



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2021 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2021-105

Proposal Title: Native Prairie Stewardship & Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition

Project Manager Information

Name: Judy Schulte

Organization: MN DNR - Ecological and Water Resources Division

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Native Prairie Bank (NPB) will help landowners conserve native prairie through multiple outreach methods, restoration and enhancement of 700 acres, and protection of 150 acres through conservation easements.

Funds Requested: \$2,100,000

Proposed Project Completion: 2024-06-30

LCCMR Funding Category: Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation (G)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): Central, NW, SW, SE,

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Native prairie is a fragile, unique natural ecosystem that consists 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. Native prairie provides a multitude of benefits to the citizens of the state, such as water filtration and recharge, pollinator and wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, soil health, erosion control, outdoor recreation, etc. High quality native prairies provide the best available habitat for native prairie pollinators. Restoration efforts aim to meet the standards set by these original native prairies.

The Minnesota Biological Survey has identified about 249,000 acres of remaining native prairie in Minnesota, approximately 1.3% of what once existed in the state. Of these 249,000 acres, approximately 118,000 acres still have no formal protection. Threats to native prairie continue to be widespread including cropland conversion, mining, development, invasive species, woody encroachment and non-prairie focused land use/management.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and Milestones.

This proposal seeks to protect and enhance high quality native prairie to insure these highly complex habitats continue to protect the habitat essential to many of the state's rare, threatened and endangered species, set the standard for native prairie pollinator habitat and provide a multitude of benefits to the citizens and animals of the state.

Established in 1987 through Minnesota Statute 84.96, Native Prairie Bank (NPB) has a proven track record of working with landowners to enhance and protect high quality native prairie while leaving the land in private ownership. In partnership with landowners, Native Prairie Bank currently manages, with exceptionally high standards, 13,949 acres of native prairie and associated habitat on 155 sites throughout the prairie region of the state. The goal is to expand this partnership and effort through this proposal.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

Through this proposal, prairie outreach and technical assistance will be provided to landowners, practitioners, youth and the general public. Native prairie restoration and enhancement activities will be implemented on about 700 acres of Native Prairie Banks. Permanent protection of about 150 acres will take place through the acquisition of Native Prairie Bank conservation easements with priority given to high quality remnant prairie identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS).

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Prairie Landowner Assistance, Prairie Outreach, and Existing Native Prairie Bank Stewardship

Activity Budget: \$517,267

Activity Description:

Private landowners and other practitioners will increase their stewardship of native prairie as a result of this project's workshops, field days, one-on-one technical assistance, online resource development, etc. The Prairie Landowner Network established through the ML18 appropriation will continue to use innovative ways to connect prairie landowners through social media, email, newsletters, training opportunities, etc. This network is aimed at improving prairie quality on private lands by keeping landowners up-to-date on the best management strategies. At least 10 landowners will receive a comprehensive prairie stewardship plan that will provide specific prairie management expertise for their property. About 40 monitoring visits will be completed on existing NPBs to evaluate current conditions and insure easement compliance.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
monitoring and stewardship of ~ 40 NPB easements	2024-06-30
~10 prairie stewardship plans provided to prairie landowners (~700 acres)	2024-06-30
~50 prairie stewards participating in the Prairie Landowner Network	2024-06-30
consultations, guidance, mgmt. asst., etc. to ~80 landowners	2024-06-30
~10 workshops/field days for prairie landowners & practitioners (~700 people)	2024-06-30

Activity 2: 700 Acres of Native Prairie Habitat Enhancement & Restoration

Activity Budget: \$809,584

Activity Description:

