



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration - Phase V

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/18/2026

Project Title: Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration - Phase V

Funds Recommended: \$2,375,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(c)

Appropriation Language: \$2,375,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources to acquire lands in fee for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes 86A.05, subdivision 8; to acquire land in fee for scientific and natural areas under Minnesota Statutes, sections 86A.05, subdivision 5; to acquire land in fee for state forest purposes under 86A.05, subdivision 7; to acquire permanent conservation easements; and to restore and enhance prairie, grasslands, forest, and savanna for agreements , as follows: \$1,000,000 to The Nature Conservancy; \$675,000 to The Trust for Public Land; \$700,000 to Minnesota Land Trust, of which up to \$80,000 is to Minnesota Land Trust for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund, as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Annual income statements and balance sheets for income and expenses from land acquired in fee with this appropriation and not transferred to the State of Minnesota or local government unit must be submitted to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Richard Biske

Title: Freshwater Program Director

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Partners Contact

MLT: No Contact Added

TNC: No Contact Added

TPL: No Contact Added

Location Information

County Location(s): Fillmore, Winona and Houston.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Southeast Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Protect in Fee

Restore

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The program protected 416 acres through fee-title acquisition and 441 acres in conservation easements for a total of 857 acres of protection. Program partners also completed 161 acres of habitat enhancement, including 31 acres that occurred on property protected through this award.

Process & Methods

The program's four core activities were to acquire lands in fee, protect lands through conservation easement, restore, and enhance habitat.

To protect habitat, program partners worked collaboratively with DNR and Soil and Water Conservation District partners to identify priority parcels and contact landowners to discover and cultivate potential projects. Program partners also conducted direct outreach to landowners; for fee acquisition projects local real estate listings were monitored.

Habitat restoration and enhancement sites were identified and prioritized in partnership with private landowners (for conservation easements) and DNR land managers (for fee acquisitions), with whom we worked collaboratively to develop project specifications. Enhancement projects in this phase primarily focused on brush management of bluff prairies where invasive shrubs like buckthorn and honeysuckle threaten the success of recent restorations. Prescribed goat grazing was the main tactic used on these sites, where the steep slopes make mechanical treatment impossible and hand treatment difficult and costly. This work was carried out by local contractors who managed goat herds through a rotation of paddocks at each site throughout multiple growing seasons.

The Rush Creek fee acquisition parcel completed by TNC included several structures which required demolition to be transferred to MN DNR. TNC contracted with an environmental services company to inventory all potential hazardous materials in the buildings, and then hired a construction firm to demolish the buildings and properly

dispose of all potentially hazardous waste. We were able to utilize dirt excavated from a small wetland scrape we completed on the parcel to fill the old foundation and basement areas.

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?

All work in this project was focused around priority conservation areas within the Blufflands Ecological Subsection, which contains more Species in Greatest Conservation Need than any other subsection in Minnesota. Conservation opportunity areas were identified by TNC, MLT, TPL, MN DNR and others based on the MN Biological Survey (MBS), existing public land assets, and the potential to expand and connect habitat complexes. Projects protected and improved habitat conditions for rare plants and animals along with popular game species in the region, including whitetail deer, wild turkey and ruffed grouse. Most projects are situated along or near trout streams; protection and restoration were focused on maintaining and improving trout waters and fishing opportunities. Projects funded through this appropriation have impacted known 66 occurrences of 25 different plants, animals, or communities considered rare, threatened, endangered, or of special concern. These include plants such as goat's rue, snow trillium, and the State Endangered Carey's sedge; and animals such as timber rattlesnake, North American racer, rusty-patched bumble bee, and Leonard's skipper.

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.

Enhancement and protection projects took place in conservation opportunity areas identified based on concentrations of native plant communities mapped by the MBS, rare features, existing conservation lands and the potential to expand habitat complexes and link them. As a result, roughly 55% of the habitat impacted by this award is of Moderate, High, or Outstanding significance to biodiversity according to the MBS.

Each protection project completed using funding from this award either created or expanded large connected complexes of habitat. TNC's Rush Creek parcel is the second of a three-part acquisition of a new 980-acre WMA in Fillmore County which represents a significant new protected complex of diverse habitat. MLT's North Branch Whitewater River parcel is adjacent to a unit of the 28,000-acre Whitewater WMA, and its South Fork Root River conservation easement is adjacent to Choice WMA. TPL's two acquisitions, Choice WMA North 1 and 2, are also additions to Choice WMA, which help bring the total of nearly-contiguous protected habitat to 1,850 acres.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

The strength of our collaboration with local partners was key to our success. All three partners funded through this award collaborated on landowner outreach. Priority areas were identified in partnership with multiple local stakeholders, especially members of the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's Southeast Landscape Committee. We worked closely with MN DNR throughout this program from planning to implementation and follow-up. Our coordination with County Soil and Water Conservation Districts has led to improved landowner outreach and connections to local landowners.

