

APPENDIX A

Criteria for Ranking and Pursuing Land Protection Projects

POLICY

Before The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc., (TPE) can accept the responsibility of assuming the fiscal and labor demands of protecting a parcel of real estate, TPE must find that it fits the TPE mission. If it does not meet the criteria, the project will not proceed. Our mission is the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration and education. To accomplish this mission we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.

A point system is set forth in the procedures to allow TPE to evaluate potential easement and fee title projects. The local chapter will complete the form jointly with TPE Land Protection Committee. It will then be reviewed by the full board at the time the proposal is presented to the board.

The principal value of the ranking system is to establish the relative weight of the factors set forth in the procedures. To proceed, a project must fit TPE's mission, conservation goals, capacity and current priorities.

PROCEDURES

- 1) Fits TPE mission? The site must have (or have great potential for reestablishment of) plant communities of fire-derived native ecosystems. This includes prairie, the wettest variant sedge meadow, oak savanna, pine barrens and oak woodland. Embedded patchy habitats may be included in these large types, such as fens, streams, cliffs/ledges, ephemeral wetlands, marsh, etc. Recovery or restoration should only be considered if the community type was present on site prior to European settlement or has become well established since that time on its own. [Yes/No]
- 2) Funding for management, monitoring and legal defense?
 - a. If TPE is acquiring fee title, what is the calculated financial need to manage the property: Is there a land management fund or other plan, such as a dedicated core of volunteers, to accomplish the management objectives on the property? Point range 0-10.
 - b. If the acquisition is a conservation easement, is there funding for the monitoring and legal defense fund? If so, how much? Does it meet TPE minimum requirements? Point range 0-10.

- 3) Natural area quality? This is the degree of intactness of the native plant community's composition in terms of closeness to pre-settlement state (as best we know) or having a high floristic quality index, and a scarcity of non-native and invasive native species. If the site is included in TPE Inventory of Remnants, or a state agency Inventory of Remnants, what relative ranking has been given in this inventory? Point range 0-40. [0-20 little to no pre-settlement and low floristic quality, 21-30 high, 31-40 highest quality.]
- 4) Critical habitat for rare and declining species? This is the presence of, and quality of habitat for, state and federally listed species and species in significant and rapid decline that are associated with the ecosystems in Criteria 1. Make reference to the Species of Greatest Conservation Need as identified in applicable State Wildlife Action Plans. Point range 0-10.
- 5) Environmental gradients? The more diversity of soils, substrates, soil moist regimes, slope and aspects, the higher the points. Point range 0-5.
- 6) The landscape context? This takes into account the size of the target parcel, compatibility of adjacent land uses and vegetation cover, potential of preserve expansion and buffering, proximity to other remnant communities and their size (genetic flow and population viability issues).
 - a. What is the size of the parcel? [Larger parcels are seen as important for biological integrity.] Point range: 5 points for 0-10 acres; 7 points for 11-20 acres; 10 points for 21-40 acres; 15 points for greater than 40 acres.
 - b. Does the property abut or is it within one quarter of a mile from abutting prairie remnants or other nature areas? 5 points.
 - c. Does the property afford the opportunity for future expansion? If so describe. 5 points.
 - d. Are the adjacent land uses compatible with the conservation of this land? 5 points. Please explain.
- 7) Assist with Education and Outreach? Will the conservation of this parcel help raise awareness and appreciation of TPE and natural areas? Will it help children, families and future generations appreciate the experience of natural areas and TPE's conservation programs? Please explain. Point range 0-10 points.
- 8) Is TPE the most appropriate conservation agent? This should also take into account the availability of an alternative group or an existing friend, support or land management group. Point range 0-5.
- 9) Other important reasons for undertaking this project? If so, please explain. The committee can designate the additional 5 points.
- 10) Included within another conservation project? Is the property included within another conservation project, and if so, how significant is the property to the larger project? Point range 0-10.

A project could achieve a total of 125 points. The project must reach at least 70 points before TPE can take it on.

Even if the scoring above does reach the minimum score of 70, TPE Board may elect not to take on the project if one or more of the following problems exist. In making its recommendation to the board, the Land Protection Committee shall advise the board of any of the following problems of which they are aware.

1. Difficulty of management or enforcement. The land or easement would be unusually difficult to manage or enforce.
2. Limitations in conservation easement. The landowner insists on including provisions in the conservation easement that TPE believes would diminish the property's conservation values or its ability to enforce the easement.
3. Contamination. The land or conservation easement is irreparably contaminated or the cost of eliminating the contamination is more than TPE could afford.
4. Insufficient size. The land is not sufficient in size to be significant for its purpose.
5. Ethical or public relations issues. There is a potential for either ethical or public relation problems, or possible conflict of interest, that exist in association with the acceptance of the project.
6. Lack of funds. TPE does not have adequate funds to cover a land acquisition, stewardship, monitoring or enforcement costs.

The above criteria apply only to land being acquired by TPE for protection purposes. They do not apply to other land acquisitions, such as acquisitions for trade purposes or lands being acquired to buffer existing TPE properties.