Restoration and enhancement activities will be completed on about 700 acres. Activities include seed collection, site preparation, planting, invasive species prevention and control, woody species removal, boundary signing, site cleanup, prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance, such as haying, mowing or grazing, where appropriate) and monitoring. All restorations will use seeds/plants of local ecotypes, collected from onsite or within 30 miles. Ecological Monitoring will occur at 40 NPB sites to collect ecological data used to evaluate whether the objectives of management were met, to analyze ecological changes over time and to contribute to future management decisions. Restoration and enhancement activities will be carried out via landowner agreements, DNR staff, Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI), volunteers, and/or contractors.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Ecological monitoring on ~40 NPB sites	2024-06-30
NPB easement boundary signs & development work on ~4 NPB sites	2024-06-30
~ 530 acres of prescribed burns	2024-06-30
~160 acres of woody removal & invasive species treatment	2024-06-30
~10 acres of prairie reconstruction (restoration)	2024-06-30

Activity 3: Acquisition and Stewardship of 150 acres of Native Prairie Bank Easements

Activity Budget: \$773,149

Activity Description:

DNR-administered permanent NPB conservation easements will be acquired on about 150 acres of high quality native prairie, which will include no more than 30% non-prairie as necessary to improve prairie management. Payment rates are determined by authorizing law, M.S. 84.96, as applied according to policies of the Department of Natural Resources. Conservation easement baseline reports will be completed on approximately 4 NPBs. Priority sites are identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) which target rare and endangered plant and animal species, high quality plant communities, key habitats for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and parcels within larger habitat complexes to reduce impacts from habitat fragmentation. If needed, restoration will be completed using a combination of funds from Activity 2 above and/or other state appropriations. Only about 10 of the 150 acres acquired are expected to need restoration. Funding will be deposited into a conservation easement stewardship account dedicated to perpetual monitoring and enforcement on NPB easements acquired with this proposal.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
dollars deposited into conservation easement stewardship account (~4 easements)	2024-06-30
~4 baseline property reports for NPB easements	2024-06-30
acquisition of ~150 acres of Native Prairie Bank conservation easements	2024-06-30

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Partners and Local Technical Teams	Teams of staff from SWCD's, NRCS, DNR, USFWS, TNC, Pheasants Forever, etc.	Cultivate relationships with prairie landowners and bring new potential NPB parcels to DNR prairie staff for further evaluation.	No

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this be funded?

Currently, DNR holds 13,949 acres of NPB easements, which accounts for 40% of the MBS mapped native prairie protected through conservation easements statewide. If NPB aimed to protect 40% of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan native prairie easement protection goals, NPB would need to acquire an additional 44,000 acres. At the same time, without active natural resource management prairie values will be lost. Thus Native Prairie Bank could utilize ENRTF support of about \$5M per year to sustain and protect native prairie.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Easement Program for Native Prairie Bank	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 09i	\$2,000,000
Native Prairie Stewardship and Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 09e	\$2,675,000
Native Prairie Stewardship and Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition	M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 09d	\$3,325,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Judy Schulte

Job Title: Prairie Biologist

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

The Scientific and Natural Areas Program's mission is to "preserve and perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota's natural heritage, including landforms, fossil remains, plant and animal communities, rare and endangered species, or other biotic features and geological formations, for scientific study and public edification as components of a healthy environment". As the Scientific and Natural Area Program's Prairie Biologist, Judy is responsible for coordinating and administering programs designed to improve native prairie conservation and management on private lands and provide oversight of conservation easement stewardship. She provides programmatic direction and management for Native Prairie Bank, Native Prairie Tax Exemption, and Prairie Stewardship Planning Assistance.

Judy has been involved with the implementation and management of 39 previous LCCMR & LSOHC projects, all of which were aimed at the protection and management of Minnesota's most unique and rare remnant native plant communities.

Judy has served as the Prairie Biologist since March of 2015. Other related experiences include:

- Acting SNA Unit Supervisor (May 2018-May 2019) statewide lead for the Scientific and Natural Areas program while continuing to cover Prairie Biologist duties.
- Southern Region Prairie Specialist, MN DNR (2011-2015)
- District Technician, Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District (2009-2011)
- CRP & GRP Program Technician, USDA Redwood County Farm Service Agency (2007-2009)

Education: Graduated from South Dakota State University in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science in Park Management & Horticulture.

