆ Strategically acquire and restore marginal agricultural lands with drained prairie wetlands adjacent to WMAs & WPAs.
- ◆ Strategically restore and buffer prairie land around DNR-managed shallow lakes and large wetlands.
- ◆ Benefit breeding and migrating waterfowl, pheasants, non-game prairie birds and pollinators.
- ◆ Help implement Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan and other plans by restoring prairie & wetlands in key landscapes.

## Secondary goals:

- ◆ Preserve remnant native prairie patches and permanently protect USDA CRP acres where possible on land tracts for sale.
- ◆ Provide public hunting and other outdoor opportunities on lands acquired for Minnesota DNR state WMAs.

**Location:** Prairie Pothole Region in the southwest prairie portion of Minnesota.

**Habitat Outputs:** 1,000 acres of protected prairie and wetland habitat for breeding ducks and other wildlife.

**Wildlife Outcomes:** Strategically adding new lands and restoring wetlands and prairie adjacent to existing state WMAs and federal WPAs will increase habitat for breeding wildlife to increase production of ducks, pheasants, and many non-game birds.

## **BUDGET:**

## **\$12,995,000 TOTAL REQUEST**

Land Acquisition:	\$ 9,000,000 to purchase 1,000 acres, depending on appraised value of land, for MNDNR & USFWS
Contracts:	\$ 2,200,000 for wetland and native prairie restoration contracts
Professional Services:	\$ 300,000 for land appraisals, title reviews, boundary surveys, closing costs, etc.
Personnel:	\$ 849,00 for DU biologists and engineers over five years to buy and restore land
In-state Travel:	\$ 60,000 for DU biologists and engineers over five years to buy and restore land
Supplies and Materials:	\$ 60,000 for native grass and forb seed materials and other supplies to restore land
Tools and Equipment:	\$ 90,000 for prairie seeding and wetland restoration equipment, including GPS survey lease
Direct Support Services:	\$ 80,000 for DU staff support costs, including legal, administrative, office, etc.
DNR Land Acquisition:	\$ 199,500 for DNR Lands & Minerals Division realty staff and AGO staff fees to transfer land
DNR IDP Costs:	\$ 155,800 for DNR wildlife to implement "Initial Development Plan" signs, posts, parking areas, etc.

## **PRIOR DU OHF ACQUISITION APPROPRIATION SPENDING AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

<b>Appropriation Year:</b>	<b>Appropriation \$:</b>	<b>Funds Spent:</b>	<b>\$ Remaining:</b>	<b>Acres Accomplished:</b>
Phases I - VIII	\$38,116,000	\$36,862,000	\$ 0	46 tracts, 4,790 acres - completed
2020 - Phase IX	\$ 4,608,000	\$4,504,575 (98%)	\$ 103,425	5 tracts, 518 acres - restoration ongoing
2021 - Phase X	\$ 4,581,000	\$4,518,335 (99%)	\$ 62,665	5 tracts, 562 acres - restoration ongoing
2022 - Phase XI	\$ 4,779,000	\$4,724,868 (99%)	\$ 54,132	9 tracts, 549 acres - restoration ongoing
2023 - Phase XII	\$ 7,061,000	\$6,869,695 (97%)	\$ 191,305	2 tracts, 694 acres - restoration ongoing
2024 - Phase XIII	\$ 7,670,000	\$5,991,585 (78%)	\$1,678,415	4 tracts, 715 acres - restoration ongoing
2025 - Phase XIV	\$ 5,673,000	\$1,350,000 (24%)	\$4,323,000	3 tracts, 234 acres - under purchase agreement