TNC and TPL notified each County Board prior to acquiring parcels. TNC also hosted a meeting with County Commissioners from Fillmore County on the Schueler WMA. While some local officials have had reservations around the acquisition of cropland, we communicated proactively with board members around potential projects in their districts to address concerns early in the process.

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

Schueler WMA, which was acquired using multiple OHF grant phases through our Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration program, is a major win for habitat protection in Southeast MN. The 890-acre WMA protects 588

acres of habitat with Outstanding Significance to biodiversity as mapped by the MN Biological Survey, nearly 5 miles of stream frontage on designated trout streams.

MLT was able to significantly exceed conservation easement goals for this appropriation by 22% for acreage and 96% for leverage (via donated easement value).

The additions to Choice WMA completed by TPL and the connecting conservation easement completed by MLT helped form one of the largest blocks of contiguous protected habitat in the Root River watershed. The cumulative protection work of this program in the South Fork Root River sub-watershed has protected significant habitat complexes within a corridor of contiguous forestland stretching across several townships in Fillmore and Houston Counties.

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

Protection parcels are adjacent to or within close proximity to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement. This allows for the potential expansion of maintenance and restoration activities that are currently taking place on those protected lands and adjacent private lands. Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire and in some instances with goat grazing to prepare for prescribed fire.

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained by MLT through a state-of-the art easement stewardship standards and practices. MLT is a nationally-accredited and insured land trust with a successful easement stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring and defending the easements as necessary. In addition, MLT encourages landowners to undertake active ecological management of their properties, provides them with habitat management plans and works with them to secure resources (expertise and funding) to undertake these activities over time.

Protection and restoration projects will improve future prescribed fire and maintenance activities through economies of scale. The tracts protected and enhanced with this appropriation meet the prioritization for the State Wildlife Action Plan. MN DNR has been successful securing federal habitat enhancement funding for Southeast Minnesota allowing DNR and partners to use federal funds to complete habitat enhancement for Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Each project is within a Conservation Opportunity Area, receiving higher level of coordination and resource priority by many partners for maintaining and enhancing protected habitats.

Budget

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$210,000	\$231,200	\$233,800	\$24,000	\$24,000	-, Private	\$234,000	\$257,800
Contracts	\$234,000	\$253,400	\$175,500	-	-	-	\$234,000	\$175,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,123,500	\$1,123,500	\$1,181,400	-	\$277,500	-, RIM Critical Habitat Match, Private	\$1,123,500	\$1,458,900
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$418,100	\$438,100	\$437,700	\$150,000	\$291,500	Private	\$568,100	\$729,200
Easement Stewardship	\$80,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	-	-	-	\$80,000	\$20,000
Travel	\$11,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	-	-	-	\$11,000	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$164,500	\$158,900	\$164,300	-	-	-	\$164,500	\$164,300
Direct Support Services	\$73,900	\$77,900	\$70,300	\$73,900	\$48,200	Private, Private, Private	\$147,800	\$118,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$18,700	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$18,700
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$300	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$300
DNR IDP	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$22,500	-	-	-	\$30,000	\$22,500
Grand Total	\$2,375,000	\$2,375,000	\$2,336,500	\$247,900	\$641,200	-	\$2,622,900	\$2,977,700

Partner: MLT

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$75,000	\$86,200	\$82,100	-	-	-	\$75,000	\$82,100
Contracts	\$34,000	\$63,400	\$42,100	-	-	-	\$34,000	\$42,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$418,100	\$438,100	\$437,700	\$150,000	\$291,500	Private	\$568,100	\$729,200
Easement Stewardship	\$80,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	-	-	-	\$80,000	\$20,000
Travel	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$5,700	-	-	-	\$5,000	\$5,700
Professional Services	\$69,500	\$63,900	\$63,800	-	-	-	\$69,500	\$63,800
Direct Support Services	\$18,400	\$22,400	\$22,100	\$18,400	-	Private	\$36,800	\$22,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$673,500	\$168,400	\$291,500	-	\$868,400	\$965,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT - Conservation and Legal Staff	0.28	3.0	\$82,100	-	-	\$82,100

Partner: TNC

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$85,000	\$95,000	\$101,700	-	-	-	\$85,000	\$101,700
Contracts	\$200,000	\$190,000	\$133,400	-	-	-	\$200,000	\$133,400
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$585,100	\$585,100	\$643,000	-	-	-	\$585,100	\$643,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,300	-	-	-	\$5,000	\$5,300
Professional Services	\$55,000	\$55,000	\$60,500	-	-	-	\$55,000	\$60,500
Direct Support Services	\$39,900	\$39,900	\$35,800	\$39,900	\$35,800	Private	\$79,800	\$71,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$300	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$300
DNR IDP	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$2,700	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$2,700
Grand Total	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$992,700	\$39,900	\$35,800	-	\$1,039,900	\$1,028,500