Judy will provide overall management to this proposed LCCMR project. She has effectively demonstrated her capacity to manage programs and budgets, maintain accurate records, and direct staff. Judy has experience and has demonstrated the ability to collaborate with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in addressing complicated and contentious prairie protection and management issues. She is organizationally driven and has the knowledge and background to get the work done on the ground.

Organization: MN DNR - Ecological and Water Resources Division

Organization Description:

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Ecological & Water Resources, Scientific & Natural Areas Program

Charged under MS 86A.05 to protect and perpetuate in and undisturbed natural state those natural features that possess exceptional scientific or education value; and under MS 84.96 and 84.961 to acquire Native Prairie Bank easements and work with landowners in conserving native prairie.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Acquisition & Management Coordinators and Prairie Biologist		Project acquisition, management and budget implementation, contract execution, partner coordination			25%	0.32	X	\$26,500
Specialists & Technicians		On the ground project implementation			25%	8.16	X	\$569,800
Laborers & Seasonal crews		On the ground project implementation			20%	3.08	X	\$116,500
							Sub Total	\$712,800
Contracts and Services								
State of Minnesota	Acquisition costs	Professional Services for Acquisition: Attorney General's Office and DNR Lands and Minerals costs associated with completing an acquisition				0.38		\$88,000
TBD & Conservation Corp of MN	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Professional/Technical: ecological monitoring & private prairie stewardship plans Conservation Corp of MN: Prairie Landowner Network (1 individual placement), prescribed burning, invasives, woody removal and seed harvest (crew contracts, dependent on availability) Service Contracts: prescribed burning, invasives, woody removal, seed harvest				4		\$375,200
							Sub Total	\$463,200
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Activity 1: Outreach materials and supplies Activity 2: herbicide, posts, signs, safety supplies, equipment repair/parts, seed cleaning/testing, field tools,	Project implementation					\$24,150

		enclosure fence for monitoring, etc. Activity 3: Deed and baseline reporting printing, field tools						
							Sub Total	\$24,150
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
	Conservation Easement Acquisition	Acres: 150 Parcels: 4						\$530,000
	Stewardship Funds	State of Minnesota-MN DNR						\$80,000
							Sub Total	\$610,000
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	DNR fleet charges (for operation of trucks, cars, & special fieldwork equipment) & instate travel costs (as per state contracts)	Travel expenses needed to complete direct project work					\$171,455
							Sub Total	\$171,455
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		DNR's Direct and Necessary Costs	(~\$88,395 total) pay for activities that are directly related to and necessary for accomplishing appropriated programs/projects. Direct and necessary costs cover HR Support					\$88,395

