

Program Title: Green Corridor Legacy Program

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

Program Title: Green Corridor Legacy Program – Phase II: Creating a Legacy of Habitat Connectivity, Viability, and Public Access within the Mid- Minnesota River Watershed

Date: November 2, 2009

Requesting Organization: Redwood Area Communities Foundation dba Green Corridor Inc.

Manager's Name: Bradley H. Cobb

Title: Program Manager – Green Corridor Inc

Mailing Address: 200 S. Mill St., Redwood Falls MN 56283

Telephone: 320- 493- 4695

Fax: 507- 637- 4082

E-Mail: 1231tlc@charter.net

Web Site: .radc.org

Fiscal Manager: Redwood Area Communities Foundation dba Green Corridor Inc.

Contact: Patricia Dingels

Title: Redwood Area Communities Foundation – Executive Director

Mailing Address: 200 S. Mill St., Redwood Falls MN 56283

Telephone: 507- 637- 4004

Fax: 507- 637- 4082

E-Mail: @redwoodfalls.org

Web Site: www.radc.org

	Council Funding Request	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
Funds Requested (\$000s)	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$4,165,835	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000

A. Summary The Green Corridor Legacy Program – Phase II would be a continuation of the Phase I FY2010 appropriations by LSOHC. The Green Corridor Legacy Program fiscal agent is the Redwood Area Communities Foundation (RACF) dba Green Corridor Inc with oversight/management responsibilities by the Green Corridor Inc. Board of Directors. RACF incorporates over 20 non-profit foundations/organizations. Financial Audit reports are available

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upon request. The Green Corridor Legacy Program Phase II has **two (2) primary objectives or accomplishments**;

Accomplishment #1) The Green Corridor Legacy Program will be to protect and restore/enhance high quality fish, game, and wildlife habitats by developing new and/or expansions of MN DNR Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and/or Aquatic Management Areas (AMA) in the Program area. The proposed fee title acquisitions will be considered from a priority list of properties based on several key factors of which show the most urgent need. All properties will be acquired from willing and supportive landowners. All projects have the support of the local DNR office for acceptance into the WMA/AMA inventory system.

Accomplishment #2) The Green Corridor Legacy Program will develop propagation of regionally adapted prairie plant seeds for use in future habitat restoration and/or enhancement projects on state owned WMA , AMA, and/or SNA properties. The development of this program objective is in partnership/contract with the University of Minnesota Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC) and the DNR.

B. Background Information

1. What is the problem or opportunity being addressed? This program incorporates the basic concepts of sustainability and ecosystem management. Minnesota has lost 99% of the original prairie and has seen dramatic declines in grassland dependent wildlife. Examples of the species showing the greatest conservation need in the Program area; the American Badger, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Bobolink to name just a few. Traditional game species are also affected by the decline in habitat such as pheasants, deer, wild turkey, and a variety of dabbling ducks which are associated to prairie wetland complexes.

Publicly owned natural resource infrastructure (WMA, AMA, SNA, parks/trails, waterways) invigorates local and regional economies by providing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities supported by hunting, fishing, wildlife observation areas, and other forms of outdoor recreation. New business concepts are likely to arise as a direct result of the recreational and tourism opportunities that will be advanced by this Green Corridor Legacy Program.

The Glacial River Warren created the Minnesota River Valley as it drained Lake Agassiz 10,000+ years ago. The bluff to bluff wall of water carved out one of Minnesota's most scenic landscapes, creating unique geological features, and unique plant communities along the valley and its primary tributaries.

Efforts to restore, protect, and enhance our wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife are timely as escalating development pressures threaten remaining natural lands and water resources on both public and private lands. The Green Corridor Legacy Program approach will be based on sound science concepts of plan development, setting conservation priorities, developing short and long term strategies to achieve conservation priorities, implement the strategies, and then continue monitoring the outcomes. All of these concepts and practices will follow existing state wildlife and conservation plans and natural resource management practices in conjunction with agency partners.

