

APPENDIX C: RANKING CRITERIA FOR INDIVIDUAL PARCELS

The following criteria will be used for focusing the Department's land protection efforts at the small or 'parcel' scale: A rating scale for these criteria will be developed and piloted prior to implementation. Note that we consider a parcel to be a unit of land available for protection. Typically the parcel will be a field, but it may range in size from ¼ acre to more than 500 acres.

Criteria 1-6 will be given additional weight if the parcel is located in a designated or proposed BCA.

Criteria 7-23 will be given additional weight if the parcel is located in a Focus Area or BCA.

Grassland habitat

1. Is parcel primarily existing grassland habitat (CRP, prairie remnants, pasture, old field, wet- or sedge meadow), or if somewhat degraded by wooded fence lines or young scattered trees, can it be easily restored to open grassland? Consider size (large parcels would be preferred over smaller parcels) and quality of the grassland parcel for the targeted birds (e.g., is the parcel dominated by invasive weeds).

Landscape context

2. Does the parcel exist within an 'open' area of 500 acres or more, with a low housing density of approximately 1 house/160 acres or less? Open means not to exceed 25% closed canopy forest in areas dissected by ridges or draws (and where the woods are mainly restricted to draws), or 10% forest cover in flatter landscapes.
3. Does the parcel consist of land on broad, open ridgetops or in broad, open valleys? For grassland bird conservation, ridgetops would rank higher than lowland areas.
4. Does the area immediately surrounding or adjoining the parcel have a significant amount of existing, formally protected grasslands (e.g. CRP, areas with management agreements, etc), which can serve as buffers and increase the value and likelihood of success of conservation actions on the parcel? Or, if somewhat degraded by wooded fence lines or young scattered trees, can the adjacent grasslands be easily restored to open grassland?
5. Does the parcel contribute to connectivity of existing grassland and/or agricultural areas?
6. Does the parcel exist in a matrix of largely open agricultural/undeveloped lands which are reasonably likely to continue to serve as buffers in the future?

Water resources

7. Is parcel within the watershed of an outstanding or exceptional resource water (ORW, ERW), and would conservation actions on the parcel contribute to the improvement/maintenance of stream quality?
8. Is parcel within the watershed of a Class 1 or 2 trout stream with naturally reproducing trout populations and/or brook trout present?
9. Is parcel within the watershed of a stream with rare aquatic or wetland species present (including Species of Greatest Conservation Need)?
10. Is parcel within the watershed of a stream with high biodiversity (IBI score), including environmentally intolerant species?
11. Is parcel within the watershed of a designated impaired water (303(d) stream) or a stream ranked high by the Bureau of Watershed Management for priority watershed funding, and would conservation actions on the parcel help improve water quality in the stream? Noted that 303(d) streams are a division priority, but that there are other state (DNR) and federal (EPA) funds targeted for work to restore 303(d) streams.
12. Do characteristics of the parcel indicate that the site is important for groundwater recharge (e.g. high bedrock, fractured limestone, shallow soils)
13. Is there a spring on the parcel?



High quality natural communities and rare species

14. Does the parcel include unplowed prairie sod? Consider size and quality of prairie plant community as well as proximity to other remnants and landscape context (surrounding land use, open habitats, etc).
15. Are high-quality natural communities present on the parcel (e.g., remnant prairies, savannas, oak woodlands)? Parcel would rank highest if high quality communities are present on site, but would also receive points in this category if there is potential for restoration of priority natural communities with limited or moderate work.
16. Are rare species (including Species of Greatest Conservation Need) present on or near the parcel, or does the parcel have the potential to positively influence rare species (with limited management/restoration) at some stage in their life history? Parcel would rank highest if rare species are present on site, but would also receive points in this category if rare species are present within one mile of the parcel according to NHI or other data sources, or if restoration on the parcel would positively influence rare species.

Other resources

17. Would the parcel enhance recreational opportunities in the area (e.g. adjoins or is quite near an existing park or trail)?
18. Are cultural, historical, or archaeological resources present on the parcel, or is the property near or within the viewshed of important cultural, historical, or archaeological sites? The presence of cultural, historical, or archaeological resources on the parcel would increase the value of the property, but there is a need to develop a priori a plan for future maintenance and management of such resources.
19. Are other high quality natural communities (e.g. pine relics, wetlands) or scenic natural features (e.g. rock outcrops) present on the parcel?

Partnerships and local support

20. Does the Department or another partner group/agency have an existing project on this or adjoining parcels that would be enhanced or complemented by Department action and increase the likelihood of success of Department conservation actions?
21. Are neighboring landowners supportive, potentially increasing the probability of conservation actions on the parcel and in nearby areas being successful over the long term?
22. Is local government supportive of project, potentially increasing the probability of conservation actions on the parcel and in nearby areas being successful over the long term?
23. Has land in the area been identified as important area for agriculture, conservation, or open space through other planning efforts (e.g. local smart growth plans or other land use planning efforts, local zoning)?