			(~\$19,202), Safety Support (~\$3,567), Financial Support (~\$14,555), Communication Support (~\$6,620), IT Support (~\$38,707), and Planning Support (~\$5,744) that are necessary to accomplishing funded programs/projects.					
		Online Prairie Landowner Handbook	Create online version of Prairie Landowner Handbook (written and printed through ML17), which will allow landowners to get prairie management support online with direct links to additional resources and improved accessibility.					\$30,000
							Sub Total	\$118,395
							Grand Total	\$2,100,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Personnel - Acquisition & Management Coordinators and Prairie Biologist		Project acquisition, management and budget implementation, contract execution, partner coordination	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.
Personnel - Specialists & Technicians		On the ground project implementation	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.
Personnel - Laborers & Seasonal crews		On the ground project implementation	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Agassiz Dunes	Norman, Polk,	Dry barrens oak savanna-rare prairie plant community in northern MN	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$144,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Big Stone Lake Prairie (north & south)	Big Stone	Dry Hill, mesic and wet prairies along Big Stone Lake next to DNR state park and SNA parcels	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$72,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Big Stone Moraines	Big Stone	Prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat for many rare species	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$144,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Blanket Flower Prairies	Clay, Becker, Otter Tail,	Dry Sand-gravel prairie in Alexandria Moraine and Hardwood Hills subsection	Conservation Easement	100	-	\$150,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Blue Mounds/Touch-The-Sky Prairies	Rock	Mesic to wet prairie with rock outcrops; provides habitat for many rare rock outcrop plants	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$160,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Blue Stem Prairie	Clay	Mesic, wet meadow/carr, & wet prairie parcels intermixed with DNR SNA and Audobon preserves	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$144,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Chanarambie Creek Prairies	Murray, Pipestone,	Dry gravel, mesic & wet prairies in biggest grassland complex with the highest quality prairie parcels in SW MN	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$224,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Des Moines River Valley	Cottonwood, Jackson,	Des Moines River Valley native prairie including oak savanna, dry hill prairie; expands habitat for many, butterflies, birds and rare plants - including Prairie Bush Clover.	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$240,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Felton Prairies	Clay	Prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat for many rare species as well as Prairie Chickens	Conservation Easement	100	-	\$180,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Frontenac Hay Creek Bluffs	Goodhue	Southern dry bedrock bluff (goat) prairies in a complex of bluff prairies and cold streams	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$104,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun

Glacial Lakes & Moraine Prairie	Pope, Kandiyohi, Swift, Stearns,	Dry sand-gravel prairies of the Alexandria Moraine, provides habitat for the Threatened Dakota Skipper as well as the Poweshiek Skipper and Regal Fritillary	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$100,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Glacial Ridge Prairies	Polk	Prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat for many rare species as well as Prairie Chickens	Conservation Easement	100	-	\$160,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Hole-in-the-Mountain Prairies	Lincoln, Pipestone,	Dry hill prairie, prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat around existing TNC and DNR lands	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$104,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Kellogg-Weaver Dunes Prairies	Winona, Wabasha,	Rolling sand dune topography, mature dunes with dry, mesic, or wet prairie as well as oak savanna	Conservation Easement	20	-	\$50,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Lake Bronson and Aspen Parkland Prairies	Kittson, Marshall, Roseau,	Aspen parkland complex-many prairie dominated aspen complexes are succeeding to woodland in absence of fire	Conservation Easement	100	-	\$100,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Lake Christina Hills Prairies	Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail,	Dry Hill to wet prairies; part of the rolling topography of the Alexandria moraine	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$144,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Lake Traverse Prairies	Traverse	Dry prairie and prairie- woodland complex	Conservation Easement	100	-	\$200,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Prairie Coteau/Rock River Prairies	Pipestone	Dry hill prairie, prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat around the Prairie Coteau SNA	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$208,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Root River Valley Prairies	Houston, Fillmore, Winona,	Southern Dry Bedrock Bluff (goat) prairies in a complex of bluff prairies and cold streams; habitat for timber rattlesnakes	Conservation Easement	20	-	\$48,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Rothsay Prairies	Wilkin	Prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat for many rare species as well as Prairie Chickens	Conservation Easement	160	-	\$256,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun

Shakotan Prairies	Lincoln	Dry hill prairie, prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$104,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Sherburne Sands Prairies	Sherburne	A mosaic of prairie, wetlands and oak savanna set in an important transition zone	Conservation Easement	80	-	\$128,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Upper MN River Prairies	Chippewa, Redwood, Renville, Yellow Medicine, Swift,	MN River Valley native prairie including oak savanna, wet prairie, rock outcrops; expands habitat for many rare plants, butterflies and birds	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$120,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Wambach Santee Prairie	Mahnomen	Prairie meadow complexes, prairie rich fens and other rare northern plant communities	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$40,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
Yellow Medicine Coteau Prairie	Yellow Medicine	Dry hill prairie, prairie meadow, wet prairie, rare species; part of a large, contiguous prairie macrosite, expands habitat for Western White Prairie Clover and Upland Sandpiper	Conservation Easement	40	-	\$100,000	Private	DNR-SNA	Has not begun
				-	-	-			
				-	-	-			
Totals				1,700	0	\$3,424,000			

Conservation Easement Acquisition

1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.

