



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Acquisition - Phase VII

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/14/2025

Project Title: Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Acquisition - Phase VII

Funds Recommended: \$7,620,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2015, First Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 4(a)

Appropriation Language: \$7,620,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Pheasants Forever to acquire land in fee to be designated and managed as waterfowl production areas in Minnesota, in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Murray, Swift, Big Stone, Otter Tail, Mahnomen, Blue Earth, Lincoln, Stearns, Carver, Faribault and Douglas.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Metro / Urban

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The goal of this phase of the WPA acquisition program was to protect a total of 900 acres of grassland, wetland and other wildlife habitats as Waterfowl Production Areas open to public hunting. Pheasants Forever purchased 12 parcels totaling 1,506.35 acres of wetlands and grasslands in Minnesota's prairie region. In addition to exceeding our acre goals, \$16,982 of grant funds will be returned.

Process & Methods

Conversion of grassland and wetlands for other uses have not only contributed to many native species population declines, but also impacted water quality, groundwater recharge cycles, and natural flood cycles. Permanent acquisition and restoration of grasslands and wetlands is one of the major tools we have for reversing this trend. This seventh phase of the WPA acceleration program acquired and restored a total of 1,506.35 acres of grasslands and wetland habitat as permanently protected WPA's managed by the USFWS.

Pheasants Forever and USFWS staff collaborated to generate a list of parcels with landowners who had the desire to sell. The parcel's ecological impact was evaluated using landscape level planning tools developed by the USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET). These tools utilize Thunderstorm Maps to predict productivity of breeding waterfowl, grassland birds, and other wildlife species for the potential parcel and surrounding area. By utilizing these tools, we were able to focus efforts in areas where acquisitions and restorations will make the greatest impact on the landscape and thus these additional acres of WPA are very beneficial to wildlife and public recreation.

Pheasants Forever notified counties prior to acquisition of lands. Once acquired, the USFWS will make a one-time Trust Fund payment to the County where the property is located. Additionally, the USFWS will make annual Refuge Revenue Sharing payments for all fee lands within the respective counties.

Once acquired, wetlands on each parcel were restored by installing surface ditch "plugs" and or breaking subsurface tile. Some wetlands may also have had sediment removed to create proper substrates for wetland function and vegetative growth. Grasslands were restored by planting a high-diversity native seed mix of grasses and forbs that are regionally appropriate to the area. As with all restoration work there are challenges that come from weather and working with private contractors but we did not face any major issues.

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?

The majority of the acquisitions in this program are located in the Prairie Pothole Region which is not only the richest wetland system on earth but also produces approximately one-third of the continent's waterfowl population. In addition to supporting waterfowl, this region supports numerous grassland and wetland dependent wildlife species, many of which are experiencing severe population declines due to habitat loss. The parcels acquired and restored as part of this phase add to the quantity and quality of grasslands and wetlands that are available to species such as mallards, black terns, bobolinks, meadowlarks, and the ring-necked pheasant. Additionally SGCN and T/E were considered when the parcels were evaluated for acquisition. Parcels with these species were ranked more favorably than parcels without. Species of concern that will benefit from these projects include the greater prairie chicken, short-eared owl, marsh hawk and yellow rail.

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.

As stated in the Process and Methods section, we used models developed by the USFWS HAPET team to determine the parcels productivity potential of breeding waterfowl, grassland bird, and other wildlife species. Additionally these parcels were evaluated by determining location in proximity to other existing wildlife habitats, location within conservation plan areas such as the Minnesota Prairie Plan, Pheasants Action Plan and others.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Pheasants Forever worked with USFWS to evaluate, acquire and restore parcels in this program. This program has many supporters including numerous conservation agencies and groups such as Ducks Unlimited and the MN DNR.

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

There were no exceptional failures or challenges that were encountered. This program is unique in the aspect that more than 1,000 acres of permanently protected prairie and wetland habitat were added into a landscape where most of it has been destroyed.

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?

