

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

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

Program or Project Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

Date: November 2, 2009

Manager's Name: Kay Clark
Title: Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance [GBERBA] Coordinator
Mailing Address: 339 Street, Windom, MN 56101
Telephone: 507.831.1153 x 3
Fax: 507.831.2928
E-Mail: .clark@windomnet
Web Site: .gberba [available starting January 1, 2010]

| | Council Funding Request | Out-Year Projections of Needs | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Funds Requested (\$000s) | FY 2011 | FY 2012 | FY 2013 | FY 2014 |
| Outdoor Heritage Fund | \$1,000 | \$2,000 | \$2,000 | \$2,000 |

A. Summary

Our program will establish approximately 200 acres of native grasses or woody plants [where appropriate] on high priority lands for wildlife, currently in annual tillage, in the Greater Blue Earth River Watershed in south central Minnesota that protect, restore and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife while allowing periodic harvest.

B. Background Information

What is the problem or opportunity being addressed?

South central Minnesota contains some of the most productive soils in the world which has led to having some of the most intense row cropping within the state. The result is minimal remaining quality habitat for a variety of prairie plant and animal species. Today, there are several 'drivers' coming together that can help accomplish our goals to protect, restore and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife especially in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin area in southern Minnesota. These drivers include:

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

- Interest and growth in perennial based renewable energy
- TMDL [Total Maximum Daily Loads] water quality improvement criteria, especially phosphorous, nitrogen, sediment, flow and pathogen reductions
- Hypoxia [low oxygen] in the Gulf of Mexico significantly impacted by high nitrogen loading and lack of water storage throughout the corn belt
- Climate change, reduction of greenhouse gases and carbon sequestration
- Over 20,000 acres of expiring CRP [Conservation Reserve Program] in the region
- Landowner interest in restoring native prairie, wetland and riparian landscapes

This funding request has four main goals:

- 1) Convert targeted lands from annual tillage to native perennials;
- 2) Establish buffer areas favorable to wildlife;
- 3) Retain expiring CRP and RIM in perennial plantings; and
- 4) Allow a periodic harvest for site management and bio-based industries.

Adding native perennials to rural landscapes could support renewable energy and bio-based industries while also providing multiple ecological services such as wildlife and pollinator habitat enhancement, carbon sequestration, sediment, nitrogen and phosphorous reductions, water storage and recharge for shallow aquifers. Planned bioenergy facilities alone will utilize at least 30,000 acres of perennial feedstocks in south central Minnesota. This proposal would only provide a small percentage of the total tonnage needed. The priority for this funding would be to restore, protect and enhance wildlife habitat and allow a periodic harvest following habitat friendly management schemes.

What action will be taken?

The GBERBA staff will coordinate with their eighteen member counties and SWCD's and other conservation partners in the watershed to develop and implement a cohesive, efficient program to establish these conservation easements with continuity across the watershed. In addition, GBERBA will handle all accounting, tracking and reporting for the project. GBERBA members will work with conservation groups, state and federal partners to identify priority sites and meet with those landowners for enrollment. SWCD staff will utilize a methodology similar to what was used with the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program [CREP] to identify targeted sites and landowner contact with wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement value.

Who will take action and when?

The project will be coordinated by GBERBA and their eighteen member counties and SWCD's. Members include the counties of Cottonwood, Jackson, Watonwan, Martin, Faribault, Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Freeborn and Waseca and the SWCD's of Cottonwood,

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

Jackson, Watonwan, Martin, Faribault, Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Freeborn and Waseca counties, all in the Greater Blue Earth watershed. GBERBA member staff are familiar with the landscape and landowners in their jurisdiction. As soon as it is known the project has been selected for funding, agreements and marketing materials will be developed and priority potential wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement sites can be identified using a variety of tools already established. Once grant agreements are complete GBERBA and their members will be ready to implement the program and get the sites established.

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

GBERBA is willing to work with other conservation partners in the region to avoid duplication, improve implementation and increase the level and quality of conservation on the land.

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

This proposal will establish, restore, protect or enhance approximately 200 acres of wildlife habitat in south central Minnesota. Under a management plan and following NRCS guidance for harvest described in NRCS document *“Soil Quality Enhancement Activity- SQL06- Conversion of cropped land to grass-based agriculture for biomass or forage production and wildlife habitat”*, the acres will be allowed to have limited harvest. Two enrollment options will be available:

1] New wildlife habitat will be established from lands currently in annual tillage and become protected by a perpetual conservation easement.

