



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase IV

Laws of Minnesota 2014 Final Report

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### General Information

**Date:** 08/17/2025

**Project Title:** Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase IV

**Funds Recommended:** \$1,430,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2014, Ch. 256, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(g)

**Appropriation Language:** \$1,430,000 in the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Trust for Public Land to acquire and restore lands in the Cannon River watershed for wildlife management area purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8. Lands acquired with this appropriation may not be used for emergency haying and grazing in response to federal or state disaster declarations. Conservation grazing under a management plan that is already being implemented may continue. Subject to the evaluation criteria under 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 proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Bob McGillivray

**Title:** Land Protection Director

**Organization:** Trust for Public Land

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### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Rice.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Prairie

**Activity types:**

Protect in Fee

Restore

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Wetlands

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

**Narrative**

**Summary of Accomplishments**

Through fee-title acquisition, The Trust for Public Land permanently protected 287 acres (106% of our goal) in the Cannon River Watershed resulting in four new Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These now publicly accessible and protected areas include wetland, prairie, Big Woods forest, and shallow lake shoreline habitat. The permanent protection of these places has reversed habitat loss, allowed for habitat restoration, and increased access to public lands for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

**Process & Methods**

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase IV program acquired 287 acres of high-quality wetland, prairie, remnant Big Woods forest, and shoreline habitat for fish, game and wildlife in the Cannon River Watershed. The protection and creation of four large complexes - Circle Lake WMA, Big Woods Heritage WMA (Erin Township), Sunktokeca Creek WMA (Wells Township), and Trout Lily WMA provide new opportunities for public hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase IV program was designed to address the following problems: degradation and loss of quality and diversity of habitat in the prairie section of the State, degradation of water quality in the Cannon River Watershed; and lack of available public lands for hunting and angling opportunities, especially within an hour's drive for over half of the state's population.

The Phase IV program is a part of a multi-year conservation effort, focusing on the Cannon River Watershed, that includes acquisition, protection, and restoration of core parcels of land that will contribute to a large complex of restored prairies, grasslands, wetlands, lakeshore, and river shoreline. The Phase IV acquisitions were prioritized toward protecting existing large wetland/upland complexes, rare communities (Big Woods forest, oak savanna, tamarack swamp), and shallow lakes. In addition, landowner willingness to sell and the threat of conversion were also taken into consideration. Protection of these lands provides critical habitat for game species, including migratory waterfowl (mallards, canvasback, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, pintails, lesser scaup), upland birds (dove, turkey, pheasant, and woodcock), white tail deer, and fish (northern pike, black crappies, bluegills, bullheads and walleye). Protection will also provide access for a diversity of recreational experiences including duck, pheasant, turkey and deer hunting, lake fishing, and wildlife observation. In addition, restoration work conducted by the MN DNR has been focused on the degraded portions of the lands acquired and has included restoration of agricultural fields near wetlands and lakes back to native habitat.

Specifically, four acquisitions were completed with Phase IV funding:

#### 1. Circle Lake WMA - Rice County:

The Trust for Public Land acquired the Circle Lake WMA property on June 23, 2016 and conveyed the 166 acre property to the DNR on March 10, 2017 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. Located directly on the north shore of Circle Lake in Rice County, this new WMA consists of high quality emergent marsh habitat as well as upland grass knolls. This site protects habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl and wildlife, specifically including colonial waterbirds and Blanding's turtles. The Trust for Public Land purchased this property for a total of \$711,000 using \$371,684 from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase IV (ML 2014 OHF; allocated acreage 87), and also \$339,316 from the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase III grant (ML 2013 OHF; allocated acreage 79).

#### 2. Big Woods Heritage WMA - Rice County:

The Trust for Public Land acquired the Big Woods Heritage property on June 23, 2016 and conveyed the 130 acre property to the DNR on March 10, 2017 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. Located just north of Shields Lake, the headwaters of the Cannon River, this new WMA comprises both rolling upland mixed forest and wetland habitat. The native plant community of Southern Mesic Maple-Basswood Forest is found on this property and it will provide new publicly accessible outdoor experiences including ample hunting opportunities for waterfowl, deer, pheasant and turkeys. The Trust for Public Land purchased this property for a total of \$520,000 using \$271,836 in funds from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase IV (ML 2014 OHF; allocated acreage 68), and also \$248,164 from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase III (ML 2013 OHF; allocated acreage 62).