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The primary work area of the Green Corridor Legacy Program will be Redwood, Renville, Yellow Medicine, Chippewa, Brown, Nicollet, Murray, Lyon, and Cottonwood Counties along the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Creating new and connecting existing fragments of habitat along and near the Minnesota River and tributaries in the Program area will generate an ecological synergism that will allow game, wildlife, and aquatic species to flourish, while creating multiple recreational opportunities and improving public access through a series (phases) of funded activities within the nine (9) county Program area. This appropriation request will be spent in four (4) of the nine (9) counties in the Program Area – Brown, Cottonwood, Redwood, and Renville. Future Program Phases and/or appropriations will include projects in the other counties within the Program area.

This Program is directly consistent with the uses of the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as specified in Article XI of the Minnesota Constitution and Minnesota Statute 97A.056: to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife. Furthermore, it will produce multiple conservation benefits across a large targeted and planned geographic area.

2. What action will be taken? Phase II of this Program will protect 840 acres of land by acquiring fee title to these properties. Of these 840 acres of fee titled properties 400 acres will be restored by planting native prairie plants. The Program will also propagate regional adapted native prairie plants in partnership with the U of M Southwest Research and Outreach Center and the MN DNR to be used on future restoration and/or enhancement projects on public lands like WMA/AMA/SNA.

3. Who will take action and when? Accomplishment 1) The protection through fee title acquisition of 840 acres of land will be accomplished by the Green Corridor Inc., and facilitated by the Program Manager following established protocol and practices of the State of MN and DNR. Properties will be transferred to the DNR and developed as WMA/AMA with the intention of this activity to be completed by June 30, 2011. We then anticipate the completion of the restoration of 400 acres by the following growing season in 2012. **Accomplishment 2)** The propagation of regional adapted prairie seeds will be accomplished under partnership/contract agreements between Green Corridor Inc and the U of M SWROC with initial plot development completed by June 30, 2012.

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

The Green Corridor Legacy Program focuses on preserving and restoring natural resources infrastructures while emphasizing habitat connectivity (corridors), viability, and public access to these habitats. Several SWCD's in the Green Corridor Program area are planning future Clean Water Legacy Fund program proposals and Green Corridor Inc will be participating in those planning discussions. Green Corridor Inc. is also helping to coordinate Program area submissions to the Outdoor Heritage Fund – Conservation Legacy Program (small grants) with our conservation group partners like the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Minnesota Waterfowl Association, National Wild Turkey

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Federation, and Pheasants Forever. Many other regional initiatives are currently being planned that are in line with Parks & Trails and Arts & Cultural Legacy Funds.

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

The Granite Prairie WMA project has been ranked as our highest priority. This 180 acre acquisition will protect approximately 12 acres of remnant – high quality native prairie. These prairie remnants are remaining because of the surface exposed granite layers. Also present in this tract are; hardwood forest, a shallow lake, over one (1) mile (5,700 ft) of MN River shore land, excellent game and wildlife populations, and has one of the most productive fishing locations along this stretch of the Minnesota River. Also located directly south of this tract on the south side of the Minnesota River in Redwood County is the Mann's Lake WMA.

Of the proposed tracts for consideration, Portions of the Badger Track, Granite Prairie, Whispering Ridge, Cold Spring, and Charlestown properties will be restored into 400 acres of prairie with diverse plant species – for some of these tracts there already exists some high quality habitat that does not need restoration or enhancement practices.. Currently these tracts would be considered marginal farmlands which are currently in row crops, non cropland, and/or the federal CRP program and would eventually create excellent habitat corridor complexes and provide future expansion opportunities once restoration is completed.

The Whispering Ridge AMA addition will be an expansion of the newly developed 182 acre AMA which was funded by the Green Corridor LCCMR appropriation. The Sanborn WMA is a large unit at 160 acres that we be protected and is current established in a high quality native prairie under the federal CRP program. This tract also has the potential to expand future WMA corridor complex expansions. There is a very high likelihood that this landowner would convert this tract back into croplands once the CRP contract expires. And finally, the Cold Spring WMA addition would protect and provide public access to significant Minnesota River bluff land which has very good concentrations of several game species – deer and wild turkey. This tract also expands the Cold Spring WMA corridor complex.

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

 X YES NO
If not, how will you finance completion?

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

Initial restoration and development costs for these new WMA/AMA are included in this appropriation. Also because these tracts are in proximity to other DNR properties will help keep maintenance costs less than average due to shared resources. The DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife will manage these properties by their area staff and they will perform routine inspections and maintenance activities funded through their traditional sources

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like the Game & Fish Fund. Periodic enhancements or improvements by the DNR will be funded by special funding requests.