2] Land currently enrolled in CRP or RIM and expiring in the next five years will be protected by a perpetual conservation easement. The permanent conservation easement will begin when the CRP or RIM contract expires.

In addition, these acres will provide multiple ecological services such as pollinator habitat enhancement, carbon sequestration, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, sediment, nitrogen and phosphorous reductions, water storage and recharge for shallow aquifers.

When do you expect to see these habitat changes?

Within 3 months of the acres being established we expect to observe beneficial habitat changes.

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

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

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

How will you pay for the maintenance of the accomplishments?

All acres enrolled will be under a conservation easement [RIM] with ownership retained by the landowner. Under the easement agreement, the landowner will be required to maintain the enrolled acres. In addition, these acres will be allowed to be periodically harvested for bio-based industry use. These annual or less harvests will help to minimize noxious weeds and invasive trees within the plantings.

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

This proposal will restore or protect approximately 200 acres. Exact number of acres will vary slightly depending on exact location of sites and the RIM [Reinvest in Minnesota] rate for that township.

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

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

Through this effort a permanent conservation easement, through the BWSR RIM process, will be acquired for the parcel.

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

GBERBA is a Joint Powers Organization of eighteen Counties and SWCD's in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin. As a local government organization, they are required to meet state requirements ensuring transparency, public openness and accountability to the public. A variety of methods have been used and are available to them including press releases, field days, reporting and posting information on the websites of the member counties and SWCD's. In addition, GBERBA is in the process of developing their own website [www.gberba.org] and anticipate that to be online by the end of 2009.

Why will this strategy work?

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

GBERBA and their member SWCD's have a long history of successful implementation of conservation practices. Each SWCD has an established rapport with landowners in their county and the areas where the location of these conservation easements will have the most value. They also have established rapport with other conservation partners in their area to ensure the State is getting significant value for their investment and the habitat enhancement is exceptional.

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

We do not anticipate any one or group working against this strategy.

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

N/A _____ **YES** _____ **NO**

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

N/A _____ **YES** _____ **NO**

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

MAYBE _____ **YES** _____ **NO**

If Yes what kind of use?

The enrolling landowner will be able to make a YES/NO decision if the conservation easement will be open for public use at the time they sign the agreement.

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?

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

The permanent conservation easements enrolled through this proposal will follow MS2009, Chapter 103F.515, specifically the Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve Program.

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

10 Years, dependent on funding

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

- 1. 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

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

☒ **YES** ☐ **NO**

If yes, please explain.

Due to the intense row crop production in south central Minnesota, any area that can be converted or protected has value as habitat. We are targeting these acres so they adjoin an existing native area to add value for more species. In the current economy, these marginal areas are threatened by increased agricultural production pressures.

- 3. 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.

- 4. 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.

Brett Richardson, DNR – Metro Office, developed the Greater Blue Earth Ecological Analysis Map and used modeling to determine priority areas to establish wildlife corridors that connect existing patches of grasses that met a minimum size and factored in other landscape features such as proximity to surface waters and soil types. This methodology followed work Mr. Richardson had developed to do an ecological analysis of the Metro area for DNR.

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

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

Numerous scientific studies identify a decline in wildlife numbers and diversity from areas with a high percentage of the landscape in annual tillage. Conversations with Todd Arnold, Wildlife Biologist at the University of Minnesota, have indicated that expanding native plantings in agricultural regions can significantly enhance the biological diversity of numerous wildlife species.

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

Specific sites will be identified by GBERBA and local SWCD Staff in collaboration with local conservation partners. Sites will be selected with quality wildlife habitat as the number one priority outcome. We will use mapping tools identifying priority habitat restoration sites as a guide to locating sites. Each restoration site selected will adjoin an existing native area and be a conversion from annual row cropping to native species. Each protection or enhanced site, which will be sites of expiring CRP or RIM, will be prioritized by considering which would result in the highest quality habitat.

All sites will be located in one of the GBERBA member Counties/ SWCDs which are Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, Le Sueur, Martin, Waseca or Watonwan.