#### 3. Sunktokeca Creek WMA - Rice County:

The Trust for Public Land acquired the Sunktokeca Creek property on June 23, 2016 and conveyed the 199 acre property to the DNR on March 10, 2017 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. Located just northwest of Faribault, this new WMA protects diverse, high quality emergent marsh habitat, supports a wide variety of waterfowl and wildlife, and provides new publically accessible outdoor experiences within an hour of the Twin Cities including quality hunting opportunities for waterfowl, deer, pheasant and turkeys. The Trust for Public Land purchased this property for a total of \$1,040,000 using \$543,673 in funds from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase IV (ML 2014 OHF; allocated acreage 104), and also \$496,327 from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase III (ML 2013 OHF; allocated acreage 95).

#### 4. Trout Lily WMA - Rice County:

On August 9, 2017, The Trust for Public Land acquired the 112 acre Phase I property and conveyed both the Phase 1 and Phase 2 properties to the Minnesota DNR on November 6, 2018 to create the new Cannon River Trout Lily WMA in Rice County. This new WMA is located directly on the Cannon River just northeast of Faribault, it currently consists of agricultural cropland and maple-basswood "Big Woods" remnants, and will be restored to prairie while conserving the federally-endangered dwarf trout lily habitat. Directly adjacent to The Nature Conservancy's Trout Lily preserve and the DNR Trout Lily Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), this acquisition adds protection to this federally-endangered species that is only found on Earth in approximately 600 acres in this area of Minnesota. In addition to protecting the dwarf trout lily and other rare animals such as wood turtles, Blanding's turtles, and red-shouldered hawks, this area is home to a major deer wintering complex. Cannon River Trout Lily WMA will provide much needed public access for dispersed wildlife-based recreation including hunting, fishing, trapping, bird-watching, general nature observation, and to provide a natural environment for the study of wildlife and their habitats.

This acquisition used the remaining \$148,679 of the Cannon River Phase IV acquisition funds and \$453,321 of the Cannon River Phase V acquisition funds.

### **Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition**

These acquisitions were supported by a number of partners, including but not limited to; the MN DNR, Rice County, respective Township Boards, and Cannon River Watershed Partnership. No opposition occurred on these projects.

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

The Cannon River Watershed is unique in that its' geography overlaps between three different MN DNR regions. This makes sense in that the Cannon River is located an hour south of the Twin Cities and meanders east from prairie/cropland areas through the historic mill towns (Big Woods area) of Faribault, Northfield, and Red Wing before it empties into the Mississippi River in the southeast bluffs area. However, this unique geography can make coordination with our MN DNR partners more challenging as the regions have different priorities/processes at times.

### **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 Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex lands have been acquired and conveyed to the DNR who has completed initial site development and restoration work. Restoration work includes hardwood seedling planting and prairie seeding. Costs for this work are included in the IDPs attached to the completed parcel reports. The properties will be managed for the long term as WMAs and will be maintained by the Minnesota DNR according to their WMA guidelines.

### **Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Source of Funds</b>	<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>
2017 and ongoing	DNR Land Management Funds	Property owned by the DNR via TPL acquisition will be managed according to DNR land management policies.	DNR lands acquired in fee-title will remain permanently protected and open to the public.	On-going DNR management

## Budget

### Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$70,000	-	-	\$10,000	-	-	\$80,000	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,350,000	\$1,350,000	\$1,350,000	\$15,000	-	-	\$1,365,000	\$1,350,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	\$70,000	\$69,600	-	-	-	-	\$69,600
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,430,000</b>	<b>\$1,430,000</b>	<b>\$1,429,600</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,455,000</b>	<b>\$1,429,600</b>

### Explain any budget challenges or successes:

No major unanticipated budget challenges. We spent all of our acquisition capital and exceeded our protection acreage goals. A very small amount (under \$500) of DNR Land Acquisition and DNR IDP funds went unexpended. Unfortunately, the leverage expected in 2014 from either a landowner donation of value, or a RIM match, did not occur.

**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.

## 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	92	67	71	103	52	80	55	37	270	287
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>287</b>

**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	\$474,000	\$333,100	\$388,000	\$513,200	\$283,000	\$398,900	\$285,000	\$184,400	\$1,430,000	\$1,429,600
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$474,000</b>	<b>\$333,100</b>	<b>\$388,000</b>	<b>\$513,200</b>	<b>\$283,000</b>	<b>\$398,900</b>	<b>\$285,000</b>	<b>\$184,400</b>	<b>\$1,430,000</b>	<b>\$1,429,600</b>

**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	270	287	0	0	270	287
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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	0	0	0	0	0	0	270	287	0	0	270	287
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## 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	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,430,000	\$1,429,600	-	-	\$1,430,000	\$1,429,600
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	<b>\$1,430,000</b>	<b>\$1,429,600</b>	-	-	<b>\$1,430,000</b>	<b>\$1,429,600</b>

## Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

1

## Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Our goal was to protect 270 acres, we exceeded that and protected 287 acres (106%).

