



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase X Laws of Minnesota 2019 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 11/20/2023

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

Funds Recommended: \$2,383,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2019, 1st Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(d)

Appropriation Language: \$2,383,000 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 lands in fee or permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance 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

Manager's Name: Chris McGrath

Title: Habitat Protection Manager

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Location Information

County Location(s): Cottonwood, Murray, Big Stone, Jackson, Pope, Rock, Pipestone and Yellow Medicine.

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**Abstract**

The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service will work together to permanently protect native prairie and associated complexes of wetlands and native habitats in western and central Minnesota by purchasing approximately 705 acres of fee title properties and/or permanent habitat easements. Approximately 350 acres will be native prairie. Work will be focused in areas identified as having significant biodiversity by the Minnesota Biological Survey and located in priority areas in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Design and Scope of Work

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established in 2000 to address the loss of America's grasslands and the decline of grassland wildlife. The Refuge was created to permanently preserve and restore a portion of our disappearing tallgrass prairie. The Refuge is authorized to work in the prairie landscapes of western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa.

To date, the Refuge has protected 9,660 acres in Minnesota. Funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will allow The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), working in partnership, to significantly accelerate this progress. TNC and USFWS will cooperate on protecting approximately 705 acres of native prairie and associated habitat in the 49 Minnesota counties within the Refuge boundary. We expect to protect approximately 300 acres in fee title and approximately 405 acres with permanent habitat easements.

This program's work is targeted at protecting high-quality native habitat in areas with existing concentrations of native prairie, wetlands, and protected lands. The lands protected will consist of native prairie and associated habitats including wetlands, streams, and lakes.

Potential acquisitions are reviewed using the following criteria:

- 1) Is there untilled native prairie on the tract? If not, is it adjacent to untilled native prairie?
- 2) Is the property in a priority area (core/corridor/complex) identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (Prairie Plan)?
- 3) Is it adjacent to an existing complex of protected land?

4) Was it identified by Minnesota Biological Survey (Biological Survey) as having concentrations of threatened and endangered species and communities?

5) Is it suitable for public recreation?

Because of the nature of parcel ownership, some properties acquired through this program will likely include small areas of converted or degraded habitat needing restoration/enhancement. Restoration/enhancement will be completed where needed. With this program's focus on native habitat, only a limited amount of cropland restoration has been required. To date, less than 2% of the land acquired was cultivated at the time of purchase. The funds budgeted for this work are primarily for enhancement, like tree and brush removal, to prepare these properties for long-term, sustainable management.

Previous OHF support has allowed the partners to make significant progress towards our shared goal of protecting and buffering the remaining native prairie. The first property was acquired in March, 2013. Since then, 5,465 acres have been added to the Refuge with OHF funding. Of these, 3,220 acres are classified as untilled native prairie. Additional habitat includes 514 acres of wetlands and more than 12 miles of stream and/or lakefront. Offers have been extended to landowners for the protection of 760 additional acres. Talks are ongoing with a long list of interested landowners.

With additional support from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, this program will continue to make real and lasting progress towards protecting Minnesota's native prairies and the wildlife that depend on those lands.

How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?

The NTP NWR program takes the approach that specific species are best protected by conserving high-quality habitat in the most critical prairie areas.

This focus on habitat quality has produced results. Of the 5,465 acres protected, 2,702 have been identified as having significant biodiversity by the Biological Survey. These high-quality lands provide habitat for a wide range of species, from game species to those that are endangered, threatened, or in greatest conservation need.

Biological Survey field work has identified populations of 27 rare species located wholly or partially on NTP NWR properties protected with OHF-funding. Benefited species include:

Birds – Henslow's sparrow (endangered), Wilson's phalarope (threatened), greater prairie-chicken, marbled godwit, short-eared owl, and yellow rail

Butterflies – Dakota skipper (endangered), Poweshiek skipperling (endangered), arogos skipper, Pawnee skipper, and regal fritillary

Fish - Topeka shiner (endangered)

Reptiles - Blanding's turtle (threatened)

Plants – sterile sedge (threatened), hair-like beak rush (threatened), blanket flower, buffalo grass, few-flowered spikerush, Hall's sedge, least moonwort, Missouri milk-vetch, mudwort, prairie mimosa, slender milk-vetch, slender plantain, small white lady's slipper, and western white prairie clover

A highlight this year was the protection of two parcels with 5,700' feet of frontage on streams and rivers identified as critical habitat for the Topeka Shiner. OHF-funding for this program has now protected almost 4 miles of habitat for this federally-listed species.

Future acquisition work will be guided by this same focus on high-quality, diverse habitat, benefiting a wide range of species.

Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

This program's goals are guided by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area plan. Individual properties are reviewed/approved by TNC and USFWS biologists using the parcel selection criteria described above, including: native prairie, location in prairie complexes, nearby protected lands, and Biological Survey research.

Biological Survey data is a critical part of this review. Every proposed project is evaluated using Survey information on: 1) Native prairie sites, 2) Rare, threatened and endangered species locations, and 3) Areas of biodiversity significance.

The selection criteria also recognize the importance of building on existing complexes and reducing fragmentation. If a prairie is small or isolated, the animal and plant species that live there are at risk. The best approach is conserving larger areas, like the Prairie Plan's cores/complexes/corridors, that have the scale, species diversity, and connectivity to support functioning prairie systems over the long-term.

The numbers shared above demonstrate this program's success at identifying and protecting biologically significant lands located in areas with existing complexes of habitat and protected lands.

Which two sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are most applicable to this project?

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *This program's work is primarily focused on the Prairie region. A small portion of the Refuge, however, falls in the Forest-Prairie Transition region. If work is done in this region, the following outcomes will be measured and reported: 1) Total acres protected, 2) Acres of native prairie, 3) Acres of wetland, 4) Feet of stream- and lake-front, 5) Acres within Prairie Plan priorities, 6) # of endangered/threatened/species in greatest conservation need (SGCN) on protected properties.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *The program's top priority is protecting native prairie. The majority of lands acquired will be native prairie and associated habitats including wetlands, streams and lakes. The parcel selection criteria also favor building onto existing complexes of prairie/grassland/wetland and protected land. The following outcomes will be measured and reported for acquisition in this region: 1) Total acres protected, 2) Acres of native prairie, 3) Acres of wetland, 4) Feet of stream- and lake-front, 5) Acres within Prairie Plan priorities, 6) # of endangered/threatened/SGCN on protected properties.*

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

This proposal includes \$296,400 in leverage. The USFWS has committed \$90,000 of in-kind staff support from USFWS field staff. A letter has been provided from the USFWS confirming these funds. This phase includes \$56,400 of support from TNC, covering half the cost of Direct Support Service (DSS) with private funds. Finally,

this round includes \$150,000 in leverage from a North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant for fee and easement acquisition in western Minnesota. For the four completed rounds of this program, we have exceeded our original leverage estimates by over 20%. We hope to continue that success in this round.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.

This project does not substitute or supplant any previous funding. The work described in this proposal would not be funded or completed without this appropriation.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
ML 2010	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$308,000
ML 2015	TNC Private Contributions	\$54,400
ML 2016	TNC Private Contributions	\$22,700
ML 2010	TNC Private Contributions	\$37,700
ML 2011	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$144,000
ML 2011	TNC Private Contributions	\$23,200
ML 2012	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$139,400
ML 2012	TNC Private Contributions	\$36,100
ML 2014	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$67,600
ML 2014	TNC Private Contributions	\$64,400
ML 2015	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$112,300

How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

Outdoor Heritage Funds will be used to purchase the land in fee title or to purchase perpetual habitat easements. The land and easements purchased will be transferred to the USFWS to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife/habitat/easement monitoring will be funded through annual USFWS operations funding.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually	USFWS - Annual Service Operating Funds	Monitoring and management by USFWS managers, biologists, field and realty staffs to ensure the long-term health of these habitats. Activities may include burning, mechanical, biological and sometimes chemical treatments.	-	-

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

We will follow the county/township board notification processes as directed by current statutory language.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection?

Yes

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?

Yes

Who will manage the easement?

USFWS staff will manage all easements acquired under this program.

Who will be the easement holder?

The USFWS will be the easement holder on all easements acquired.

What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

It is anticipated that this program will protect approximately 405 acres in 3 - 5 easements.

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program?

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

No food plots will be established on OHF acquired properties. Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted Best Practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, short-term use of soybeans could be used for restorations to control weeds and prepare seedbeds prior to prairie plantings. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control invasives present in the seedbank. Neonicotinoid treated seeds will not be used. We would not expect agricultural crop use to exceed 3 years on any given OHF acquired property.

Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated?

True

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

Lands acquired by fee will be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, United States Code, title 16, section 668dd, et seq.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- Federal

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- National Wildlife Refuge

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

It is anticipated that this program will acquire approximately 300 acres in fee title land in 2-4 closed acquisition projects.