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TNC Grant Administration	0.05	3.0	\$5,500	-	-	\$5,500
TNC Project Manager	0.2	3.0	\$50,200	-	-	\$50,200
TNC Protection Staff	0.08	3.0	\$46,000	-	-	\$46,000

Partner: TPL

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$24,000	\$24,000	Private	\$74,000	\$74,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$538,400	\$538,400	\$538,400	-	\$277,500	RIM Critical Habitat Match, Private	\$538,400	\$815,900
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	-	-	-	\$1,000	\$1,000
Professional Services	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	-	-	-	\$40,000	\$40,000
Direct Support Services	\$15,600	\$15,600	\$12,400	\$15,600	\$12,400	Private	\$31,200	\$24,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$8,700	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$8,700
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$19,800	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$19,800
Grand Total	\$675,000	\$675,000	\$670,300	\$39,600	\$313,900	-	\$714,600	\$984,200

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TPL - Protection and Legal Staff	0.15	3.0	\$50,000	\$24,000	Private	\$74,000

Direct Support Services

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

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

MLT: In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We applied this DNR approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of the direct support services.

TPL: Trust for Public Land's DSS request is based upon our federally approved indirect rate, which has been approved by the DNR. 50% of these costs are requested from the grant, 50% is contributed as leverage.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The Choice WMA North 1 acquisition leveraged a total of \$277,500. In addition to the \$250,000 in RIM Critical Habitat funding, TPL also leveraged a land value donation of \$27,500 for this project.

Additionally, of the \$50,000 that was budgeted and released to the MN DNR for Land Acquisition and IDP costs, 41,200 was spent on necessary activities. The remainder will be returned to the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

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

E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

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

Other : RIM Critical Habitat Match

How were the funds used to advance the program?

Trust for Public Land leveraged \$250,000 in RIM Critical Habitat Match funding to contribute to the acquisition cost of the Choice WMA North 1 parcel.

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 (Amend)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	214	162	66	254	0	0	280	280	416
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	60	74	300	367	0	0	360	360	441
Enhance	0	0	70	133	0	0	0	0	70	70	133
Total	0	0	344	369	366	621	0	0	710	710	990

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	18
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	9
Enhance	20	24
Total	20	51

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	-	-	\$30,000	-	\$30,000	-	-	\$300	\$60,000	\$300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	\$912,500	\$572,800	\$512,500	\$880,000	-	-	\$1,425,000	\$1,452,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$175,000	\$91,700	\$525,000	\$569,300	-	-	\$700,000	\$661,000
Enhance	-	-	\$190,000	\$222,400	-	-	-	-	\$190,000	\$222,400
Total	-	-	\$1,307,500	\$886,900	\$1,067,500	\$1,449,300	-	\$300	\$2,375,000	\$2,336,500

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 (Amend)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	280	416	0	0	0	0	280	280	416
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	360	441	0	0	0	0	360	360	441
Enhance	0	0	0	0	70	133	0	0	0	0	70	70	133
Total	0	0	0	0	710	990	0	0	0	0	710	710	990

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	-	-	-	-	\$60,000	\$300	-	-	-	-	\$60,000	\$300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$1,425,000	\$1,452,800	-	-	-	-	\$1,425,000	\$1,452,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	\$700,000	\$661,000	-	-	-	-	\$700,000	\$661,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	\$190,000	\$222,400	-	-	-	-	\$190,000	\$222,400
Total	-	-	-	-	\$2,375,000	\$2,336,500	-	-	-	-	\$2,375,000	\$2,336,500

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

2.79

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

MLT's success in this appropriation of the grant is largely due to the large size of the South Fork Root River (Dahl Creek Farms) and the full donation of the North Branch Whitewater River (Larsen-Nelson) conservation easement projects. The partnership exceeded its acre goals for each activity we undertook through this grant. The total acres impacted by our work under this award was 990 acres, exceeding our stated goal by 280 acres, or nearly 40%.