The parcels acquired by Pheasants Forever have been transferred to the USFWS as part of the Waterfowl Production Area program. All parcels have been acquired and restoration activities have been completed during this effort. Long-term management and maintenance of these WPA's are the responsibility of the USFWS.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2021 and beyond	Federal, Local, PF	PF will continue to work with our partners and look for funds, where appropriate, to help maintain quality wildlife habitat on acquisitions.	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$62,200	\$62,200	\$65,100	-	\$200,000	-	\$62,200	\$265,100
Contracts	\$368,800	\$432,700	\$446,800	-	\$116,500	Federal,Private,PF	\$368,800	\$563,300
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$6,915,000	\$6,864,000	\$6,823,600	\$4,046,000	\$4,672,400	Federal,Private,PF	\$10,961,000	\$11,496,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,300	\$2,300	\$2,200	-	-	-	\$2,300	\$2,200
Professional Services	\$59,000	\$59,000	\$57,800	-	\$9,500	Federal,Private,PF	\$59,000	\$67,300
Direct Support Services	\$12,400	\$12,400	\$13,100	-	-	-	\$12,400	\$13,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$16,000	\$3,100	\$3,100	-	-	-	\$16,000	\$3,100
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$184,300	\$184,300	\$191,300	-	-	-	\$184,300	\$191,300
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$7,620,000	\$7,620,000	\$7,603,000	\$4,046,000	\$4,998,400	-	\$11,666,000	\$12,601,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
FWS Realty In-Kind Services	0.0	3.0	-	\$200,000	USFWS	\$200,000
MN State Coordinator	0.06	3.0	\$21,700	-	-	\$21,700
MN Field Representatives	0.06	3.0	\$21,700	-	-	\$21,700
PF Grants Staff	0.15	3.0	\$21,700	-	-	\$21,700

Direct Support Services

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

Shared support services cost 20.22% of the total payroll. Every hour an employee spends working directly on the grant, we recover 20% of the cost toward the overall shared support services pool.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

Pheasants Forever was able to accomplish all of the stated outcomes of this program and will be returning grant funds to the OHF. This is due in part to land value donations from willing sellers as well as leverage from partners such as the Federal NAWCA program.

Total Revenue: \$147,169

Revenue Spent: \$73,134

Revenue Balance: \$74,035

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

B. This revenue, or a portion of it, was used for other purposes as approved in the AP by the LSOHC.

C. This revenue, or a portion of it, was transferred back to the OHF.

Itemize out how the revenues were spent:

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	225	184	675	1,322	0	0	0	0	900	1,506
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	225	184	675	1,322	0	0	0	0	900	1,506

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	\$1,905,000	\$930,200	\$5,715,000	\$6,672,800	-	-	-	-	\$7,620,000	\$7,603,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$1,905,000	\$930,200	\$5,715,000	\$6,672,800	-	-	-	-	\$7,620,000	\$7,603,000

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	50	135	150	123	0	0	700	1,248	0	0	900	1,506
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	50	135	150	123	0	0	700	1,248	0	0	900	1,506

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/ Urban (AP)	Metro/ Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Fore st (AP)	SE Fores t (Fina l)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Fore st (AP)	N. Fores t (Fina l)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$423,400	\$677,800	\$1,269,900	\$625,100	-	-	\$5,926,700	\$6,300,100	-	-	\$7,620,000	\$7,603,000
Protect in Easeme nt	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhanc e	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$423,400	\$677,800	\$1,269,900	\$625,100	-	-	\$5,926,700	\$6,300,100	-	-	\$7,620,000	\$7,603,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

By utilizing federal match dollars and working on strategic land acquisitions Pheasants Forever was able to exceed our acre goals in all categories.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *We acquired two tracts in Stearns and Otter Tail counties totaling 123.84 acres that were in the forest-prairie transition region. Wetland and upland restorations were completed to create nesting habitat for breeding waterfowl, upland and other grassland birds, and stopover habitat for migrating species.*

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

Protected habitats will hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting ~ *One parcel totaling 134.3 acres was acquired in Carver county and is now open for public recreation and hunting. These restored wetlands will serve as nesting, brood rearing, and stopover habitat for waterfowl and will provide areas for waterfowl and other hunters to utilize.*

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Nine parcels totaling 1,248.18 acres were purchased in the prairie region. These acres were restored to the highest extent possible to benefit migratory and unique Minnesota species.*

