



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Shallow Lake & Wetland Protection Program - Phase VI

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

General Information

Date: 06/21/2025

Project Title: Shallow Lake & Wetland Protection Program - Phase VI

Funds Recommended: \$5,750,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 4(b)

Appropriation Language: \$5,750,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Ducks Unlimited to acquire land in fee and restore prairie lands, wetlands and land buffering shallow lakes for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes 86A.05, subdivision 8. A list of proposed acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Lincoln, Sibley, Clay and Pope.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

This Phase 6 of Ducks Unlimited's wetlands protection/restoration program proposed to acquire/restore 600 acres of prairie land on shallow lakes or with restorable wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region of SW Minnesota for transfer/inclusion into the Minnesota DNR's public state Wildlife Management Area system. Ducks Unlimited successfully acquired 765 acres in eight land tracts in the Prairie Section, including 211 acres of wetlands and 554 acres of grasslands which far exceeded our goals, transferred them to DNR for inclusion in the WMA system, and fully restored them back to wetlands and grasslands for wildlife habitat and public use, including hunting.

Process & Methods

This Phase 6 of Ducks Unlimited's prairie land acquisition/protection program in Minnesota acquired and restored land with drained wetlands adjacent to existing public lands and shallow lakes for inclusion in the Minnesota DNR's state Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system. DU focuses on the acquisition and restoration of lands with restorable wetlands and prairie adjacent to existing WMAs to create functioning prairie-wetland habitat complexes for wildlife and public use. This work addresses the habitat goals in Minnesota's Long-range Duck Recovery Plan, Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. This work is time-sensitive because farmland adjacent to state WMAs is rarely offered for sale for conservation, and tracts are only available for a short time.

DU worked in close partnership with the Minnesota DNR Section of Wildlife to identify land tracts for sale of importance to DNR and of significance to wildlife, once restored and protected. DU then hired professional licensed consultant appraisers to determine fair market land value, and purchased land from willing sellers private landowners. In six of eight cases, DU secure bargain sale purchase donations totaling \$56,832, and paid full appraised value for the other two parcels. In each case, DU provided written communication to county boards informing them of our land purchase plans at least 30 days before closing, and appeared before two county boards and one township board to further explain and discuss our conservation work. No formal objections were made, and all concerns resolved.

Following acquisition, DU professional biologists and engineers worked closely with DNR field staff to plan and implement both robust prairie and wetland restorations, including diverse native forb/grass seed plantings and complex wetland restorations that required extensive drainage system modification and expensive sediment removal to restore functioning wetlands for prairie wildlife, especially on Indian Lake WMA in Sibley County, Tyler and Discors WMA in Lincoln County, and Goose Prairie WMA in Clay County. Private contractors were selected to perform restoration earth moving work to restore wetland hydrology, remove drainage tile and sediment, and invasive trees. A combination of private contractors and DNR field staff seeded uplands back to native prairie grasslands with abundant pollinator forbs. Each of the eight land tracts has been successfully transferred into the Minnesota DNR's WMA system, and are fully open to public use, including hunting.

This work was important because Minnesota has lost 90% of our prairie wetlands to drainage and 99% of our prairie uplands to cultivation. Acquisition and restoration of small wetlands and prairie is critically needed here, especially for breeding waterfowl in the Prairie Pothole Region of SW Minnesota where DU is focused. The few remaining prairie wetlands and shallow lakes contained within state WMAs or federal Waterfowl Production Areas rarely provide optimal wildlife habitat due to their small, fragmented size and isolated juxtaposition. Acquisition/restoration drained wetlands and cultivated prairie adjacent to existing public lands and public waters helps create functioning prairie-wetland complexes of habitat for wildlife that are open to public hunting too.

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 protects and restores prairie lands, which are identified as critical habitats for many “Species of Greatest Conservation Need” listed in Minnesota’s “Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild & Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife.” Specific species listed in the Action Plan as requiring prairie (page 255) include seven species of butterflies and three bird species that are native prairie specialists: chestnut-collared longspur, Sprague’s pipit, and Baird’s sparrow.