Eligibility for Native Prairie Bank (NPB) is established in both M.S. 84.96 and MN Rule 6136.09. To qualify, land must be covered by native prairie vegetation and have never been plowed. Eligible lands are prioritized based on factors including: size, quality and diversity of the native prairie habitat; occurrence of, or suitable habitat for rare species; location relative to other native prairie and/or public land; and potential for long-term habitat management and enhancement. MBS data is the foundation for many of these evaluation factors. Native Prairie Bank uses the “Native Prairie Bank Evaluation Form” to evaluate and score individual projects. This form has been included as an attachment to this proposal for reference.

2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.

Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/prairieplan/index.html>)

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025 (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mnwap/index.html>)

Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/conservationagenda/index.html>)

Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan (https://www.lccmr.leg.mn/documents/scpp/statewide_plan.htm)

3. For any conservation easement acquired, a restoration and management plan must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.

Each parcel acquired as a new NPB will have a Prairie Stewardship Plan. Prairie Stewardship Plans include, 1) a resource inventory and assessment of all the lands native plant communities or restored to plant communities that would have been native to the site, 2) landowner and DNR’s goals, and 3) prairie management alternatives/recommendations. The goals for the NPB’s management are based upon soils, topography, geology, and other factors necessary to sustain the plant community. Each plan includes an implementation timetable that summarizes ongoing management needs and a statement on funding. Long-term management costs (e.g. invasive species treatments, prescribed fire, and ecological monitoring/evaluation) will be covered by a combination of funding sources, including, but not limited to, the landowner, ENRTF, Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), federal grants, and other funds as appropriated. Each Prairie Stewardship Plan is kept in a DNR internal shared electronic filing system accessible to all SNA staff along with a copy given to the landowner.

4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.

DNR policy is to notify the county assessor prior to easement closing, however county board approval is not requested.

5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.

As part of the DNR acquisition process, all NPB acquisitions are required to have approval of the Ecological and Water Resources Division Director and land conveyances are accepted by the Director or Deputy Director of the Division of Lands and Minerals who have delegated authority to approve this for the Commissioner.

6. Provide a statement addressing how conservation easements will address specific water quality protection activities, such as keeping water on the landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, protecting groundwater, and not permitting artificial hydrological modifications.

Native Prairie Bank’s goal is to protect existing high quality, high functioning native prairie that currently is providing multiple water quality benefits. In addition, the easement terms and the Prairie Stewardship Plan they are required to follow assures that the prairie health is sustained, thus they inherently do an excellent job of keeping the water on the

landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, and protecting groundwater. In addition, use of pesticides on the easement is prohibited without approval of the DNR. The easement terms also prohibit artificial hydrological modifications by prohibiting excavation, cultivations, drainage, filling, and irrigation.

7. Describe the long-term monitoring and enforcement program for conservation easements acquired on parcels by your organization, including explanations of the process used for calculating conservation easement monitoring and enforcement costs, the process used for annual inspection and reporting on monitoring and enforcement activities, and the process used to ensure perpetual funding and implementation of monitoring and enforcement activities.

The policy of the DNR is to protect both the conservation values of the property protected by these easements and the investment of the state in those interests. Elements of this stewardship include the creation of baseline property reports, enforcement protocols, regular compliance monitoring, record keeping and reporting, and maintaining effective working relationships with the owners of these easement properties. Native Prairie Bank implements this policy by following DNR Operational Order #128 “Conservation Easement Stewardship” in addition to the “Ecological and Water Resources Division Conservation Easement Stewardship Plan and Guidelines”. This operational order and supporting division guidance calls for annual landowner contacts as well as on-the-ground site evaluations once every three years if no violations are found. If a violation is found, monitoring would occur annually until the violation is corrected.