Outcomes

Programs in southeast forest region:

Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat typical of the unglaciated region are restored and protected ~ *The land protected through this award grew existing complexes of protected public/private land representative of the Driftless Area, expanding Choice WMA, creating Schueler WMA, and protecting private lands bordering Choice and Whitewater WMA. Growing the protected area in these critical habitat complexes better maintains functioning and connected habitat for a diverse set of species. Enhancement activities focused on improving fire dependent bluff prairie and oak savanna that can be managed through large complex prescribed fire to maintain the natural heterogeneity of the region.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Anderson Tract	Houston	10104219	48	\$29,730	Yes	Goat grazing to control encroaching brush on native prairie.
Hammel Unit	Houston	10104229	25	\$22,200	Yes	Goat grazing to control encroaching brush on native prairie.
Vinegar Ridge Bluffs	Houston	10407215	60	\$24,095	Yes	Removal of invasive brush from bluff prairie and savanna habitat

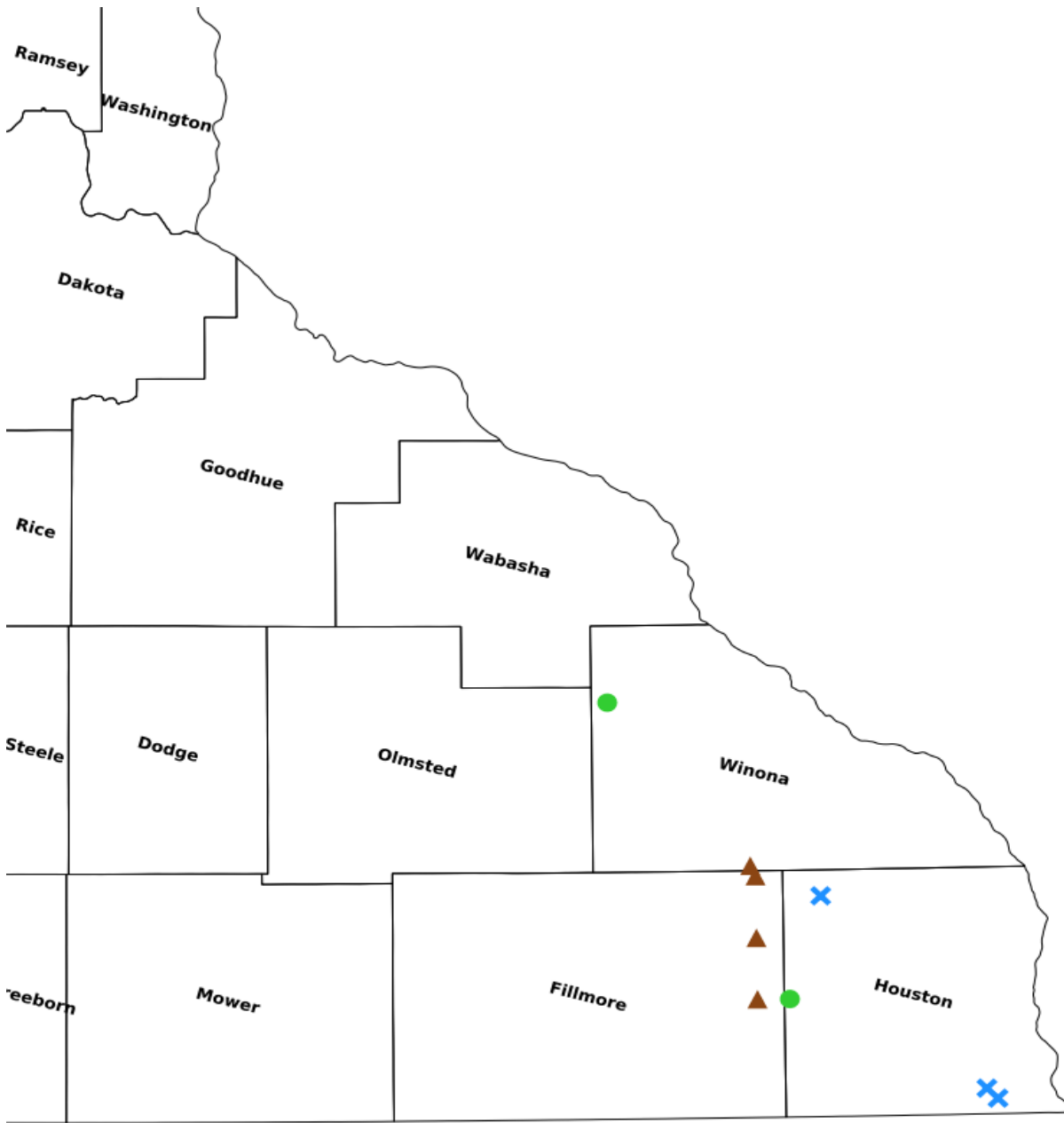
Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Choice WMA North 1	Fillmore	10308203	150	\$1,321,000	No
Choice WMA North 2	Fillmore	10208203	52	\$548,000	No
Rush Creek 2	Fillmore	10408203	188	\$578,400	Yes
Rush Creek	Winona	10508233	25	\$1,363,400	Yes

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
MLT - South Fork Root River (Dahl Creek Farms)	Houston	10207206	363	\$437,600	No
MLT - North Branch Whitewater River (Larsen-Nelson)	Winona	10710208	74	\$0	No

Parcel Map



0 5 10 15 mi

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