In addition to these specific wildlife species listed as SGCN examples in the Action Plan, restored prairie in the Prairie Parkland will provide habitat of significant value for other species listed in Appendix B of the Action Plan too. Restored and protected prairie will provide habitat of significant value for other SGCN including bird species: upland sandpiper, bobolink, burrowing owl, Le conte’s sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, swamp sparrow, sharp-tailed grouse, short-eared owl, northern harrier, dickcissel, Henslow’s sparrow, and Nelson’s sharp-tailed sparrow. Upland nesting waterfowl will also benefit including waterfowl listed as SGCN; northern pintail and lesser scaup, which have both seen declines in continental populations. Wetland associated birds such as trumpeter swan, black tern, American bittern, Wilson’s phalarope, and marbled godwit will benefit from wetlands either restored or buffered in the prairie landscape.

In short, most of the wildlife species listed as SGCN in the Action Plan need the same restored prairie wetlands and grasslands that waterfowl and other game species need, and acquisition and restoration of wetlands and prairie grasslands adjacent to existing state Wildlife Management Areas often benefits both game and nongame species alike when restored correctly and fully as Ducks Unlimited always strives to do and achieved through this grant.

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.

Ducks Unlimited used science-based targeting to evaluate land acquisitions, and focused on tracts adjacent to existing state WMAs with restorable wetlands that enlarged prairie-wetland habitat complexes. Science-based models such as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) “Thunderstorm Maps” and “Restorable Wetlands Inventory” helped us determine landscape importance to breeding waterfowl. We prioritize parcels with relatively high biological diversity and significance based on the Minnesota DNR County Biological Survey (MCBS). Examples include:

Our acquisition and restoration of three land parcels totaling 261 acres on Indian Lake WMA in Sibley County adjacent to Indian Lake, a shallow lake with a high level MCBS biological significance and moderate biodiversity significance, buffered Indian Lake and increased the size of the WMA to support breeding wildlife.

Our acquisition and restoration of two land parcels totaling 153 acres Tyler/Discors WMA in Lincoln County restored much-needed uplands and small wetlands to help improve a prairie-wetland complex in an area estimated as capable of supporting 21-30 breeding pairs of waterfowl per square mile.

Our acquisition and restoration of a 151-acre land parcel and restoration of multiple prairie pothole wetlands totaling 44 acres on Goose Prairie WMA in Clay County was prioritized due to the landscape supporting over 50 duck breeding pairs per square mile with many federal Waterfowl Production Areas within only a few miles. Thus, our land acquisition and restoration work both buffered Goose Prairie Marsh and added to the size of the existing state WMA there, but also contributed to the overall prairie wetland wildlife habitat complex in the general landscape as well.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

DU partnered primarily with the Minnesota DNR Section of Wildlife within the Fish & Wildlife Division, but enjoyed support from the counties within which we worked and from other private partners too, including The Schmidt Foundation, the Van Sloun Foundation, the Bame Foundation, Flint Hills Resources, and a federal North American Wetlands Conservation Act small grant for land restoration work on Indian Lake WMA.

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

Our main challenge was restoring land with drained wetlands involving complex subsurface drainage systems that involved private drainage from neighbors and required both accommodation and new drainage agreements with neighbors, all of which was accomplished but which required extensive engineering survey, tile investigations, and design time. On Goose Prairie WMA, the land we purchased required the exclusion of a building site and driveway at the landowner's request, which we accommodated but which bisected the parcel acquired and restored. Nonetheless, DU successfully exceeded our land acquisition and restoration goals, and all eight parcels have been successfully and fully restored and are open for public use through the state's Wildlife Management Area system, including public hunting and other forms of wildlife-compatible outdoor recreation.