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

No

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

Yes

Restoration/enhancement activities will be completed where needed. While the focus of this program will be on native prairie and associated complexes of wetlands and native habitats, small areas of acquired parcels will likely consist of converted or degraded habitat with restoration/enhancement needs. The majority of restoration/enhancement funds allocated within this appropriation will likely be used for enhancement, including tree/brush and invasives removal.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Purchase agreements/Options for the first 150 acres of fee and 200 acres of easement acquisition	June 30, 2021
Purchase agreements/Options for the remaining 150 acres of fee and 205 acres of easement acquisition	June 30, 2022
Grassland/wetland restoration and enhancement completed	June 30, 2026

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2026

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Unless otherwise provided, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2022. For acquisition of real property, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2023, if a binding agreement with a landowner or purchase agreement is entered into by June 30, 2022, and closed no later than June 30, 2023. Funds for restoration or enhancement are available until June 30, 2024, or five years after acquisition, whichever is later, in order to complete initial restoration or enhancement work. If a project receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds, the time of the appropriation may be extended to equal the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if that federal funding was confirmed and included in the original draft accomplishment plan. Funds appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$223,700	\$90,000	USFWS	\$313,700
Contracts	\$95,000	-	-	\$95,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$900,000	\$150,000	USFWS NAWCA	\$1,050,000
Easement Acquisition	\$972,000	-	-	\$972,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$4,200	-	-	\$4,200
Professional Services	\$94,900	-	-	\$94,900
Direct Support Services	\$56,400	\$56,400	TNC	\$112,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Supplies/Materials	\$26,800	-	-	\$26,800
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,383,000	\$296,400	-	\$2,679,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Grant Administration	0.07	3.0	\$19,400	-	-	\$19,400
Science/Stewardship Staff	0.01	3.0	\$900	-	-	\$900
Protection staff	0.54	3.0	\$148,300	-	-	\$148,300
USFWS in-kind/Volunteer Contributions	0.0	0.0	-	\$90,000	USFWS	\$90,000
Project Manager	0.18	3.0	\$55,100	-	-	\$55,100

Amount of Request: \$2,383,000

Amount of Leverage: \$296,400

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 12.44%

DSS + Personnel: \$280,100

As a % of the total request: 11.75%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

The Budget and Accomplishments were reduced roughly in proportion to the difference between the original request and appropriation recommendation, which was approximately 36% of the request. The proposed

accomplishments were reduced to 35% of the request to account for economies of scale compared to a larger program.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The Personnel line includes USFWS in-kind support. Fee acquisitions w/o PILT and easement acquisitions include leverage from a NAWCA fee and easement acquisition grant. The leverage offered on the DSS line reflects one half of the Conservancy's federally approved indirect rate. These funds are privately raised.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

These funds are entirely for restoration/enhancement work. While this program targets primarily high-quality habitats, small areas may need enhancement/restoration. It is anticipated that the majority of the contract work will consist of tree/brush and invasives removal.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

Yes

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

Rental car expense is also included.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:

No

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 on an annual basis. The portion requested from the grant represents 50% of this rate, with the remaining 50% contributed as leverage.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?

[Yes](#)

- Cash : \$150,000
- In Kind : \$90,000

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	300	0	0	300
Protect in Easement	0	405	0	0	405
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	705	0	0	705

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	100
Protect in Easement	250
Enhance	0
Total	350

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$1,145,700	-	-	\$1,145,700
Protect in Easement	-	\$1,237,300	-	-	\$1,237,300
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$2,383,000	-	-	\$2,383,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	15	0	285	0	300
Protect in Easement	0	20	0	385	0	405
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	35	0	670	0	705

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$57,300	-	\$1,088,400	-	\$1,145,700
Protect in Easement	-	\$61,900	-	\$1,175,400	-	\$1,237,300
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$119,200	-	\$2,263,800	-	\$2,383,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
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Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$3,819	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,055	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$3,820	-	\$3,818	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,095	-	\$3,052	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Cottonwood #1	Cottonwood	10838207	5	\$17,000	No
Pope #20	Pope	12337223	78	\$825,000	No
Pope #17	Pope	12339229	100	\$350,000	No
Pope #16	Pope	12338201	77	\$270,000	No
Rock #15	Rock	10345217	31	\$180,000	No

