



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection
Laws of Minnesota 2016 Final Report

General Information

Date: 04/03/2026

Project Title: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection

Funds Recommended: \$2,541,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2016, Ch. 172, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(f)

Appropriation Language: \$2,541,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources to implement the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan through the acquisition of permanent conservation easements to protect and restore native prairie. Of this amount, up to \$120,000 is for establishing monitoring and enforcement funds as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquisition 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 permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Lyon, Swift, Martin, Becker and Polk.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The Native Prairie Bank Program perpetually protected via conservation easement 519 acres of native prairie from willing landowners. This exceeds the original outcome goal of 420 acres by 99 acres. Easement acquisition focused on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes and targeted high-quality prairies that provide valuable wildlife habitat.

Process & Methods

The loss of native prairie and associated grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing western and southern Minnesota. This appropriation aimed to protect 420 acres of native prairie habitat by accelerating the enrollment of Native Prairie Bank easements. Not only were the prairie protection outcomes met but they were exceeded by 99 acres.

Acceleration, such as this, is necessary to address the loss of native prairie and associated grasslands. Today, only about 1.3% of Minnesota’s original 18 million acres of prairie remains. The few remaining acres of native prairie once were thought of as unsuitable for crop production, however with advancements in technology and equipment, in addition to growing competition for tillable acres, this is no longer the case. Unfortunately, grassland-to-cropland conversion is not the only impact to native prairie, significant degradation and loss is also occurring due to property development, aggregate extraction, and lack of prairie-oriented management. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland dependent wildlife populations.

Recognizing that protecting grassland and wetland habitat is one of the most critical conservation challenges facing Minnesota, over a dozen leading conservation organizations have developed a road map for moving forward – the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. This plan calls for several outcomes, one being the protection of all remaining native prairie, largely through conservation easements. One of the primary easement tools for native prairie protection in Minnesota is the DNR administered Native Prairie Bank easement. Native Prairie Bank was established by the 1987 legislature to protect private native prairie lands by authorizing the state to acquire conservation easements from willing landowners. Native Prairie Bank targets the protection of native prairie tracts but can also include adjoining lands as buffers and additional habitat.

Originally, this appropriation aimed to protect 420 acres of native prairie through Native Prairie Bank easements. Eligible tracts were to be located within priority landscapes identified in the Minnesota Prairie Plan and prioritized based on several evaluation factors including:

- 1) Size and quality of habitat, focusing on diverse native prairie communities that have been identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey
- 2) The occurrence of rare species, or suitability habitat for rare species
- 3) Lands that are part of a larger habitat complex

Ultimately, 7 native prairie parcels for a total of 519 acres (99 acres more than initial 420-acre goal) were

perpetually protected through this appropriation via Native Prairie Bank Easements. These now protected native prairies are unique natural resources that consist of thousands of different organisms, plants, animals, bacteria, and soil fungi. Their complex interactions provide the food, water and shelter required by many of Minnesota's rare, threatened, and endangered species. These prairies house a wide variety of pollinator species, some of which often cannot survive in other habitats, including prairie restorations.

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?

Native Prairie Bank prioritizes protection of sites identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey and targets rare and endangered plant and animal species, high quality plant communities, and key habitats for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). SWAP identifies 139 SGCNs alone in the Prairie Parkland Province. SWAP also identifies prairie as a key habitat in 11 different subsections within the State. Prairie, as a habitat type, contains more SGCNs than any other habitat in Minnesota. Native Prairie Bank protects these unique wildlife habitats, works with the landowners of these tracts to manage and enhance them, all in a way that is permanent and enduring.

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.

The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) systematically collects, interprets, and delivers data on plant and animal distribution and the ecology of native plant communities. This data is used directly in the scoring and evaluation of potential Native Prairie Bank parcels along with additional criteria related to habitat complexes and prairie plan priority areas. Scoring criteria used for this appropriation has been uploaded and included with this final report.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

The protection efforts through this appropriation were well supported by landowners and conservation organizations across the prairie landscape. Prairie Plan Local Technical Teams, made up of a variety of local conservation partners, recommended parcels and, at times, coordinated site visits. All of this support was volunteered by the conservation agencies. No appropriation dollars were allocated to partners.

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

In 2016, Native Prairie Bank did a review and lowered payment rates to better reflect real estate market value. This allowed Native Prairie Bank to acquire 99 more acres than initially anticipated. This opportunity also came with a large set of challenges. Some landowners previously interested were no longer interested, in general it appears landowners are taking much more time to decide if they want to move forward with protection, and more landowners decline offers which in-return requires staff to find more potential sites and overall increases personnel costs. Despite these challenges, so far Native Prairie Bank staff have been able to meet or exceed protection outcomes promised on appropriations requested prior to this change. Unfortunately due to this change, Native Prairie Bank has not always been able to completely spend down the funding appropriated.