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 eight land tracts have been fully restored and transferred to the Minnesota DNR for long-term management and public use as part of the state Wildlife Management Area system of public lands.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2021	MN DNR Game & Fish Fund	Monitor and maintain lands acquired and restored	Manage lands, including periodic noxious weed control and burning	Maintain WMA signs and public access, including for hunting

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$300,000	\$375,000	\$375,100	\$50,000	\$70,900	DU Private, NAWCA and DU Private	\$350,000	\$446,000
Contracts	\$600,000	\$942,700	\$942,700	\$150,000	-	NAWCA and DU Private	\$750,000	\$942,700
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$4,000,000	\$3,980,500	\$3,980,500	-	\$56,800	Private Landowner Donations	\$4,000,000	\$4,037,300
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$25,000	\$34,100	\$34,100	-	\$5,600	NAWCA and DU Private	\$25,000	\$39,700
Professional Services	\$70,000	\$128,800	\$128,800	-	-	-	\$70,000	\$128,800
Direct Support Services	\$30,000	\$26,400	\$26,400	-	-	-	\$30,000	\$26,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$40,000	\$70,000	\$69,700	-	-	-	\$40,000	\$69,700
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$20,000	\$13,100	\$13,100	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$13,100
Supplies/Materials	\$190,000	\$52,200	\$52,200	-	-	-	\$190,000	\$52,200
DNR IDP	\$475,000	\$127,200	\$119,500	-	-	-	\$475,000	\$119,500
Grand Total	\$5,750,000	\$5,750,000	\$5,742,100	\$200,000	\$133,300	-	\$5,950,000	\$5,875,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Program Manager to coordinate work and administer grant	0.5	4.0	\$22,200	\$7,300	DU Private	\$29,500
Biologists and Engineers to buy land and restore habitat	2.0	4.0	\$352,900	\$63,600	NAWCA and DU Private	\$416,500

Direct Support Services

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

DU DSS costs comprise approximately 10% of our staff personnel costs and are calculated according to accounting methodology previously reviewed and approved by DNR and LSOHC staff.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

DU successfully spent nearly all of our grant funds and exceeded our acre goals within. DU used OHF expenditures on acquiring land to leverage federal a NAWCA small grant funds to help pay staff costs to restore land acquired on Indian Lake WMA. However, DU was unsuccessful in leveraging additional standard NAWCA grants to help pay for restoration costs on lands acquired due to timing and location of restorations that did not align with proposals.

MNDNR failed to spend \$3,138 of IDP funds and \$14,760 of the LAM funds conveyed to them, which will be returned to OHF.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

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

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	100	211	500	554	0	0	0	0	600	765
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
Total	100	211	500	554	0	0	0	0	600	765

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	600	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0
Enhance	0	0
Total	600	0

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	\$1,250,000	\$2,183,200	\$4,500,000	\$3,549,000	-	-	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$1,250,000	\$2,183,200	\$4,500,000	\$3,549,000	-	-	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200

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	600	765	0	0	600	765
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	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	600	765	0	0	600	765

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200	-	-	\$5,750,000	\$5,732,200

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Ducks Unlimited successfully acquired eight (8) land parcels totaling 764 acres, including 205 acres of wetlands and 559 acres of prairie upland grasslands. This far exceeds our goal of acquiring and protecting 600 acres, including 100 acres of wetlands and 500 acres of prairie. This was made possible through a combination of conservative estimation in our proposal and eight fortunate land acquisition opportunities that were less expensive on average than anticipated.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands ~ *This outcome is measured simply by the sheer number of wetland and prairie acres acquired for protection and restored or enhanced through this appropriation. DU exceeded our acre acquisition/protection goal.*