Parcels

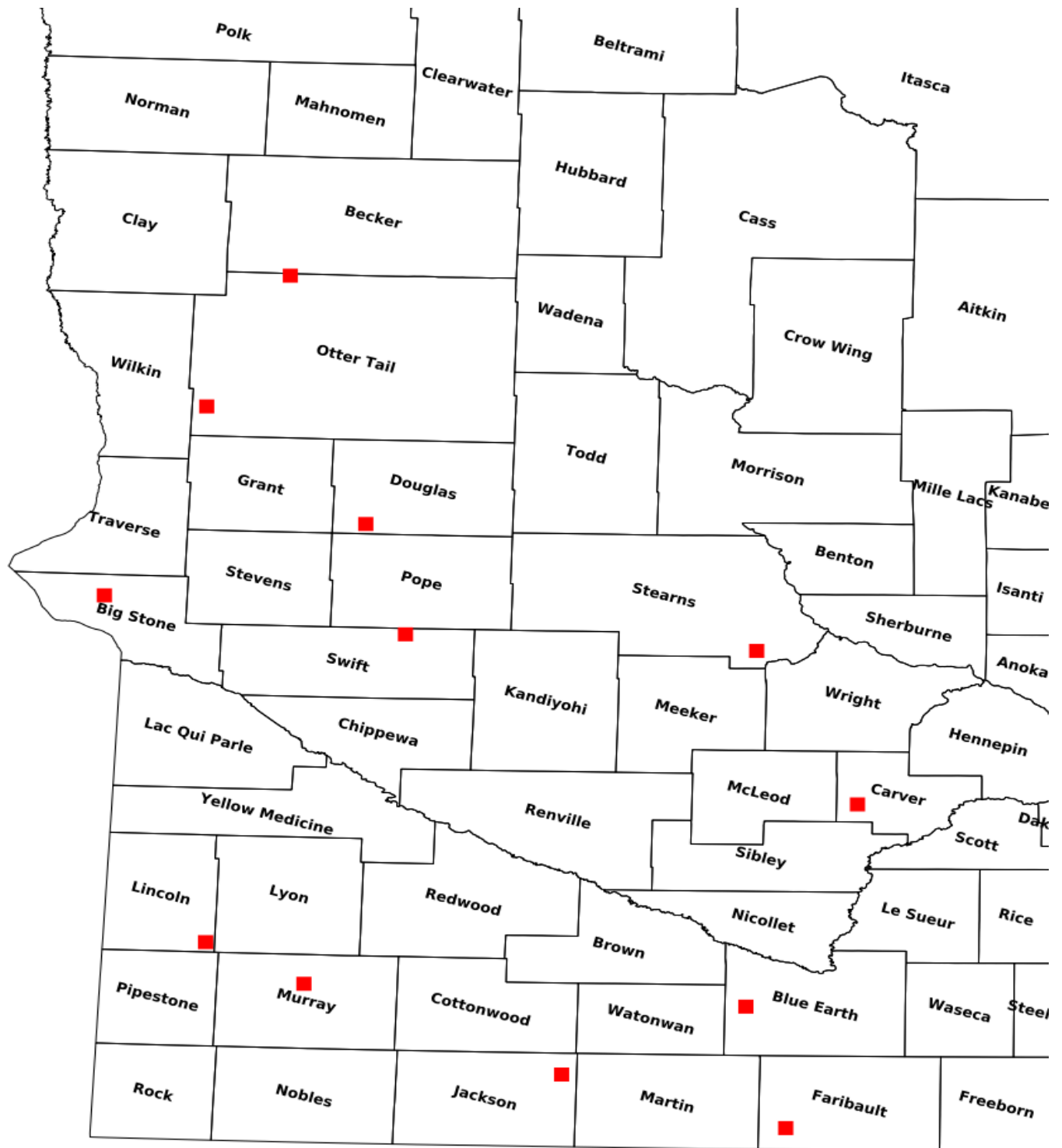
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Becker WPA Addition	Big Stone	12447235	132	\$375,000	No
Lincoln WPA Addition	Blue Earth	10729234	154	\$1,000,000	No
Tiger Lake WPA	Carver	11526210	134	\$850,000	No
Bengtson WPA Addition	Douglas	12740224	104	\$350,000	Yes
Pilot Grove WPA Addition	Faribault	101280202	23	\$825,000	No
Jessen WPA Addition	Lincoln	10944223	81	\$480,000	No
Squirrel Lake WPA Addition	Mahnomen	10434234	139	\$275,000	No
Mason WPA Addition	Murray	10741209	281	\$1,900,000	No
Putnam WPA Addition	Otter Tail	13742202	86	\$400,000	No
Ridgeway WPA Addition	Otter Tail	13244228	160	\$600,000	Yes
Murray Lake WPA Addition	Stearns	12229226	38	\$125,000	No
Loen WPA Addition	Swift	12238207	176	\$385,000	Yes

Parcel Map



0 12 24 36 mi

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