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

Accomplishment 1) Protection of 840 acres will be accomplished by fee title acquisition of lands from willing and supportive landowners and developed as WMA's and AMA's which are open to public use for the proposes of hunting, fishing, trapping, and other compatible uses. The restoration of 400 acres of these acquired lands will be accomplished by planting native prairie plant species to restore the vegetative cover to these newly acquired properties that were previously converted into marginal farmlands.

Accomplishment 2) The propagation of regional adapted prairie plant seeds will be used to restore and/or enhance future habitat projects on state owned properties like WMA and/or AMA which will result in multiple natural resource and wildlife benefits.

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

☒ **YES**

☐ **NO**

If yes briefly describe the kind of protection. Both Accomplishments will be on state owned WMA and/or AMA.

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

Transparency, shared information, and uses of OHF dollars will be accomplished by following the approved Accomplishment Plans and established LSOHC Guidelines and reporting requirements. Press releases and web-based products (e.g, commitment to the LCC Accomplishment Website) will be used to provide public and/or stakeholder notification of Program goals, objectives, and, accomplishments. The Green Corridor Team will continue our past successes by engaging our partners, local units of governments, government agencies, and regional state and federal legislators of Program developments and accomplishments.

11. When do you expect to see these habitat changes? June 30, 2012.

12. Why will this strategy work? Green Corridor Legacy Program has received letters of support from the DNR Regional office and Redwood County Board of Commissioners. Similar letters of support are being requested from other local units of government across the Program area. We feel by engaging local and regional decision makers in all aspects of Program development provides open and transparent dialog with all stakeholders. These stakeholders then become part of the Program development process. This strategy in many ways sets the Green Corridor Legacy Program apart because we see the value in these cooperative agreements and embrace these opportunities for regional/community involvement with all stakeholders.

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

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The Green Corridor Legacy Program will conform to county land use recreational plans. Decision or policy makers in local, regional, or state government and/or government agencies as well as special interest groups could have **positive or negative** effects on Program development. The negative effects can be mitigated and the positive effects can be enhanced with proper, timely, and transparent engagement with these entities and special interest groups.

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

_____ **YES**

_____ **X** _____ **NO**

Once appropriations have been approved and signed purchase agreements obtained is normally when local governments are notified of the pending acquisition. Past history by the Green Corridor Legacy Program has demonstrated to local county governments our commitment to following county recreational land use plans. The conversion of marginal farmland into conservation and/or outdoor recreational acres within riparian areas along the river corridors is consistent with the respective comprehensive plans by many counties in the Green Corridor Legacy Program area. Several county boards have been proactive with their support of similar acquisitions by the Green Corridor Legacy Program and we will be working with other counties in the Program area to secure similar support.

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

_____ **X** _____ **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?

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15 Years

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

- ☐ 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?

☒ **YES** ☐ **NO**

If yes, please explain. All of the current landowners are willing and supportive of the goals and mission of the Green Corridor Legacy Program but have expressed concern that if the Green Corridor Legacy Program goes unfunded that they will need to then sell these properties on the open market for commercial or private development purposes. Also, several of the tracts have significant remnant prairie, granite outcroppings, gravel/sand mining potential, shallow lakes and associated wetlands, river shore land, and timber that could be lost to commercial operations or private development if not protected now.

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

☒ **YES** ☐ **NO**

If Yes, list the names of the AMAs, WMAs and/or SNAs and the acres to be restored and/or enhanced. Accomplishment #2 – Propagation of regional native prairie seeds once plot has been established and harvested these seeds will be used on both new and existing state-owned WMA/AMA/SNA restoration and enhancement projects.

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** ☐ **NO**

If yes explain the model briefly. The USFWS – SHC model outlines several key elements; Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation which the Green Corridor Legacy Program has been using as a basis for program development. The Green

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Corridor Legacy Program will continue to use existing state-wide wildlife conservation and strategic plans in partnership with our local and regional natural resource managers and conservation professionals to best achieve desired outcomes. These plans were developed through the most currently available science and the professional expertise of a broad range of wildlife professionals. These plans, along with use of GIS technology, will be used to identify potential projects based on existing and potential habitat resources in the program area. This will allow for selection of acquisition tracts that maximize population responses for both game and nongame wildlife.

