

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

**Request for Funding Form
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
Fiscal Year 2011**

Program or Project Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

Date: October , 2009

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	Council Funding Request	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
Funds Requested (\$000s)	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$173,000	0	0	0

A. Summary

This project will restore and enhance a 120-acre tract of critical wetland habitat in the Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area School Forest located in the Northern Forest section in Lake of the Woods County.

B. Background Information

1. What is the problem or opportunity being addressed?

The Lake of the Woods School owns a 120-acre tract of land adjacent to the building site. This tract of land was recently accepted into the state's DNR School Forest Program as the Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area. The Lake of the

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

Woods School Forest Committee has been actively planning to restore and enhance two degraded wetlands on site to promote suitable habitat for rare species such as Wilson's phalarope, the short-eared owl, sharp-tailed grouse and the elusive yellow rail.

2. What action will be taken?

The Lake of the Woods School Forest Committee members are working with the local Soil and Water Conservation District personnel and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff to develop a comprehensive restoration and management plan for Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area (ALELA). Actions for restoration and enhancement will be implemented under the technical guidance of these two agencies.

Restoration of the northern portion will entail grading to restore hydrology, replacing topsoil, seeding with native vegetation and creating a suitable habitat for the yellow rail and Wilson's phalarope. This habitat will include a seasonally flooded wetland adjacent to a sedge meadow. Enhancement of the southern portion, once a farmed wetland, will create suitable habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. Prescribed burning and the development of firebreaks will be used to remove woody vegetation which has encroached on the wet meadow.

3. Who will take action and when?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff will provide topographic survey results from a recent survey of the site. Final site plans and restoration specifications will be completed by 2010.

•North restoration

Upon receiving notification of grant funding, the school will let out bids for contracted excavation work. SWCD staff will oversee excavation and construction for the wetland restoration during the summer of 2010, and site surveys will be completed to verify proper contouring. Installation of culverts for hydrological control points will be completed during construction.

Seeding will be completed during the spring of 2011. US FWS staff will assist with the contract process for seeding.

First year-establishment weed management will be conducted by SWCD staff in the spring and summer of 2012. Wetland monitoring plots will be established during the spring, and the sites will be monitored for immediate threats, such as Canada thistle or reed canary grass.

•South enhancement

The Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District staff and school personnel will flag a firebreak for brushing during the summer of 2010. At this time, all debris piles slated for removal and disposal will be marked. Contracts for debris disposal will be let out for bids.

The firebreak will be established during the fall of 2010. Two consecutive prescribed burns will be conducted during the spring of 2011 and 2012. U.S. FWS staff will provide the technical oversight for the burns. The Minnesota Conservation Corps will be hired to assist with conducting the burn.

As part of the public promotion for this restoration and enhancement project, an educational component, such as wildlife observation blinds and interpretive signage have been added to this project. The school personnel will work with U.S FWS staff to

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

develop and install signs. Also, two public meetings will be held throughout the project time period to inform and educate local stakeholders.

4. How will you coordinate this program with the other Constitutional Funding?

The School Forest Committee has future plans for developing environmental educational trails to provide access to ALELA. However, the wetland habitat restoration supersedes these efforts. Habitat restoration and enhancement is seen by the committee members as the most important piece.

5. What specific habitat changes will occur if this item is funded? Be specific about and list multiple benefits if they exist.

Restoration of the northern portion will entail grading to restore hydrology, replacing topsoil, seeding with native vegetation and creating a suitable habitat for the yellow rail and Wilson's phalarope. This habitat will include a seasonally flooded wetland adjacent to a sedge meadow.

Enhancement of the southern portion, once a farmed wetland, will create suitable habitat for sharp-tailed grouse. Prescribed burning and the development of firebreaks will be used to remove woody vegetation which has encroached on the wet meadow.

6. When do you expect to see these habitat changes?

Habitat enhancements to the southern portion of the site will see more immediate benefits. Removal of woody vegetation will provide suitable sharp-tailed grouse habitat, and the fringe species will be able to utilize the sedge meadow and edges created.

Due to the highly degraded area on the north end, a successful wetland restoration will take several years to establish. The seeding will take place in 2011, but many of the plant species will take two to three years to begin to establish well.

7. Will your Outdoor Heritage Fund dollar request complete the planned accomplishments?

☒ **YES** ☐ **NO**
If not, how will you finance completion?