Maps showing priority sites include:

- **Greater Blue Earth River Ecological Analysis** developed by Bart Richardson, DNR and Lansing Shepard, Paula Westmoreland of From the Ground Up and Linda Meschke, Rural Advantage and several other collaborators within south central Minnesota.
- **MN DNR Area IV Conservation Focus Area** developed in collaboration by the various divisions of DNR in Region IV.
- **DNR Working Lands Initiative**

In addition the following factors will be followed:

- ✓ No site will be located in an area with potential for aggregate mining including those areas identified, but not limited to, DNR mapping and Blue Earth County's Aggregate Sites Map.
- ✓ Native plant species only, preference for local eco-types [diverse mixes- 20 species or more- follow state guidelines]
- ✓ Adjoin existing habitat areas
- ✓ Allows an annual harvest for bioenergy [follow NRCS, BWSR or other guidance], seed collection or haying.
- ✓ Perpetual Easements [through the BWSR RIM program process]
- ✓ Payment based on RIM Rate for the township the site is located in
- ✓ Marginal lands in annual tillage converted to perennials
- ✓ Buffer areas with wildlife favorable widths [66 to 120 feet or more]
- ✓ Minimum size will be five acres.

L-SOHC Request for Funding Form

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

The following will be used for weighing each project sight for selection:

| Criteria | Weight |
|--|---------------|
| High wildlife quality following restoration, protection or enhancement | 50% |
| Use of Local Eco-type Native Species | 30% |
| Size | 20% |

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

This proposal is consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan.

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

D. Budget

| Budget Item | Fiscal Year 11 | Fiscal Year 12 | Fiscal Year 13 |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Personnel | | | |
| Contracts | | | |
| Equipment/Tools/Supplies | | | |
| Fee Acquisition | | | |
| Easement Acquisition | \$725,000 | \$1,450,000 | \$1,450,000 |
| Easement Stewardship | \$100,000 | \$200,000 | \$200,000 |
| Establishment Costs [Not to exceed \$500/acre] | | | |
| Professional Services: | | | |
| BWSR \$2,000/ easement | \$70,000 | \$140,000 | \$140,000 |
| GBERBA \$750/ easement | \$26,250 | \$ 52,500 | \$ 52,500 |
| SWCD \$2,250/ easement | \$78,750 | \$157,500 | \$157,500 |
| Travel | | | |
| Additional Budget Items | | | |
| TOTAL | \$1,000,000 | \$2,000,000 | \$2,000,000 |

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. |
|-------|------|---------|
|-------|------|---------|

In order to delivery this program with integrity, transparency and accountability we will be following the RIM process through BWSR, GBERBA and local SWCD's. We anticipate with these funds we will be able to protect, restore or enhance 200 acres with a minimum size of 5 acres per site. We estimate this will be approximately 35 easements. **Per easement**, we have budgeted \$2,000 for BWSR [state accounting and tracking]; \$750 for GBERBA [regional coordination, accounting, reporting and transparency]; and \$2,250 for the local SWCD where the easement is located [technical assistance, completing landowner agreements and proper documentation for each site].

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

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 |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Blue Earth SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3000 |
| Cottonwood SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Faribault SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Freeborn SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Jackson SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Le Sueur SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Martin SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Waseca SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| Watonwan SWCD | \$3,000 | \$3,000 | \$3,000 |
| TOTAL | \$27,000 | \$27,000 | \$27,000 |

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 Accomplish- ments | Wetlands | Prairies | Forests | Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Restore | | | | <i>125 acres</i> |
| Protect | | | | <i>60 acres</i> |
| Enhance | | | | <i>15 acres</i> |

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

| Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier | Wetlands | Prairies | Forests | Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Restore | | | | <i>125 acres</i> |
| Protect | | | | <i>60 acres</i> |
| Enhance | | | | <i>15 acres</i> |

| Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation | Wetlands | Prairies | Forests | Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Restore | | | | <i>\$620,000</i> |
| Protect | | | | <i>\$300,000</i> |
| Enhance | | | | <i>\$80,000</i> |

| Table 4 Leverage \$ | Wetlands | Prairies | Forests | Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Restore | | | | <i>\$16,740</i> |
| Protect | | | | <i>\$8,100</i> |
| Enhance | | | | <i>\$2,160</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 | | | | |
| Permanent Easement | | | | <i>RIM Permanent Easement \$1,000,000</i> |