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

Habitat fragmentation and loss has been linked to population declines in most species of greatest conservation need and many game species. This program will create continuous corridors of habitat through which wildlife populations can disperse while also creating block habitats (e.g. 4-9 square mile grassland/wetland complexes and Type 1 Grassland Bird Conservation Areas as defined by the USFWS office in Fergus Falls) within these corridors to maximize recruitment of game and nongame wildlife species. As scientific research continues to improve our understanding of the habitat needs of wildlife species we will continue to adjust our strategy as necessary. The Green Corridor Legacy Program will continue to use the scientific framework and analysis as the model for our Program development.

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

Green Corridor Inc. received a LCCMR grant in FY2008 to develop a Conservation Plan to use as a tool for evaluating Program priorities. This plan will be completed by June 2010. It is our intention to use this plan when appropriate for future project evaluations. Until this plan is finalized we will continue to use the following scoring/priority methods in cooperation with area DNR managers:

Wildlife/Fisheries Related Recreation

1. Does the property offer at least fair opportunity for:

Deer hunting	5 points
Wild Turkey hunting	5 points
Pheasant hunting	5 points
Waterfowl hunting	5 points
Trapping and/or small game hunting	5 points
Shore Fishing	5 points

2. Does the property offer viewing opportunities for:

Raptors (e.g. bald eagles)	2 points
Wetland birds	2 points
Grassland Birds	2 points
Forest Birds	2 points

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Water Resource Protection

1. Does the property contain frontage on the Minnesota River? 10 points
2. Does the property have frontage on a tributary of the MN River? 10 points
3. Does the property contain wetlands/shallow lakes? 10 points
4. Does the property contain springs or seeps? 5 points

Biological Diversity Protection

1. Does the property contain or offer habitat to Federal or State listed species of conservation concern (e.g. endangered, threatened, special concern)? 15 points
2. Does the property contain habitat listed by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS)? 15 points
3. Does the property contain natural habitat not listed by MCBS? 5 points
4. Does the property buffer other protected conservation land (e.g. RIM, WMA) 5 points
5. Does the property have good potential for restoration/enhancement of wetland, prairie, riparian forest, or oak savanna? 5 points

Major or Primary Considerations

1. Urgency and one time opportunities if not acted upon: 15 points
2. Conforms to strategies/outcomes in various conservation plans: 15 points

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

The Green Corridor Legacy Program in consultation with area DNR managers will ensure program activities conform to the various state conservation and resources plan objectives and outcomes.

Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan identifies habitat loss and degradation as the number one driver of change for wildlife in Minnesota and further states that the prairie regions have experienced the greatest amount of habitat loss of any region.

Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for species in greatest conservation need has identified significant loss and degradation of habitat as the number one management challenge and one of the primary strategies is to provide protection through selective acquisition of key habitats in the prairie regions.

Minnesota's Long Range Duck Recovery Plan lists the objective of restoring a breeding population of one (1) million ducks by 2056. The primary strategy to reach this objective is the protection and restoration of two (2) million acres of habitat of which 70% will be grassland habitat in the prairie eco-region.

Minnesota's Long Range Plan for the Ring-neck Pheasant lists the objective of increasing pheasant populations to 1.8 million birds. To accomplish this objective the plan calls for an additional 21,000 acres of grasslands to be protected through acquisitions of WMA's.

Citizens report Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition – The Next 50 Years recommends acquisition goals of an additional 494,000 in the prairie and transitional region over the next 50 years.

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D. Budget

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$48,750	\$16,250	
Contracts	\$39,342	\$40,815	
U of M Field Staff			
Equipment/Tools/Supplies	\$8,889	\$6,789	
Native Seed Propagation by the U of M.			
Fee Acquisition	\$3,793,500	\$0	
Easement Acquisition	N/A		
Easement Stewardship	N/A		
Professional Services – Fiscal Agent Oversight	\$15,000	\$5,000	
DNR Services –Title Transfer Documentation	\$9,000	\$0	
Travel	\$1,650	\$850	
Additional Budget Items			
Habitat Restoration on New WMA/AMA	\$0	\$162,000	
Initial WMA/AMA Development Costs to the DNR (signs, parking, misc)	\$0	\$18,000	
TOTAL	\$3,916,131	\$249,704	