8. How will you pay for the maintenance of the accomplishments?

Apart from the periodic burning and brushing of the firebreak, the wetland restoration will be self-maintaining once it establishes successfully. The School Forest Committee members and other volunteer organizations have committed to long-term maintenance of this project.

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

9. How does this action directly restore, enhance, or protect prairies, wetlands, forests or habitat for fish, game, and wildlife?

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10. If you are restoring or enhancing property, is the activity on permanently protected land?

☒ **YES** ☐ **NO**
If yes briefly describe the kind of protection.

The Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area is school-owned property and the entire restoration site is enrolled in the MN DNR School Forest Program.

11. How will you ensure transparency and provide information about your work and use of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars.

The Lake of the Woods School District is the fiscal agent for many grants. As a public school, all financial records are public knowledge. We will also hold public meetings and have periodic reviews of our grant dollars. These reviews will be held during monthly School Forest Committee meetings.

12. Why will this strategy work?

It is a public school. This project also involves other local, state and federal public agencies to help provide oversight.

13. Who might make decisions that assist or work against achieving the expected impact program?

None. This project is on school-owned land and has received tremendous support from the school officials and the local community. The committee has also been in communication with the adjacent landowner throughout the planning process.

14. If this is acquisition of land, has the local government formally approved the acquisition?

N/A

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

15. If this is fee simple acquisition of land, is the land free of any other permanent protection such as a conservation easement? N/A

N/A

_____ **YES**

_____ **NO**

16. If this is an easement acquisition, will the eased land be open for public use?

N/A

_____ **YES**

_____ **NO**

If Yes what kind of use?

17. If easement acquisition, will the easement be a permanent conservation easement as described in MS 2009, Chapter 84C.01, specifically protecting the natural resource values of real property forever?

N/A

_____ **YES**

_____ **NO**

18. If you are proposing funding for a new or ongoing program how long into the future do you expect this program to operate?

_____ Indefinitely, ongoing _____ **Years**

19. Which planning sections will you work in? Check all that apply in the list below.

___x___ Northern Forest

_____ Forest/Prairie Transition

_____ Southeast Forest

_____ Prairie

_____ Metropolitan Urbanizing Area

20. Does the request address an urgent conservation opportunity that will be lost if not immediately funded?

___x___ **YES**

_____ **NO**

If yes, please explain.

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

The degree of degradation to the wetland has made the property almost uninhabitable to sensitive native species.

21. Does the request restore and/or enhance habitat on existing state-owned Wildlife or Aquatic Management Areas or Scientific and Natural Areas?

YES **x** **NO**

If Yes, list the names of the AMAs, WMAs and/or SNAs and the acres to be restored and/or enhanced.

22. Is this request based on assessment through a science based strategic planning and evaluation model similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model?

 YES x NO

If yes explain the model briefly.

We want to restore and enhance the area to provide biodiversity

23. Explain the scientific foundation for your project, and the benefits it will produce.

N/A

24. How do you set priorities? (Be sure to list the criteria you use and the weight you give each one.)

N/A

C. Relationship to the *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and Other Published Resource Management Plans

There are four goals in the MNCPP which this project will directly target:

*Rec-H5 Restoration of wetlands, specifically targeting degraded wetlands

This project will restore a site which was used as a borrow (gravel) pit. Hydrology and vegetation will be restored on this site. It also will enhance a site which was once a farmed wetland. Woody vegetation, mainly brushy species, has encroached on the site, limiting the habitat value.

*Rec-H7 Keep water on the landscape

Restoration of hydrology is included in the north wetland restoration. A large ditch which provides drainage to the school grounds will be re-diverted to outlet into the wetland restoration.

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

***Rec-H13 Education of citizens**

This project will be used to educate the general public on the values of wetlands, the various types of wetlands, and the habitat benefits which can be attained through different land management techniques. Interpretive signage will be installed as part of the educational piece. In addition to on-site education, this project will be promoted through local workshops and through various publications such as the SWCD's bi-annual newsletter and the local newspapers.

***Rec-LU2 Support local conservation-based community planning**

This project will enhance and restore wetlands just outside the city limits. This project is a good fit for local efforts to maintain green space and provide natural areas near the city.

The openland habitat created is within the MN DNR's sharp-tailed grouse habitat corridor for Lake of the Woods County.

