



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IX

Laws of Minnesota 2018 Final Report

General Information

Date: 10/27/2025

Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IX

Funds Recommended: \$1,893,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 2(d)

Appropriation Language: \$1,893,000 the second 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 lands in fee or permanent conservation easements and to restore lands in 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, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquiring 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 the acquisitions must be consistent with the priorities in Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Pope, Pipestone, Murray and Jackson.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The acquisition work for this phase has been completed. Our goal for this phase was protection of 540 acres, including 325 acres of permanent conservation easement acquisitions, 215 acres of fee title acquisitions, and 270 acres of native prairie. We protected a total of 588 acres (109% of the goal), 371 acres of conservation easements (114% of the goal), 217 acres of fee acquisitions (100% of the goal), and 536 acres of permanently protected native prairie (198% of the goal). We also restored/enhanced 208 acres of native prairie with native grassland reseeding and woody vegetation removal.

Process & Methods

The Council's 25-Year Framework identifies protecting Minnesota's remaining native prairies as a critical priority. The Minnesota Prairie Conservation 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 (TNC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to preserve and protect our remaining prairies and the surrounding habitat that buffers them. With Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) 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 inter-seeding/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, 588 acres of remnant native prairie were permanently protected. Another important goal is protecting lands in existing complexes of habitat and protected lands were in priority areas identified as a prairie Core, Corridor or Strategic Habitat Complex in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation 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 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. 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, resiliency to climate change, and the presence of other rare habitats and species.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

This program is a cooperative effort of TNC and the USFWS. 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 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

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

There were no exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects encountered in this phase of the program.

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

N/A

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 NTP NWR. 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	\$202,000	\$202,000	\$215,100	\$90,000	\$90,000	USFWS	\$292,000	\$305,100
Contracts	\$68,000	\$122,700	\$91,100	-	-	-	\$68,000	\$91,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$653,400	\$653,400	\$664,800	\$125,000	-	USFWS NAWCA	\$778,400	\$664,800
Easement Acquisition	\$808,800	\$808,800	\$817,500	-	-	-	\$808,800	\$817,500
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$6,000	\$4,400	\$4,300	-	-	-	\$6,000	\$4,300
Professional Services	\$83,100	\$46,500	\$46,500	-	-	-	\$83,100	\$46,500
Direct Support Services	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$43,500	\$45,000	-	TNC	\$90,000	\$43,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$5,000	-
Supplies/Materials	\$21,700	\$10,200	\$10,100	-	-	-	\$21,700	\$10,100
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,893,000	\$1,893,000	\$1,892,900	\$260,000	\$90,000	-	\$2,153,000	\$1,982,900

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection Staff	0.53	3.0	\$174,000	-	-	\$174,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.0	\$36,200	-	-	\$36,200
Grant Administration	0.07	3.0	\$4,500	-	-	\$4,500
Science/Stewardship Staff	0.01	3.0	\$400	-	-	\$400
USFWS In-Kind Staff Support	0.0	0.0	-	\$90,000	USFWS	\$90,000

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 TNC's Federally Negotiated rate as proposed and subsequently approved by the US Dept. of Interior on an annual basis. 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 588 acres of native prairie and associated habitat, which is 109% of the stated goal of the program, and 536 acres of remnant native prairie, which is 198% of the native prairie acre goal.

Total Revenue: -

Revenue Spent: -

Revenue Balance: -

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

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

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	215	217	0	0	0	0	215	217
Protect in Easement	0	0	325	371	0	0	0	0	325	371
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	540	588	0	0	0	0	540	588

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	65	195
Protect in Easement	205	341
Enhance	0	0
Total	270	536

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$845,900	\$845,900	-	-	-	-	\$845,900	\$845,900
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$1,047,100	\$1,047,000	-	-	-	-	\$1,047,100	\$1,047,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$1,893,000	\$1,892,900	-	-	-	-	\$1,893,000	\$1,892,900

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	10	11	0	0	205	206	0	0	215	217
Protect in Easement	0	0	15	19	0	0	310	352	0	0	325	371
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	25	30	0	0	515	558	0	0	540	588

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$42,300	\$42,300	-	-	\$803,600	\$803,600	-	-	\$845,900	\$845,900
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$52,400	\$52,300	-	-	\$994,700	\$994,700	-	-	\$1,047,100	\$1,047,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$94,700	\$94,600	-	-	\$1,798,300	\$1,798,300	-	-	\$1,893,000	\$1,892,900

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

We surpassed our overall goals for total native prairie and associated habitat acres protected (109% of goal) and for native prairie protected (198% 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 ~ *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 - 588 acres
Acres of native prairie - 536 acres
Other native habitat protected - 43 acres of wetlands
Forested acres protected - 9 acres