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

DNR's Conservation Easement Stewardship policy is to protect both the conservation values of the protected property and the state's investment in those interests. Stewardship elements include baseline property report creation, enforcement protocols, regular compliance monitoring, effective record keeping and reporting, and maintaining good working relationships with the easement landowners. Native Prairie Bank implements this policy by following DNR Operational Order 128 "Conservation Easement Stewardship" along with the "Ecological

and Water Resources Division Conservation Easement Stewardship Plan and Guidelines", which call for annual landowner contact as well as on-the-ground monitoring once every three years. If a violation is found, annual site visits (or more frequently) are conducted until the violation is rectified. Through this appropriation, funding was deposited into an account dedicated to the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of Native Prairie Bank easements. Annual reporting on these stewardship dollars is submitted as part of the Annual Real Property Interest Report for each easement acquired.

Native Prairie Bank staff in partnership with the landowner will actively seek funding to execute the best on-going prairie management activities. These management activities, such as prescribed burning, invasive species control, woody control, etc., will be completed when feasible through a variety of funding sources.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
On-going (Every 3 years)	Interest derived from Conservation Easement Stewardship Fund	Ongoing landowner partnership, monitoring, reporting, and easement stewardship as laid out in DNR Operational Order 128 and the Division of Ecological and Water Resources Conservation Easement Stewardship Division Guidelines.	-	-
On-Going	Variety of Funding Sources (Landowner, ENRTF, OHF, Game & Fish, USDA Programs, etc.)	Native Prairie Bank staff in partnership with the landowner will actively seek funding to execute the best on-going prairie management activities. These management activities, such as prescribed burning, invasive species control, woody control, etc., will be completed when feasible.	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$132,500	\$132,500	\$72,500	-	-	-	\$132,500	\$72,500
Contracts	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$2,600	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$2,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000	\$731,900	-	-	-	\$2,100,000	\$731,900
Easement Stewardship	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	-	-	-	\$120,000	\$120,000
Travel	\$19,000	\$19,000	\$4,400	-	-	-	\$19,000	\$4,400
Professional Services	\$131,600	\$131,600	\$91,400	-	-	-	\$131,600	\$91,400
Direct Support Services	\$18,500	\$18,500	\$18,000	-	-	-	\$18,500	\$18,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	\$1,000	-	-	-	-	\$1,000	-
Supplies/Materials	\$8,400	\$8,400	\$5,900	-	-	-	\$8,400	\$5,900
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,541,000	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700	-	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Project Coordinator/Acquisition Specialist	0.02	5.0	\$10,200	-	-	\$10,200
Natural Resource Specialist/Technician	0.15	5.0	\$61,500	-	-	\$61,500
Laborer	0.01	5.0	\$800	-	-	\$800

Direct Support Services

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

Direct Support Services determined using the DNR Direct & Necessary Cost Calculator.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

In 2016, Native Prairie Bank did a review and lowered payment rates to better reflect real estate market value. Though this came with many, many, challenges it did allow Native Prairie Bank to do more (99 additional acres than planned) for significantly less allowing dollars to return to the 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?

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	420	519	0	0	0	0	420	519
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	420	519	0	0	0	0	420	519

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	0	0
Protect in Easement	330	430
Enhance	0	0
Total	330	430

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700	-	-	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700	-	-	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700

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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Fee w/o State PILT Liability												
Protect in Easement	0	0	140	67	0	0	280	452	0	0	420	519
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	140	67	0	0	280	452	0	0	420	519

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$847,000	\$135,100	-	-	\$1,694,000	\$911,600	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$847,000	\$135,100	-	-	\$1,694,000	\$911,600	-	-	\$2,541,000	\$1,046,700

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Protection outcomes were exceeded by 99 acres with less dollars spent than originally anticipated. One-hundred more acres of native prairie were protected than anticipated.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Through this appropriation 67 acres of native prairie were protected within the forest-prairie transition region from potential conversion. This parcel is located within the 151,000-acre Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Glacial Ridge Core Area.*

Programs in prairie region:

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Through this appropriation 363 acres of native prairie, along with 89 acres of associated grasslands, were protected within the prairie region from potential conversion. Each parcel is highly connected to other conservation lands and is located within a Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Priority Area. The average parcel size for this region through this appropriation was 75 acres, however, each of these parcels are new protected additions to much larger complexes. The larger complexes range from 3,000 acres to 147,000 acres.*

