

Program Title:

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

Program or Project Title: #15 RIM for Forest Habitat

Date: October 13, 2009

Manager's Name: Steve Hughes

Title: Aitkin County SWCD District Manager

Mailing Address: 130 Southgate Drive Aitkin, MN 56431

Telephone: (218) 927-6565

Fax: (218) 927-6014

E-Mail: .aitkinswcd@gmail.

Web Site: www.aitkincountyswcd.org

	Council Funding Request	Out-Year Projections of Needs <i>For programs that may want to request OHF funds in future recommendation rounds, complete the columns below. One time requests enter zeros in all 3 fiscal years</i>		
Funds Requested (\$000s)	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	3,300,000	0	0	0

A. Summary

Conservation easements on private land that restrict subdivision and development are needed to protect high priority fish and wildlife habitats in the forested zone of Minnesota. These habitats include:

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1. Unique Riparian forest parcels that provide ruffed grouse and whitetail deer habitat
2. Waterfowl habitat on Wild Rice Lakes

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3. Trout Habitat in Streams

4. Deep high quality lakes that provide game fish habitat for walleyes and northern pike.

This proposal will expand the highly effective Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program to the forested region of the state. RIM has been successful in the agricultural areas of MN for twenty years. Expanding RIM to forested regions will provide a new opportunity to protect these high priority habitats that have not been targeted in the past.

By investing funds in easements on strategic private lands protection of large blocks of adjacent public lands can be completed.

B. Background Information

What is the problem or opportunity being addressed?

Wild rice lakes, trout streams, and deep water Cisco lakes and their adjacent riparian areas are sensitive habitats. Allowing property adjacent to these sensitive resources to be subdivided and developed will result in habitat degradation and loss of public recreation opportunities. An expanded RIM program targeting these habitats can provide the needed protection.

According to a US Forest Service Research Review dated Autumn 2008:

“Twenty percent of America’s family forests are owned by people who are 75 years or older. Their lands (tens of millions of acres of family forests, that is, nonindustrial private forests) will ultimately be passed on to their heirs or

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sold to new owners. These lands are mostly in smaller parcels (less than 200 acres) but the sum total is astonishing...” “What the family forest landowners do with their lands in the next several decades will have a

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substantial effect on all of us here in the Northeast and Midwest. Poor estate planning may force the sale or division of the land, which in turn can lead to subdivision and development. ”

What action will be taken?

A conservation easement program will be established for protection of high priority fish and wildlife habitats in the 15 SWCD areas. The program will follow the well-tested template of the private lands RIM program currently implemented by Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The land remains on the tax rolls as privately owned, working forests. The easement purchases the subdivision and development rights. A payment formula based on a range of 30% to 50% of the average township land values will be used to determine the payment rate for these high value riparian lands. Public access is not a requirement of a landowner enrolling a parcel in this program. It is critical to engage the RIM tool in the protection of high quality northern Minnesota fish and wildlife habitat while the opportunity still exists.

Who will take action and when?

This proposal will provide SWCD's, in cooperation with the BWSR, with resources to offer conservation easements on the highest priority lands as identified by a local screening committee. Easements will be completed for three years with this proposal. These committees will work with available lists of wild rice lakes, trout streams, and deep water cisco lakes and their adjacent riparian areas to select the most critical habitat to be protected

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from subdivision and development. Collectively, the 15 SWCDs involved in this proposal represent about 71% of the forestland in the State of

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Minnesota. Because this proposal funds an easement program using the template of RIM, the infrastructure is largely in place to deliver the program immediately. Some training for SWCD staff in the 15 county area will be required because these SWCD's have not been involved in the current RIM program due to eligibility. Some time will also be required for marketing the program at the SWCD level as these parcels and these landowners have not been eligible in the past.

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

The local steering committee will include state land managers to maximize easement opportunities, enhance public land holdings, and ensure programs are complimentary and not duplicative. One ranking criteria will include proximity to public lands and compatibility with planned management of these lands. Wild Rice lakes provide unique and productive shallow water habitat. Trout streams are highly susceptible to sedimentation and over-heating. Development pressures on the shorelines and land management activities within the watersheds threaten the sustainability of these high value resources. Coldwater fish species (cisco, whitefish, trout and burbot) found in these lakes serve as a high quality forage base for walleye and northern pike.

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

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This proposal seeks to expand RIM for northern Minnesota into priceless wildlife habitat and water quality resources throughout the 15 counties in

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the northern part of the state. Without protection of these important parcels the following threats to the habitat will occur: habitat fragmentation, waterfowl disturbance, wild rice crop disturbance, trout streams will warm up, wildlife travel corridors will be segmented.

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

X YES

Top priority easements will be completed but additional funding will be needed to continue conveying additional easements long term.

How will you pay for the maintenance of the accomplishments?

The annual RIM services funds provide for ongoing easement monitoring and any necessary enforcement.

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

Protection is accomplished by preventing the subdivision and development of high quality wildlife habitat.

For example:

Mallard Lake is one of the top ten wild rice lakes in MN and has 95 percent publicly owned shoreland. The only private land on this outstanding habitat is 60 acres surrounded by public land. Township land values average about \$2,000 per acre. Using the proposed formula the easement payment would be 50% of the township

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value. The public land is already protected from development, the only vulnerable area on this lake is the 60 acres of privately owned land. For \$60,000 we can complete the protection and ensure permanent protection of this priceless waterfowl habitat.