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

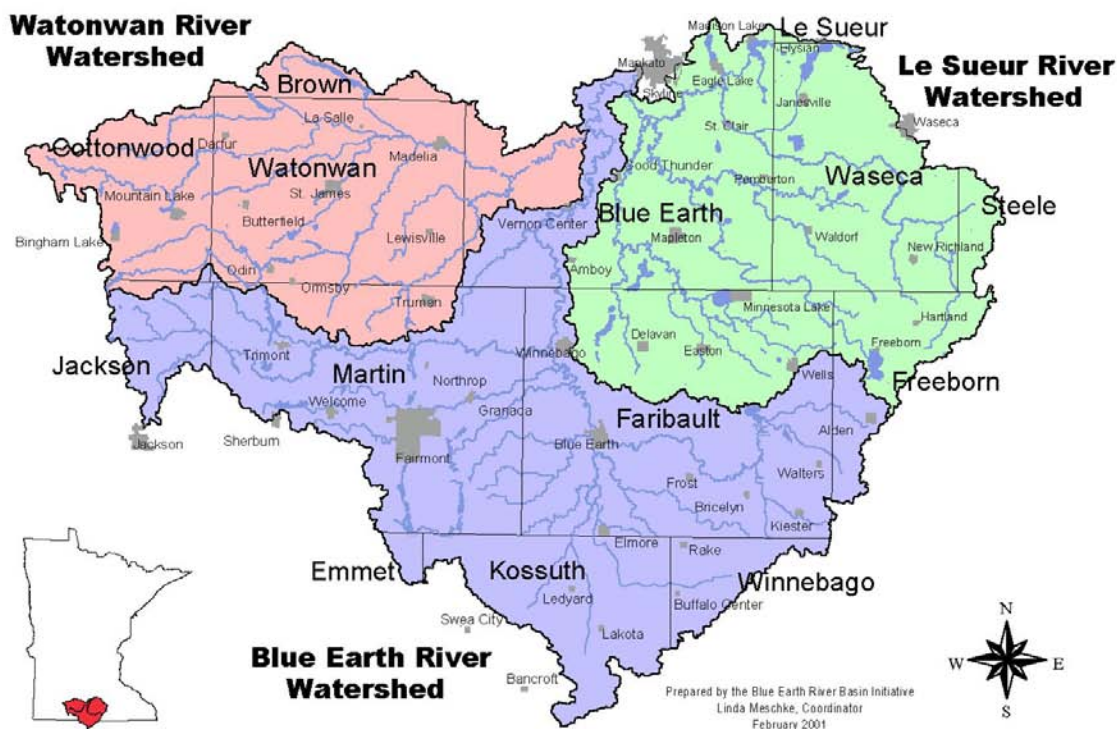
Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

anticipated. Accomplishments should clearly restore, enhance or protect forests, wetlands, prairies and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.

| Milestone | Date | Measure |
|---|--------------|------------|
| Protect, Restore and Enhance an estimated 200 acres within the Greater Blue Earth River Watershed area. | By 6.30.2012 | # of acres |

Note: These will be established under the RIM program. Rates paid will be according to the published RIM rate for permanent easements for cropped land or non cropped [for expiring CRP or RIM]. As these vary from township to township, where the specific easement is located will vary the rate paid and therefore the exact number of easement acres. We estimate we will be able to do 200 acres. These are targeted acres toward areas most beneficial to wildlife habitat.

Greater Blue Earth River Watershed



Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative

I. Relationship to Your Current Budget

If funded this project will be over and above the regular GBERBA budget. Funding this project will allow GBERBA and their members to deliver additional conservation on the land that is specific to restore, protect and enhance habitat in south central Minnesota.

J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?