Parcels

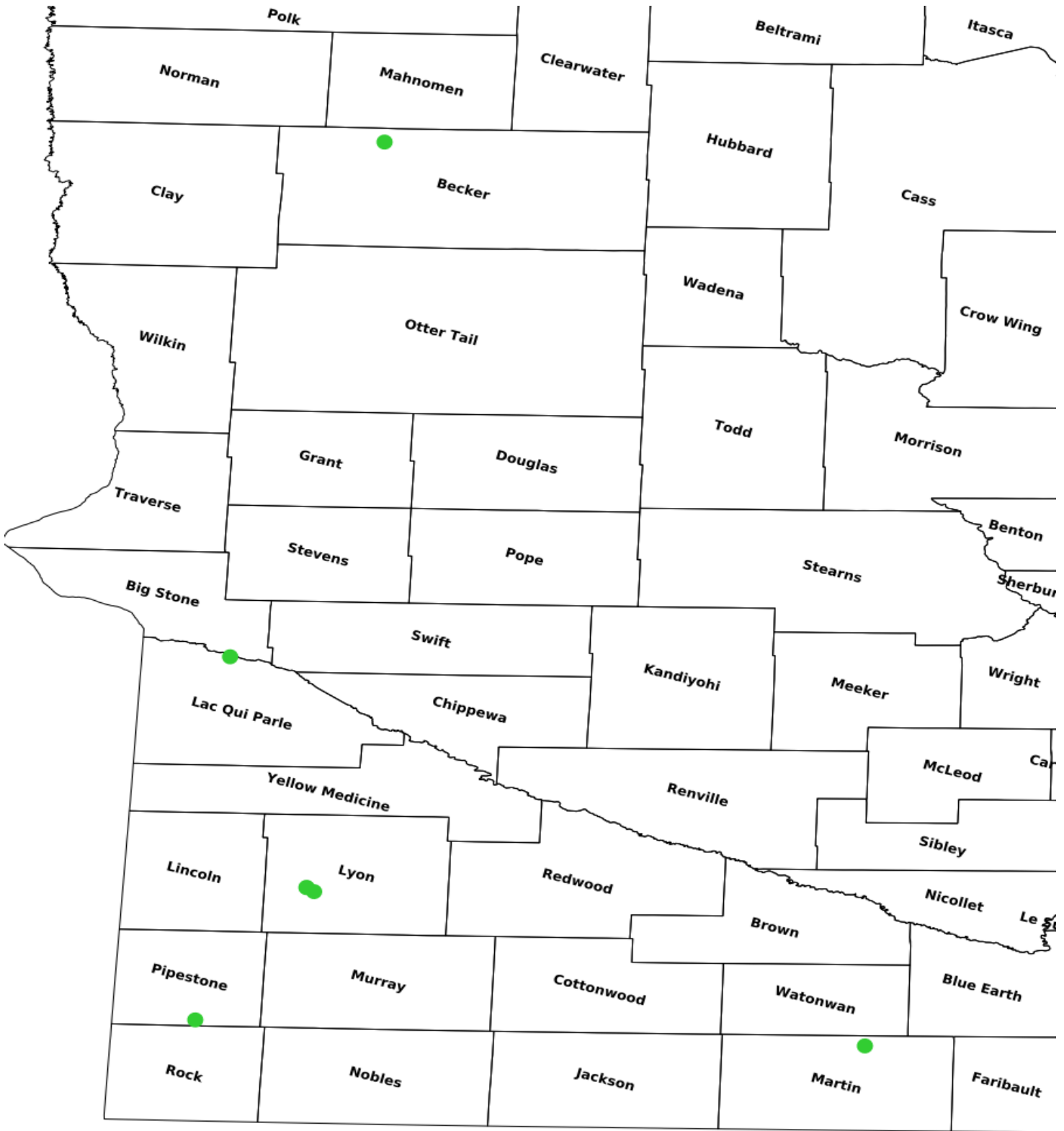
Sign-up Criteria?

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

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
White Earth 20-1 NPB	Becker	14241220	114	\$160,000	No
Coon Creek 1-1 NPB	Lyon	11043201	15	\$45,000	No
Coon Creek 1-2 NPB	Lyon	11043201	44	\$90,000	No
Lyons 7-1 NPB	Lyon	11042207	16	\$70,000	No
Westford 18-1 NPB	Martin	10430218	34	\$123,000	No
Gentilly 27-1 NPB	Polk	10545227	67	\$75,000	No
Appleton 18-1 NPB	Swift	12044218	229	\$283,000	No

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✦ Enhance
- ⊕ Other

0 11 22 33 mi