Parcels

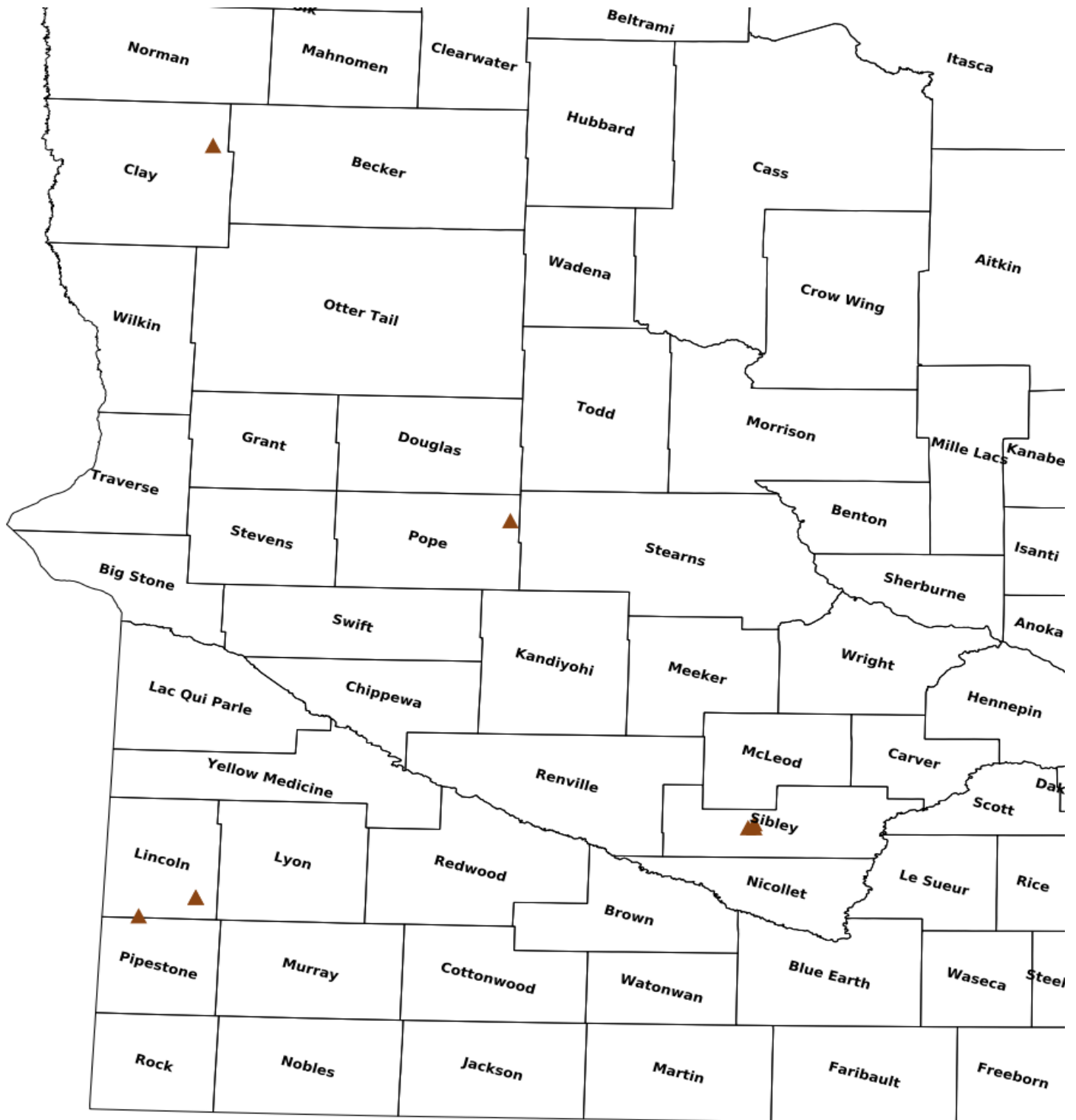
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Goose Prairie Marsh WMA - Tract 6 Dahl	Clay	14144227	151	\$500,000	No
Altona WMA - Tract 10 Skime	Lincoln	10946236	41	\$100,000	No
Tyler WMA - Henry Goehle Tract	Lincoln	10944204	12	\$100,000	No
Tyler/Discors WMA - Tracts 2/3 Goehle Trust	Lincoln	10944204	141	\$1,220,000	No
Westport WMA - Tract 3 Kasper	Pope	12536202	159	\$800,000	No
Indian Lake WMA - Tract 2A Peterson	Sibley	11329221	8	\$16,000	No
Indian Lake WMA - Tract 7 Woods	Sibley	11329229	191	\$400,000	No
Indian Lake WMA - Tract 8a Muchow	Sibley	11329228	62	\$425,000	No

Parcel Map



0 11 22 33 mi

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