Programs in prairie region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *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 - 588 acres
Acres of native prairie - 536 acres
Other native habitat protected - 43 acres of wetlands

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Pope #16	Pope	12338201	74	\$148,948	No
Pope #17	Pope	12339229	100	\$319,013	No

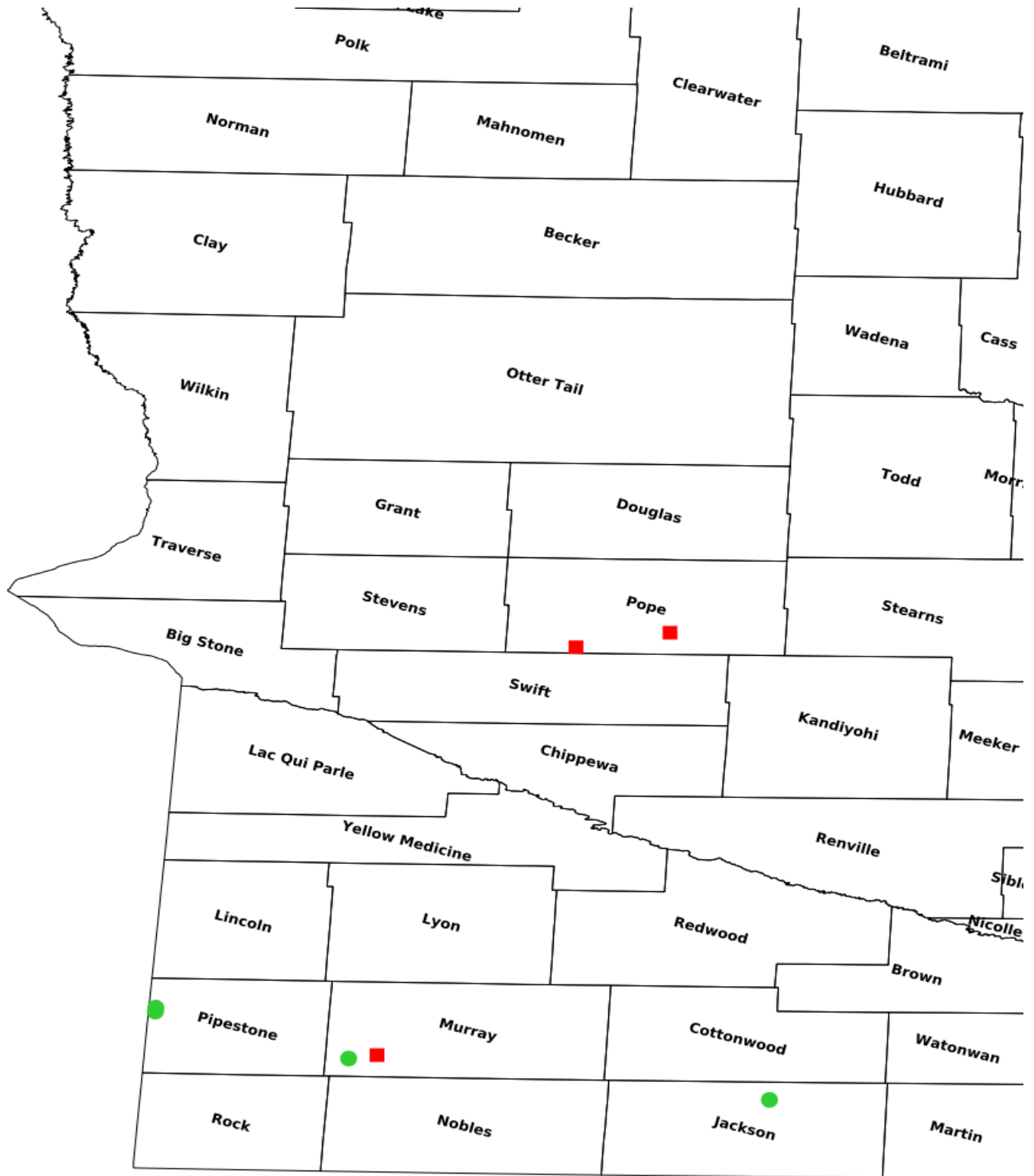
Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Murray #8	Murray	10543201	43	\$214,917	No	2	\$0

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Jackson #1	Jackson	10436225	76	\$65,396	No
Murray #7	Murray	10543209	52	\$130,000	No
Pipestone #8	Pipestone	10747212	19	\$44,675	No
Pipestone #9	Pipestone	10747213	224	\$579,250	No

Parcel Map



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