This project also fits well with goals of the USFWS. The School Forest Committee is currently working with the private lands specialist from the Rydell Refuge of the USFWS. Through this partnership, the committee will be applying for funds for a separate project component under the USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program.

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

D. Budget

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
Contracts	\$36,500	\$3,000	\$4,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies	\$46,000	\$29,000	\$1,000
Fee Acquisition	\$0	\$0	\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0	\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0	\$0
Professional Services	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
Travel	\$0	\$0	\$0
Additional Budget Items	\$0	\$0	\$11,500
TOTAL	\$96,500	\$46,000	\$30,500

E. Personnel Details *In the space below list the names, titles and anticipated program funds to be paid by this recommendation. If you will need to fill a position just list the title and amount.*

Title	Name	Amount.
Buildings and Grounds Supervisor	Reed McFarlane	\$14,000
School Forest Coordinator	Jenny Moorman	\$7,000

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

F. All Leverage In the table below list the sources and amounts of leverage you anticipate by fiscal year you anticipate receiving it. Include state and non-state leverage.

Source of Non-State Leverage	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Partners Grant	\$15,000		
Lake of the Woods School District 390		\$15,000	
TOTAL	\$15,000	\$15,000	

G. Outcomes:

- 1) *In the first table below, quantify the outcomes you plan to achieve with the recommended funds.*
- 2) *In the second table show list the sections where outcomes will occur.*
- 3) *In the third table, allocate your recommended funds to each cell with outcomes listed in table 1.*
- 4) *In the fourth table show the leverage to be applied to each cell with outcomes listed in table 1. and*
- 5) *If you have any outcomes listed in the “protect” row in table 1, account for them according to the type of acquisition and PILT status in table 5*

Table 1 Accomplishments	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	<i>Restore 12 acres of highly degraded wetland</i>			<i>Provide habitat for Wilson’s phalarope and the yellow rail</i>
Protect				
Enhance	<i>Enhance sedge meadow wetland approx. 40 plus acres in size.</i>			<i>Provide sharp-tailed grouse and the short-eared owl habitat</i>

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				<i>Northern Forest (120 acres including open- water wetland, sedge meadow and forested wetland)</i>
Protect	<i>Northern Forest (12 acres)</i>			
Enhance	<i>Northern Forest (40 acres)</i>			<i>Northern Forest (120 acres including open- water wetland, sedge meadow and forested wetland)</i>

Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	<i>\$73,000</i>			<i>\$30,000</i>
Protect				
Enhance	<i>\$20,000</i>			<i>\$50,000</i>

Table 4 Leverage \$	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	<i>\$15,000</i>			<i>\$0</i>
Protect				
Enhance	<i>\$0</i>			<i>\$15,000</i>

Table 5 Acquisition Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability				

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: Agassiz Lowlands Environmental Learning Area Wetland Habitat Restoration

Permanent Easement

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H. Accomplishment Time Table Using the headings below, include a clear statement of how much of what is being accomplished and when. Attach a map showing where accomplishments are anticipated. Accomplishments should clearly restore, enhance or protect forests, wetlands, prairies and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.

Milestone	Date	Measure
North restoration		
U.S. FWS staff topographic survey	2010	12 acres
Excavation, soil replenishment for wetland restoration	2010	12 acres
Site survey for contouring	2010	12 acres
Seeding	2011	12 acres
Weed management	2012	12 acres
Observation blinds erected	2012	1 on site
Interpretive signage placed	2012	1 on site
South enhancement		
Flag firebreak for brushing	2010	40 acre perimeter
Debris pile marked and removed	2010	10 acres
Firebreak established	2010	40 acre perimeter
Prescribed burns	2011, 2012	40 acre
Observation blinds erected	2012	2 on site
Interpretive signage placed	2012	1 on site

I. Relationship to Your Current Budget

N/A – this funding will provide the impetus for this project.

J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?

School maintenance staff will periodically mow the firebreak on the south wetland enhancement. Prescribed burns will be applied as needed to suppress the growth of woody vegetation. If assistance is needed to conduct the burns, the local volunteer fire departments and DNR staff will be asked to incorporate this site into their spring training regimen. The wetland restoration will be self-maintaining once it establishes successfully. Monitoring for noxious weeds will be conducted by the high school science classes. The school maintenance staff will work with the County Weed Inspector to treat as necessary. The School Forest Committee members and other volunteer organizations have committed to long-term maintenance of this project.

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form