**--> By 2027, DU will have spent most current OHF grant budget funds for fee-title land acquisition!**

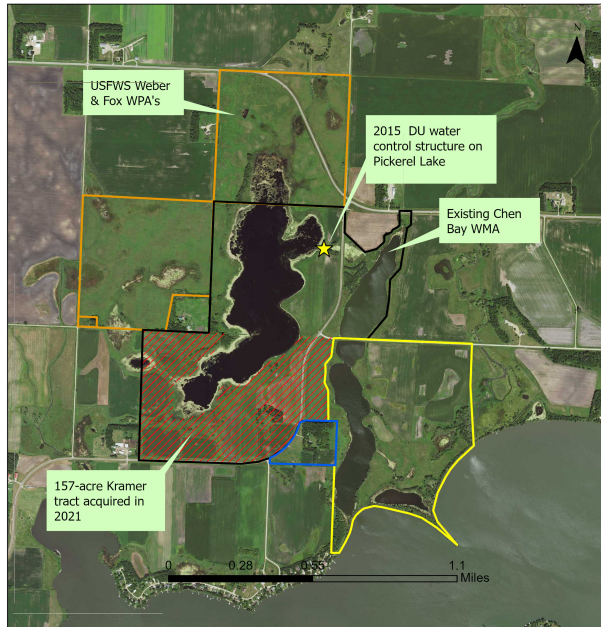




LIVING  
LAKES

## Chen Bay WMA

Lincoln County, MN



- /// 2021 Acquisition - Kramer Tract
- Carlisle Building Site - 19.9 Acres
- James Carlisle Farm - 169.9 Acres
- USFWS WPA
- DNR WMA





WA04

# Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program



This Program is centered within the Prairie Pothole Region of west-central Minnesota. Here, wetlands, shallow lakes, and associated upland habitat are essential for waterfowl populations and many other native species. Our program targets high-quality areas with an emphasis on building large-scale habitat complexes and completes restoration and enhancement through a partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

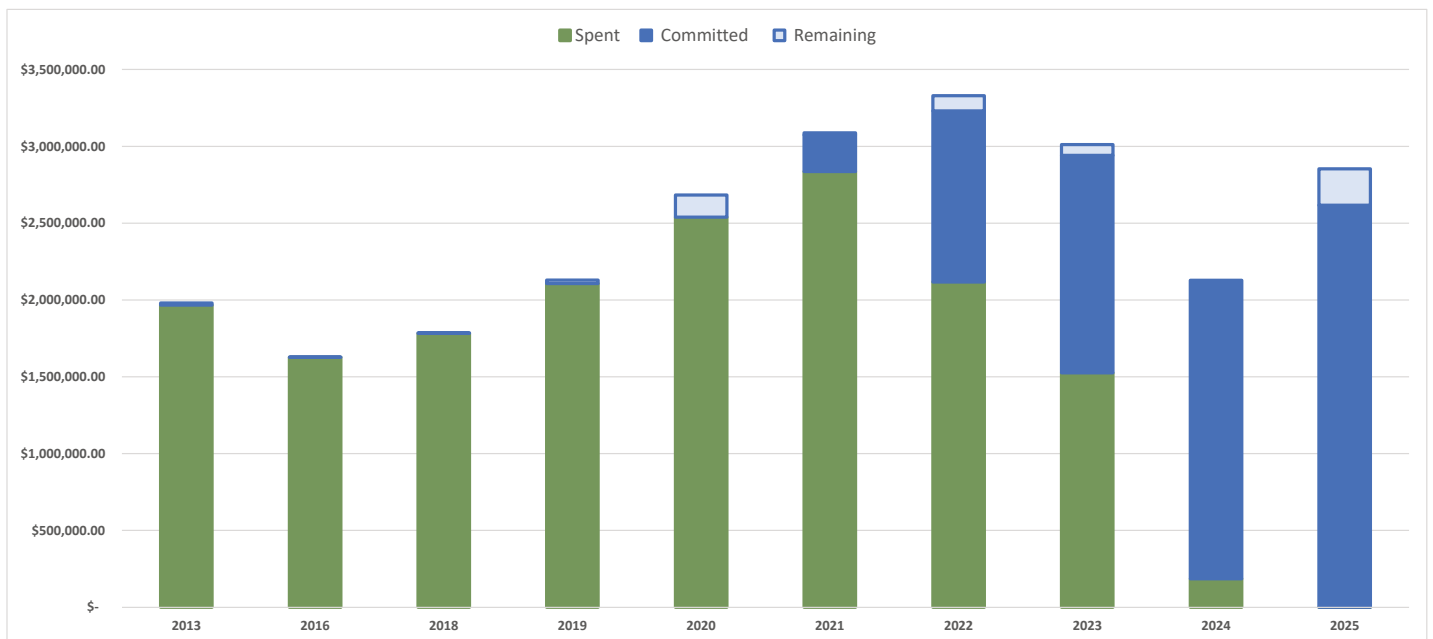


The Wolf Lake (Ristinen) project, closed in January 2025, consists of 148 acres primarily of forest and wetlands on Wolf Lake located between Detroit Lakes and Park Rapids. Lying just south of the Smoky Hills State Forest, this property is part of a site of High Biological Significance. Permanent protection of this property addresses priorities of the Becker County Local Water Management Plan and the Leaf-Wing-Redeye Watershed One Watershed One Plan.