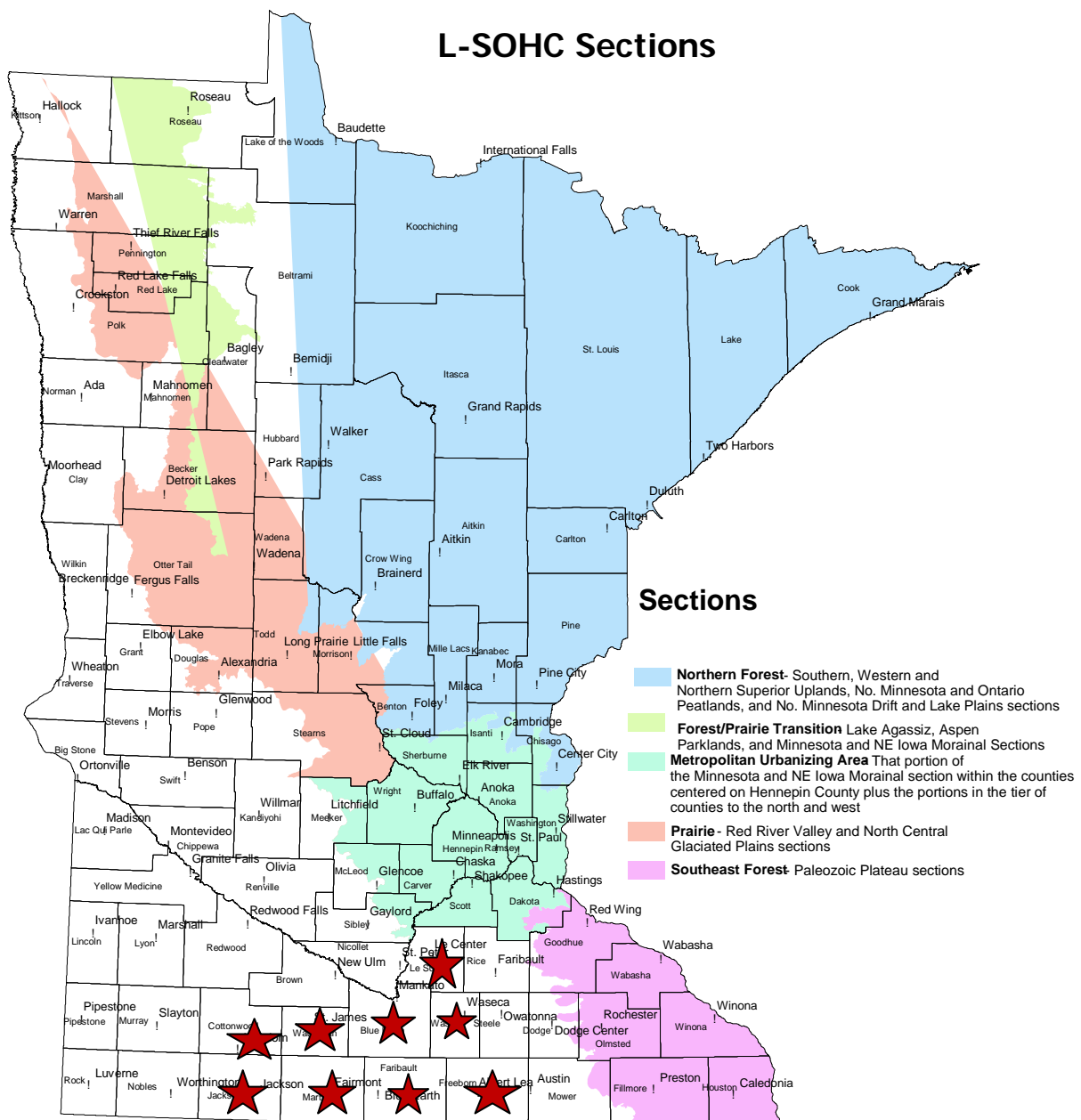
The landowner will be responsible for sustaining the habitat improvements on the parcels. Each easement will have an operation and maintenance plan for the landowner to follow. Each site will have technical assistance in the design provided by the local SWCD staff, Randy Schindle, DNR and other habitat resource professionals from DNR and USFWS in the region as is appropriate to the specific site, location and specific habitat outcomes.

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.

Specific sites will be identified by GBERBA and local SWCD Staff in collaboration with local conservation partners. Sites will be selected with quality wildlife habitat as the priority outcome. We will use mapping tools identifying priority habitat restoration sites as a guide to locating sites. Each restoration site selected will adjoin an existing native area and be a conversion from annual row cropping to native species. Each protection or enhanced site, which will be sites of expiring CRP or RIM, will be prioritized by considering which would result in the highest quality habitat.

All sites will be located in one of the GBERBA member Counties/ SWCDs which are Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, Le Sueur, Martin, Waseca or Watonwan.

Program Title: South Central Wildlife Heritage Initiative



L-SOHC Request for Funding Form