



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition - Phase VIII

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

General Information

Date: 04/24/2026

Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition - Phase VIII

Funds Recommended: \$2,683,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(d)

Appropriation Language: \$2,683,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Nature Conservancy in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire land in fee or permanent conservation easements and restore lands within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area in western Minnesota for addition to the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquisitions of lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96 or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan and must be consistent with the priorities in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Chris McGrath

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Location Information

County Location(s): Pipestone, Yellow Medicine, Rock, Brown, Kandiyohi, Clay and Pope.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Protect in Fee

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The acquisition work for this phase has been completed. The goal for this phase was the protection of 770 acres in fee and conservation easements. Over the life of the grant we protected 973 acres (126% of the goal): 913 acres in conservation easements and 60 acres in fee title. The goal for native prairie acres for this phase was 385 acres. We protected a total of 772 acres of native prairie acres (201% of the goal).

Process & Methods

The Council's 25-Year Framework identifies protecting Minnesota's remaining native prairies as a critical priority. The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (Prairie Plan) describes the importance of preserving the cores/corridors/complexes in areas with the greatest opportunities for long-term conservation of these prairies. The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (NTP NWR) Land Acquisition program shares these goals. This program is a cooperative, multi-year effort of The Nature Conservancy and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to preserve and protect our remaining prairies and the surrounding habitat that buffers them. With Outdoor Heritage Fund support, this partnership is working together to advance these goals.

This program also includes a relatively small restoration/enhancement component of the acres acquired. While the prioritization criteria favor parcels that are in good condition, because of the nature of parcel ownership some properties included small areas of converted or degraded lands needing grassland or wetland restoration/enhancement. This work is completed only on parcels acquired with this funding, as needed to get these properties into a sustainable condition for inclusion into the NTP NWR and future management. These acres are not reported as a separate outcome in the Output Tables in order to avoid any possible double-counting.

Restoration/enhancement activity with this round of funding included grassland site preparation/seeding or interseeding/mowing, tree and/or dense vegetation removal and invasive species control on four parcels acquired with acquisition funding from this round.

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

This program's top criterion for selecting projects is the presence of remnant native prairie. As noted above, 772 acres of remnant native prairie were permanently protected. Another important goal is protecting lands in existing complexes of habitat and protected lands were in areas identified as a Prairie Core or Corridor in the MN Prairie Plan. We also target lands with high-quality habitat and the rare species this habitat supports. These permanently protected lands support a wide range of prairie species of concern and the vegetative communities that support them, including wet, mesic, and dry hill prairies, wet seepage prairies, calcareous fens, and migratory stopover habitats for water birds. Species benefited by the protected parcels include Blanding's turtles, the creek heelsplitter mussel, nesting upland sandpipers, small white lady's slipper, and many others.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

This program's overall priorities are guided by the listed conservation plans. Individual properties are reviewed by USFWS and TNC biologists using the parcel selection criteria listed above. The analyses include: existence of native prairie, location in a prairie core or corridor, presence of nearby protected lands, and the presence of other rare habitats and species.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

This program is a cooperative effort of The Nature Conservancy and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. TNC and USFWS staff cooperate on parcel selection, working with landowners, completing due diligence requirements, and wrapping up any needed restoration/enhancement. Other agencies and NGOs are involved in this process through Landscape Technical Teams. These groups were set up to coordinate action in the priority areas identified in the Prairie Plan.

For all conservation easement and fee acquisitions funded by this round, TNC and USFWS sent written notifications to Township and County governments prior to acquisition. No concerns were reported by the Townships or Counties.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

There were no exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects encountered for this program.