The Demmer property, privately owned by the Fergus Falls Fish and Game Club, protected by a USFWS easement and open to the public. The Land Trust R/E work has been completed on 244 acres under Phase 5 of the Wetlands Program. The Land Trust and U.S. Fish and Wildlife service completed a series of wetland restorations as well prairie and oak savanna enhancement. Of the 244 acres, 84 were wetland acres, encompassing 12 basins.



All remaining restoration and acquisition funds across the five currently in-progress appropriations (2021-2025) are committed to projects. The Land Trust is on track to spend allocated funds within each grant timeline.



# LIVING SHALLOW LAKE ENHANCEMENT & WETLAND RESTORATION PHASE XII

Ducks Unlimited proposes to strategically enhance 1,500 acres of shallow lakes and wetlands, restore 200 acres of wetlands, and restore or enhance 700 acres of uplands on state Wildlife Management Areas, federal Waterfowl Production Areas, permanent conservation easements, and other protected lands.

- Phase 12 of DU's ongoing programmatic shallow lake enhancement and wetland restoration initiative.
- Focus: Provide wetland engineering to improve prairie shallow lakes managed by Minnesota DNR and restore or enhance prairie pothole wetlands on federal Waterfowl Production Areas.

## Primary goals:

- ◆ Enhance degraded shallow lakes and large wetlands for migrating and brood-rearing waterfowl.
- ◆ Restore prairie pothole wetlands on federal WPAs and state WMAs for breeding waterfowl pairs in spring.
- ◆ Restore and enhance wetland and grassland habitat for non-game wetland-dependent birds.
- ◆ Enhance public water shallow lakes as public waterfowl hunting areas and birding areas for people too.

**Focus Location:** Prairie Pothole Region in the south and west regions of Minnesota.

**Habitat Outputs:** 2,400 acres of enhanced or restored habitat for breeding ducks and other wetland-dependent wildlife.

## **BUDGET:**

### **\$14,975,000 TOTAL REQUEST**

Contracts:	\$12,150,000 for shallow lake water control structure construction and wetland restorations
Professional services:	\$ 80,000 for soil investigations, county ditch petitions, county ditch reviews, etc
Personnel:	\$ 2,200,000 for DU biologists and engineers to plan, design, and implement projects
In-state travel:	\$ 80,000 for DU biologists and engineers over five years to deliver projects
Supplies and materials:	\$ 165,000 for native plant seed to restore wetlands and uplands
Other equipment/tools:	\$ 80,000 for engineering equipment to survey, design and manage construction projects
Direct support services:	\$ 220,000 for DU staff support costs, including administrative support, office, etc.

## **PRIOR DU OHF ENHANCEMENT/RESTORATION APPROPRIATION SPENDING AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

<b>Appropriation Year:</b>	<b>Appropriation:</b>	<b>Funds spent:</b>	<b>Funds remaining:</b>	<b>Accomplishments:</b>
2009 (Phase I)	\$2,528,000	\$2,528,000 (100%)	\$ 0	6,882 wetland acres
2010 (Phase II)	\$5,042,000	\$5,042,000 (100%)	\$ 0	7,251 wetland acres
2012 (Phase III)	\$4,490,000	\$4,490,000 (100%)	\$ 0	3,086 wetland acres
2014 (Phase IV)	\$4,910,000	\$4,888,300 (100%)	\$ 0	6,011 wetland acres
2017 (Phase V)	\$4,716,000	\$4,716,000 (100%)	\$ 0	2,856 wetland acres
2018 (Phase VI)	\$3,740,000	\$3,740,000 (100%)	\$ 0	1,129 wetland acres
2021 (Phase VII)	\$3,960,000	\$3,959,579 (99%)	\$ 421	Finalizing, 1,236 wetland acres
2022 (Phase VIII)	\$5,155,000	\$5,090,372 (99%)	\$ 64,628	Finalizing, 3,667 acres
2023 (Phase IX)	\$6,634,000	\$2,541,054 (38%)	\$ 4,092,946	Ongoing, 2,044 acres
2024 (Phase X)	\$7,867,000	\$929,261 (12%)	\$ 6,937,739	Ongoing, 126 acres
2025 (Phase XI)	\$5,601,000	\$0	\$5,601,000	Just started

**By end of 2026, DU will have spent or legally obligated most past OHF grant funds for shallow lake and wetland engineering enhancements and restorations through Phase 10 and most Phase 11 funding.**



WRE 03 **SHALLOW LAKE ENHANCEMENTS AND  
PRAIRIE WETLAND RESTORATIONS**