Budgeted into this work plan is funding to be deposited into the DNR’s Conservation Easement Stewardship Account dedicated to the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of conservation easements. The dedicated stewardship funds will provide the support needed for long-term, ongoing monitoring and minor enforcement activities of Native Prairie Bank easements acquired under this proposal. For each specific Native Prairie Bank easement, initial investment dollars are determined by using a DNR approved Conservation Easement Stewardship Calculator, which estimates the annual expenses and the investment needed to generate annual income sufficient to cover these expenses in perpetuity.

Funds for this activity will be deposited into the established conservation easement stewardship account and Minnesota Management & Budget protocols will be adhered to. After the closing of each Native Prairie Bank easement acquired with this appropriation, the calculated easement stewardship funds will be deposited into this account. Once funds are deposited and interest begins to accrue, this accrued interest will be applied towards actual expenses tied to annual landowner contact, regular compliance monitoring, record keeping and minor enforcement protocols.

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

All restoration activities done with this appropriation are on DNR-owned perpetual Native Prairie Bank conservation easements administered by the SNA Program.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

Each restoration project will be based upon a Native Prairie Stewardship Plan (ecological restoration and management plan) and/or project plan with goals for reconstructing plant communities that are native to the site that are based upon soils, topography, geology, and other factors necessary to sustain the plant community. Each plan includes an implementation timetable which summarizes ongoing management needs. Each restoration and management plan and project plan is kept by the landowner and in a DNR internal shared electronic filing system accessible to all SNA staff.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

The SNA Program follows or exceeds the recommendations found in the BWSR “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines”. NPB restorations typically follow the current BWSR Guidelines, including Project Guidance,

Plant Community Restoration, and Temporary Cover. The SNA Program follows the general direction of the BWSR Guidelines for “Recommended Steps for Obtaining Plant Materials”, and has additional and more restrictive requirements for restoration material sources. Specifically, all restorations on Native Prairie Banks use seeds/plants of local ecotypes, collected from onsite or within 30 miles. Restoration and management of DNR lands are governed by DNR Operational Order #124 on “Plant Material Standards for Native Plant Community Restoration” and DNR Operational Order #130 on “Pollinator Habitat” (which include BMPs).

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

Long-term management costs (e.g. invasive species treatments, prescribed fire, and monitoring/evaluation) will be covered by a combination funding sources, including, but not limited to, the landowner, ENRTF, Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), federal grants, and other funds as appropriated.

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

DNR has a standing general contract with CCMI under which the SNA Program often does project or activity specific agreements. For restoration projects, CCMI has been and will continue to be used when appropriate for hand seed harvest, invasive species control and prescribed burning on NPBs.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Restoration projects will be evaluated and a report submitted to the LCCMR to ascertain how well the native plants have been established and non-natives controlled. The evaluation reports include a summary of management plan outcomes, activities completed through the project, map of the project area, a statement of ongoing management needs and funding, and a summary of the evaluation.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [f34bf2e8-3bd.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Native Prairie Bank aims to protect the last of Minnesota's high quality remnant native prairie. This maps depicts the remaining unprotected native prairie throughout the state, highlighting that of the 249,000 acres of remnant prairie remaining in Minnesota, 118,663 acres continues to have no formal protection. Of the remaining 8,962 unprotected parcels, only 163 parcels are greater than 100 acres. Conservation easement acquisition through this proposal will target MN Prairie Conservation Plan priority areas and select priority locations within southeast MN.

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
Native Prairie Bank Acquisition Evaluation Form	50366ec0-09d.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Conservation Easement Acquisition, Restoration,

Does your project have patent, royalties, or revenue potential?

No

Does your project include research?