Budget Summary: The Personal section is for Program Manager expenses directly related to the accomplishments of this Program appropriation. Contract and Equipment section is the U of M budget items for Accomplishment #2 - the regional native prairie seed propagation project. The Professional Services is for the Executive Director and Fiscal Agent expenses – staff,

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insurance, auditing services, and legal support – to facilitate this entire appropriation and DNR Professional Services directly related to the fee title acquisitions for title review, transfer, and preparation of closing documents. Travel Budget is associated to Program Manager activities to carry out accomplishments. The Additional Budget Item is for the restoration (preferably by private contractors approved by the DNR) of the new acres being acquired with this appropriation and initial WMA/AMA development costs (e.g signage, parking lot, and fencing) to the DNR.

E. Personnel Details

Title	Name	Amount.
Program Manager	Bradley H. Cobb	\$65,000
RACF Exec. Director	Patricia Dingels	\$20,000
U of M Research/Oversight Fellow		\$33,476
U of M Senior Plot Tech		\$36,220
Summer Tech (Student)		\$10,443

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
Renville Cty PF	\$10,000		
TOTAL	\$10,000		

Leverage Comments: The Green Corridor Legacy Program will continue to seek regional financial support of this program once appropriations have been recommended by the LSOHC. Several other local wildlife conservation groups have pending commitments for these Program activity/accomplishments.

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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 Accomplish- ments	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		400 acres of marginal cropland to native prairie		
Protect		840 acres in fee title acquisitions		
Enhance		200-300 acres planted w/regional propagated prairie seeds starting 2013		

Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		400 acres		
Protect		840 acres		
Enhance		200-300 acres		

Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		\$162,000		
Protect		\$3,793,500		
Enhance		\$95,817		

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Table 4 Leverage \$	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect		\$10,000		
Enhance				

Table 5 Acquisition Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability		840 acres		
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability				
Permanent Easement				

H. Accomplishment Time Table The Green Corridor Legacy Program recognizes that there are variables not under our control that may delay or impact Milestone Accomplishments such as; acquisition (sellers, processes, title issues, etc) and restoration (e.g. weather and timing of acquisitions) projects.

Milestone	Date	Measure
Accomplishment #1 Acquisition/Restoration		
Complete final landowner/DNR documentations	July 2010	6 projects – 840 acres
Contract appraisals ordered	August 2010	6 projects – 840 acres
Purchase Agreements	Nov. 2010	6 projects – 840 acres
Closing/Title Transfer to State/DNR	Mar/Apr 2011	6 projects – 840 acres
Complete restoration (contract and/or DNR)	June 2012	5 projects – 400 acres

Milestone	Date	Measure
Accomplishment #2 Local Native Prairie Seed Propagation		
Collection of regional native seeds 24 varieties/types	Summer/Fall 2010	14 oz.
Propagate/grown in U of M greenhouse	Nov. 2010	20,250 pods
Transplant pods -Mono cultural planting	Spring 2011	20,250 pods
Harvest established transplanted seeds	On-going 2012	3,885 oz
Restoration/enhancement projects using seeds on public lands	On-going 2013	200-300 acres

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I. Relationship to Your Current Budget

Current Fiscal Year Budget: \$2,617,000

Source of Funding	Amount	Percentage to Budget
LCCMR FY2008-2010	\$1,000,000	38%
LSOHC FY2010	\$1,617,000	62%