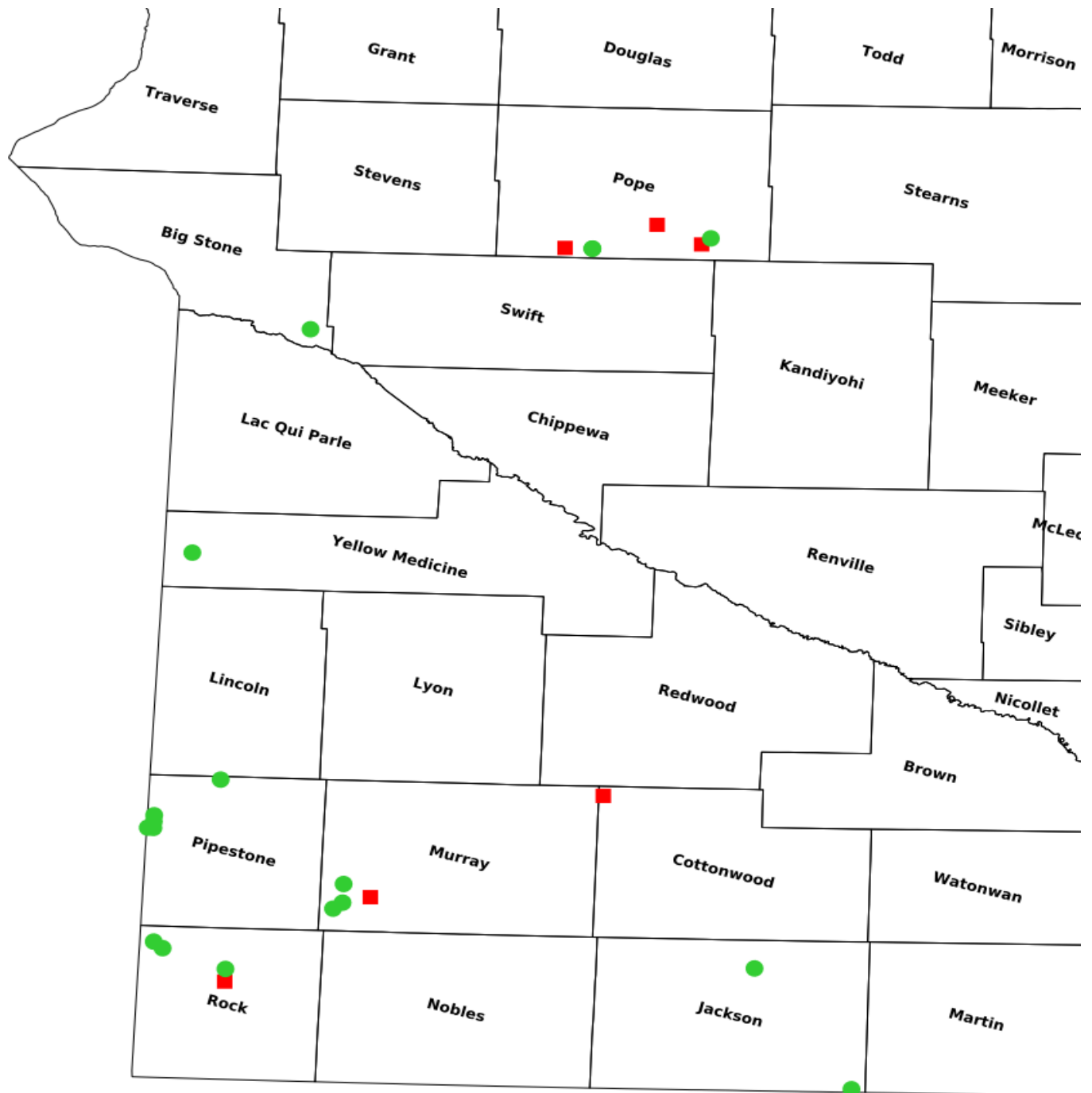
Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Murray #8	Murray	10543201	122	\$631,254	No	2	\$0

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Big Stone #8	Big Stone	12044203	99	\$201,000	No
Jackson #1	Jackson	10436225	76	\$60,000	No
Jackson #2	Jackson	10134235	154	\$225,500	No
Murray #10	Murray	10643228	60	\$128,700	No
Murray #9	Murray	10543217	195	\$270,000	No
Murray #7	Murray	10543209	45	\$245,000	No
Pipestone #11	Pipestone	10747201	114	\$298,000	No
Pipestone #10	Pipestone	10747214	107	\$245,000	No
Pipestone #9	Pipestone	10747213	285	\$610,000	No
Pipestone #8	Pipestone	10747212	102	\$235,000	No
Pipestone #7	Pipestone	10845206	20	\$65,000	No
Pope #19	Pope	12339226	76	\$113,000	No
Pope #15	Pope	12337213	111	\$120,000	No
Pope #18	Pope	12339226	200	\$185,000	No
Rock #13	Rock	10345205	97	\$330,000	No
Rock #16	Rock	10447213	62	\$126,000	No
Rock #14	Rock	10446219	120	\$320,000	No
Yellow Medicine #3	Yellow Medicine	11446203	111	\$135,000	No

Parcel Map



0 8 16 24 mi

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