## Outcomes

### Programs in prairie region:

Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Agriculture lands are converted to grasslands to sustain functioning prairie systems ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Improved access to public lands ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*



Protected, enhanced and restored remnants of big woods and oak savanna ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Restored and enhanced upland habitats ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The four new WMAs protected under this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need, including the federally federally-endangered dwarf trout lily. In total, 287 acres and a mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

## Parcels

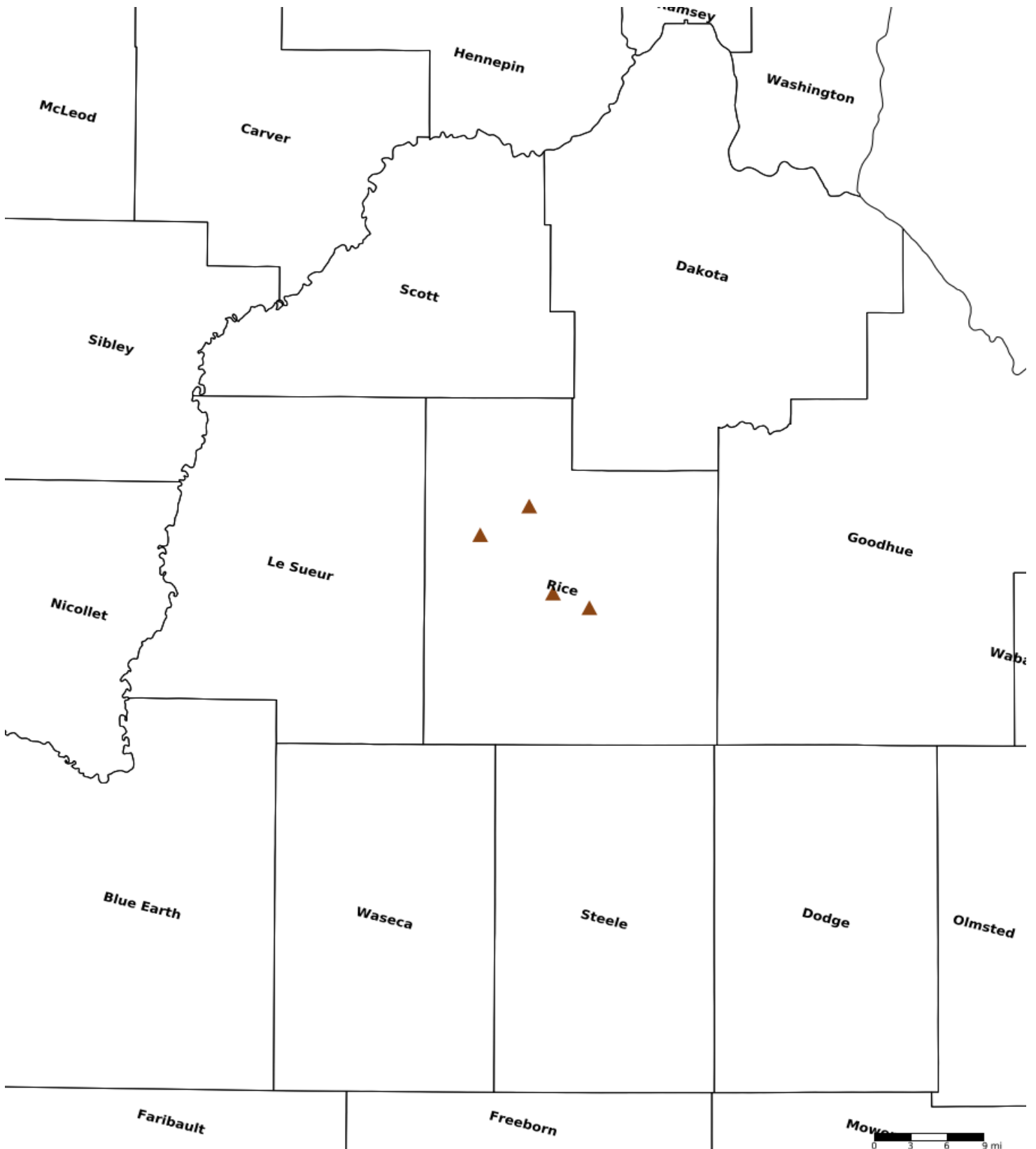
### Sign-up Criteria?

No

### Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Big Woods Heritage WMA (Erin Township)	Rice	11122223	68	\$520,000	No
Circle Lake WMA	Rice	11121209	87	\$711,000	No
Sunktokeca Creek WMA (Wells Township)	Rice	11021211	104	\$1,040,000	No
Trout Lily WMA	Rice	11020217	28	\$602,000	No

## Parcel Map



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