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

All parcels purchased under this funding are or will be transferred to the USFWS for inclusion in the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. The USFWS will manage these properties, and will fund the long-term restoration, management, and wildlife/habitat/easement monitoring activities through annual USFWS operations funding.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$214,000	\$214,000	\$222,200	\$125,000	\$125,000	USFWS	\$339,000	\$347,200
Contracts	\$101,500	\$101,500	\$73,100	-	-	-	\$101,500	\$73,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,230,000	\$230,000	\$213,500	\$100,000	-	USFWS	\$1,330,000	\$213,500
Easement Acquisition	\$925,100	\$1,925,100	\$1,930,600	-	-	-	\$925,100	\$1,930,600
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,400	-	-	-	\$5,000	\$5,400
Professional Services	\$124,500	\$124,500	\$83,200	-	-	-	\$124,500	\$83,200
Direct Support Services	\$53,400	\$53,400	\$48,300	\$53,500	-	TNC	\$106,900	\$48,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$3,800	-	-	-	\$4,000	\$3,800
Supplies/Materials	\$25,500	\$25,500	\$1,200	-	-	-	\$25,500	\$1,200
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,683,000	\$2,683,000	\$2,581,300	\$278,500	\$125,000	-	\$2,961,500	\$2,706,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection Staff	0.65	3.0	\$171,900	-	-	\$171,900
Project Manager	0.15	3.0	\$44,600	-	-	\$44,600
Grant Administration	0.08	3.0	\$5,700	-	-	\$5,700
Science/Steward	0.01	3.0	-	-	-	-
USFWS In-Kind Staff Support	0.0	0.0	-	\$125,000	USFWS	\$125,000

Direct Support Services

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

DSS is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federally Negotiated rate as proposed and subsequently approved by the US Dept. of Interior. The portion requested from the grant represents 50% of this rate, with the remaining 50% contributed as leverage.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

We permanently protected 973 acres, 126% of the stated goal of the program, and 772 acres of remnant native prairie, 201% of the native prairie acre goal, while remaining below budget by approximately 3.8%. This 3.8% (\$101,700) will be returned to LSOHC for reallocation.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

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

N/A

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	385	60	0	0	0	0	385	60
Protect in Easement	0	0	385	913	0	0	0	0	385	913
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	770	973	0	0	0	0	770	973

How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Type	Native Prairie (AP)	Native Prairie (Final)
Restore	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	135	38
Protect in Easement	250	734
Enhance	0	0
Total	385	772

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	\$149,000	\$90,300	-	-	-	-	\$149,000	\$90,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$1,446,000	\$247,800	-	-	-	-	\$1,446,000	\$247,800
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$1,088,000	\$2,243,200	-	-	-	-	\$1,088,000	\$2,243,200
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$2,683,000	\$2,581,300	-	-	-	-	\$2,683,000	\$2,581,300

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	20	16	0	0	365	44	0	0	385	60
Protect in Easement	0	0	20	26	0	0	365	887	0	0	385	913
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	40	42	0	0	730	931	0	0	770	973

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	\$7,500	\$4,500	-	-	\$141,500	\$85,800	-	-	\$149,000	\$90,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$72,500	\$12,400	-	-	\$1,373,500	\$235,400	-	-	\$1,446,000	\$247,800
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$54,500	\$112,200	-	-	\$1,033,500	\$2,131,000	-	-	\$1,088,000	\$2,243,200
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$134,500	\$129,100	-	-	\$2,548,500	\$2,452,200	-	-	\$2,683,000	\$2,581,300

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

We surpassed our overall goals for total acres protected (126% of goal) and for native prairie protected (201% of goal).

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ USFWS and TNC biologists and GIS analysts measured the following outcomes from this funding:
There were 42 forested acres out of 973 acres protected acres overall.

Acres of native prairie - 772 acres

Other native habitat protected - 59 acres of wetlands

Programs in prairie region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ USFWS and TNC biologists and GIS analysts measured the following outcomes from this funding:

Total acres protected - 973 acres

Acres of native prairie - 772 acres

Other native habitat protected - 59 acres of wetlands

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Kandiyohi #6	Kandiyohi	12236205	60	\$211,600	No

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Brown #1	Brown	10835229	110	\$107,000	No
Pipestone #10	Pipestone	10747214	103	\$234,200	No
Pipestone #7	Pipestone	10845206	19	\$60,800	No
Pipestone #8	Pipestone	10747212	96	\$235,000	No
Pope #15	Pope	12337213	109	\$120,000	No
Rock #13	Rock	10345205	97	\$325,900	No
Rock #14	Rock	10446219	114	\$308,475	No
Yellow Medicine #3	Yellow Medicine	11446203	110	\$135,900	No

Easement Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Clay #9	Clay	13946221	155	\$327,100	No	1	\$0

Parcel Map