Un-spent/un-programmed State Dollars

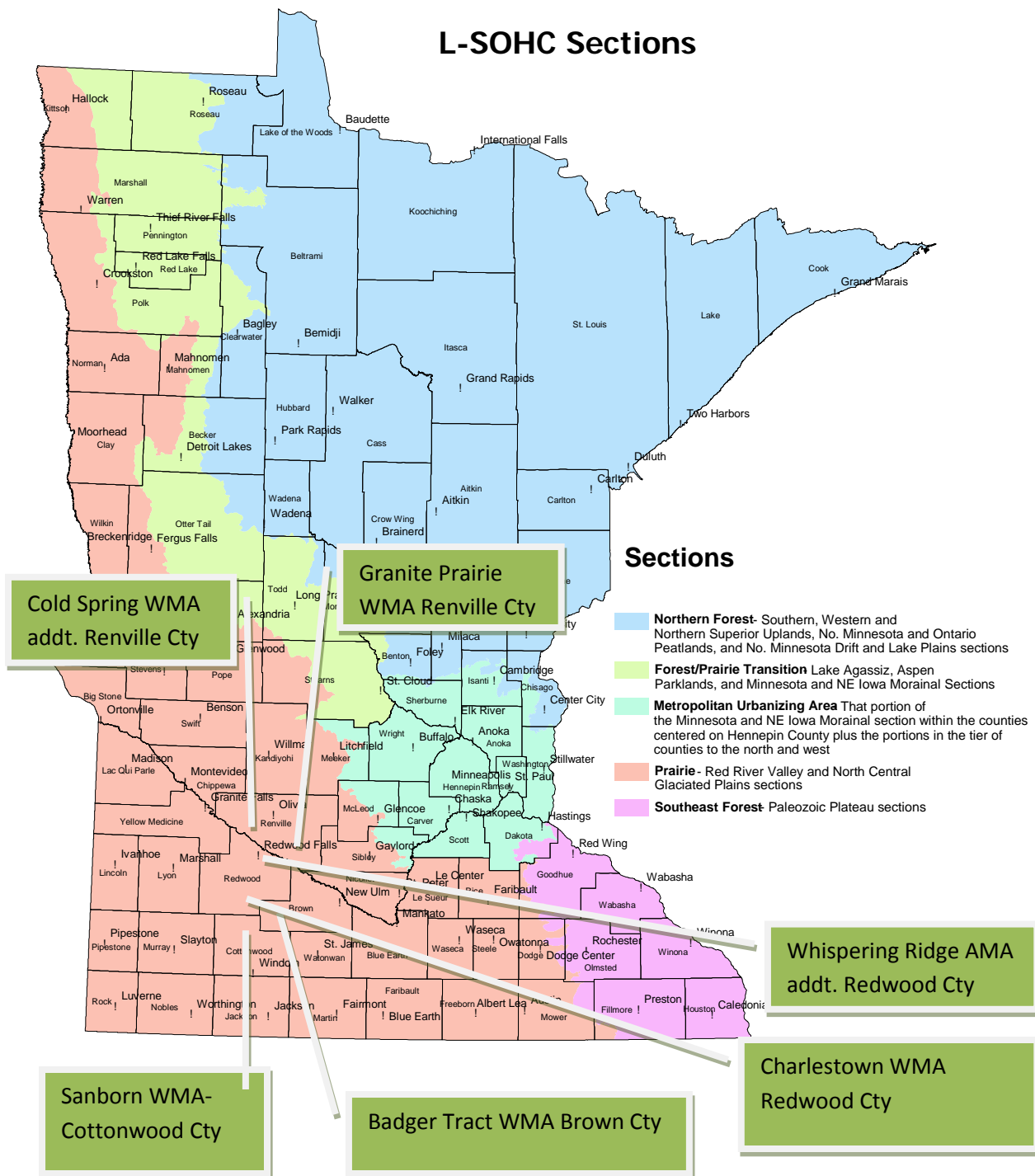
LCCMR FY2008-2010	\$190,000 (approx.)
LSOHC FY2010	\$1,617,000 (final accomplishment June 2011)

J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained? First, initial site restoration and development (signage, parking lots, fencing) will be accomplished by this appropriation. The DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife will then permanently manage these properties. As mentioned in Section B #7 routine maintenance will be managed by area DNR staff funded by their traditional sources like the Game & Fish Fund. Periodic enhancements or improvements will be funded by special funding requests. The DNR requires management plans for each project which identify periodic inspections and continuing management of the property site. These management practices include such things as; prescribed fire, weed control, and invasive tree removal. Regional partners will also support these management activities/practices by applying for state funding/grants for maintenance as needed.

K. Attach a list of your projects listing their county location and edit the map of Minnesota on the next page to show each project as a symbol.

Proposed Project Name	County	Acres
Granite Prairie WMA	Renville	180
Badger Tract WMA	Brown	220
Whispering Ridge AMA addt.	Redwood	40
Cold Spring WMA addt.	Renville	80
Sanborn WMA	Cottonwood	160
Charlestown WMA	Redwood	160

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