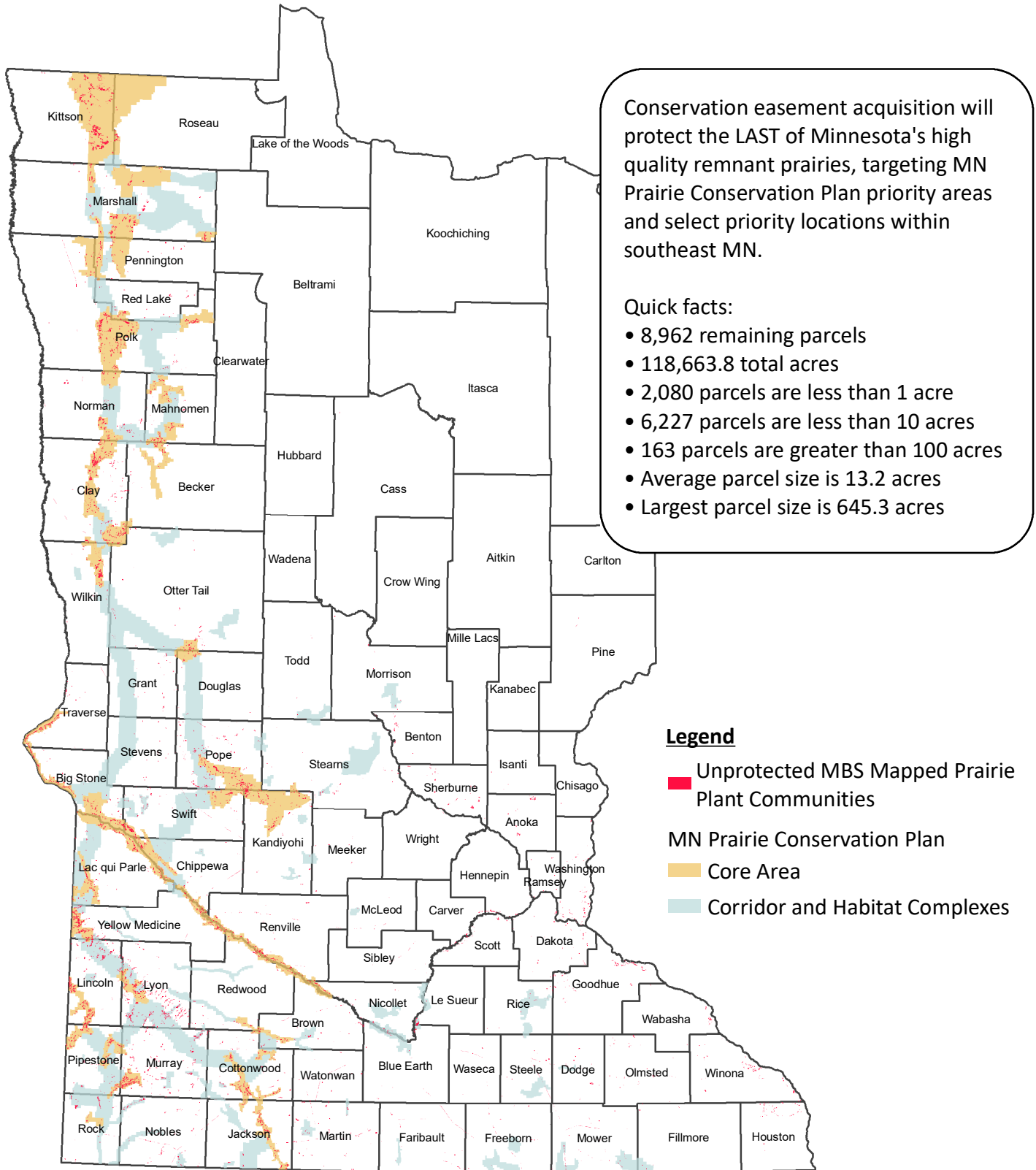
No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

ML21 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Proposal

Native Prairie Stewardship & Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition



This map highlights Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) mapped native prairie and prairie complexes that are unprotected, in red, as of 3/27/2020.