Example 2:

The Midway River is a designated trout stream. The occurrence of temperature spikes exceeding optimal levels for trout is increasing to the point that trout habitat is threatened on some reaches of the river. Land in the Midway River watershed is parcelizing quickly. Completing easements for landowners with riparian corridors would help protect critical parcels from subdivision and development. Follow up with tree plantings in the riparian zones would shade the stream, reduce water temperatures, and further enhance trout habitat.

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

YES

If yes briefly describe the kind of protection.

A permanent conservation easement will be taken on the parcel following the RIM program template. The easement purchases the development rights for the parcel and the land remains on the tax roles. A payment formula based on a range of 30% to 50% of the average township land values will be used to determine the payment rate for these high value riparian lands. The payment rate is set by factors including quality of habitat, easement location, and multiple benefits. These factors will be assessed and payment percentages set by the local steering committee.

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

The current RIM infrastructure will insure transparency for this program expansion. The BWSR maintains program reports including county-by-county statistics, overall statistics, and financial information.

The local steering committee, the BWSR, and the Attorney General's office review the easement documents. All easements and related documents are recorded at the County Recorder's office in the respective County's courthouse.

When do you expect to see these changes?

Protection from subdivision and development will be realized as soon as easements are completed.

Because this proposal funds an easement program using the template of RIM, the infrastructure is in place to deliver the program immediately.

Why will this strategy work?

RIM easements have been extremely successful in the protection and restoration of wetlands in other parts of the state and in the Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) easements near Camp Ripley. Due to the long-standing RIM program success, this expansion into forest habitat has a high likelihood for success.

The program buys easements for development rights for an easement payment of 30 –50% of the average township land value. The land stays on

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the tax roll of the Local Government unit. Habitat protection is provided for a low cost to the public.

The landowner is encouraged to actively manage the land in the easement along with adjacent forestland through the development of a forest stewardship plan. The land is restricted from subdivision and development.

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

State land management and acquisition of adjacent habitats will enhance private easements acquired through this program. Opposition will be minimized through inclusion of land managers and citizens on the local steering committee.

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

_____YES N/A _____NO

This project is not land acquisition, it is the purchase of subdivision and development rights. SWCDs in the 15 county area have been involved in this proposal's development. Local governments are in support of initiatives that encourage private land ownership and provide for long term sustainable land uses.

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

NA

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

Public access will be encouraged but not required for these easements. Due to the reduced rate of 30-50% of average township land value rate paid for the easement a public access requirement is not conducive to enrolling the priority parcels targeted by this program. Protection of these private lands enhances adjacent public lands and their recreational values.

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

YES

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

As long as funding is available the RIM program can continue to establish easements on priority parcels for habitat protection.

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

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

☒ **X** ☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

If yes, please explain.

Development of these highly desirable parcels continues even in this slower economy. There is currently no program to help SWCDs address this conservation need so immediate funding is critical to beginning to protect these habitats.

In discussing the threat to large land parcels and their public values the US Forest Service Research Review dated Autumn 2008 states:

“Without a doubt, this will be the largest intergenerational transfer of forest land in our nation’s history and we are not ready for it.”

If those parcels were protected from development through a permanent conservation easement, we would be ready.

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

☒ **X** ☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

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

In many cases a single private ownership threatens total protection of these high priority lakes. This private easement program will enhance existing state, federal, and local government land holdings. Specific areas will vary based on location within the 15 county area.

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3. 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?

 X YES

 NO

If yes explain the model briefly.

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

When parcels of land are subdivided and developed the habitat values are diminished in numerous ways. Forest fragmentation occurs which impacts nesting success of many songbirds

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

Four priority habitat areas identified in this project are:

1. Unique Riparian forest parcels that provide ruffed grouse and whitetail deer habitat
2. Waterfowl habitat on Wild Rice Lakes
3. Trout Habitat in Streams
4. Deep high quality lakes that provide game fish habitat for walleys and northern pike.

By working with these priorities and fine tuning the lists with a local screening committee, easements can be offered to protect the "best of the best".

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

Executive Summary SCPP pg. 4 talks about focusing on land and water habitat fragmentation, degradation, and loss and conversion, all of these having the most impact on biodiversity and significant impacts on water quality/quantity. There is a need to keep water on the landscape.

There is also a table on SCPP pg. 268, an assessment of costs and environmental benefits to protecting large blocks of forest land.

This proposal complements many of the goals of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council's North Central Region.

D. Budget

The budget for this proposal includes easement acquisition. Ten percent of the easement amount will be split evenly between the BWSR and SWCD. This payment will include funds for SWCD staff to complete easements based on a priority ranking at the local level with significant input from Federal State and Local land managers. The payment includes legal fees and other technical assistance for the program.

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	100,000	100,000	100,000
Contracts			
Equipment/Tools/Supplies			
Fee Acquisition			
Easement Acquisition	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Easement Stewardship			

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Professional Services

Travel

Additional Budget Items

TOTAL	1,100,000	1,100,000	1,100,000
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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.
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No additional personnel are expected to be hired to complete this project.

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
Office facilities	13,500	13,500	13,500

Travel mileage	4,125	4,125	4,125
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Committee review	10,800	10,800	10,800
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TOTAL	28,425	28,425	28,425
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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				
Protect			9,000 acres	9,000 acres
Enhance			5,000 acres	18,000 acres

Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect				
Enhance				

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Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect			\$3,300,000	\$3,300,000
Enhance				

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

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			9,000 acres	9,000 acres

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
3.000 acres of easements	Fiscal year 2011	
3.000 acres of easements	Fiscal year 2012	
3.000 acres of easements	Fiscal year 2013	

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I. Relationship to Your Current Budget:

Our current budgets do not contain funding for Conservation Easements. This would be new funding for new conservation easement projects

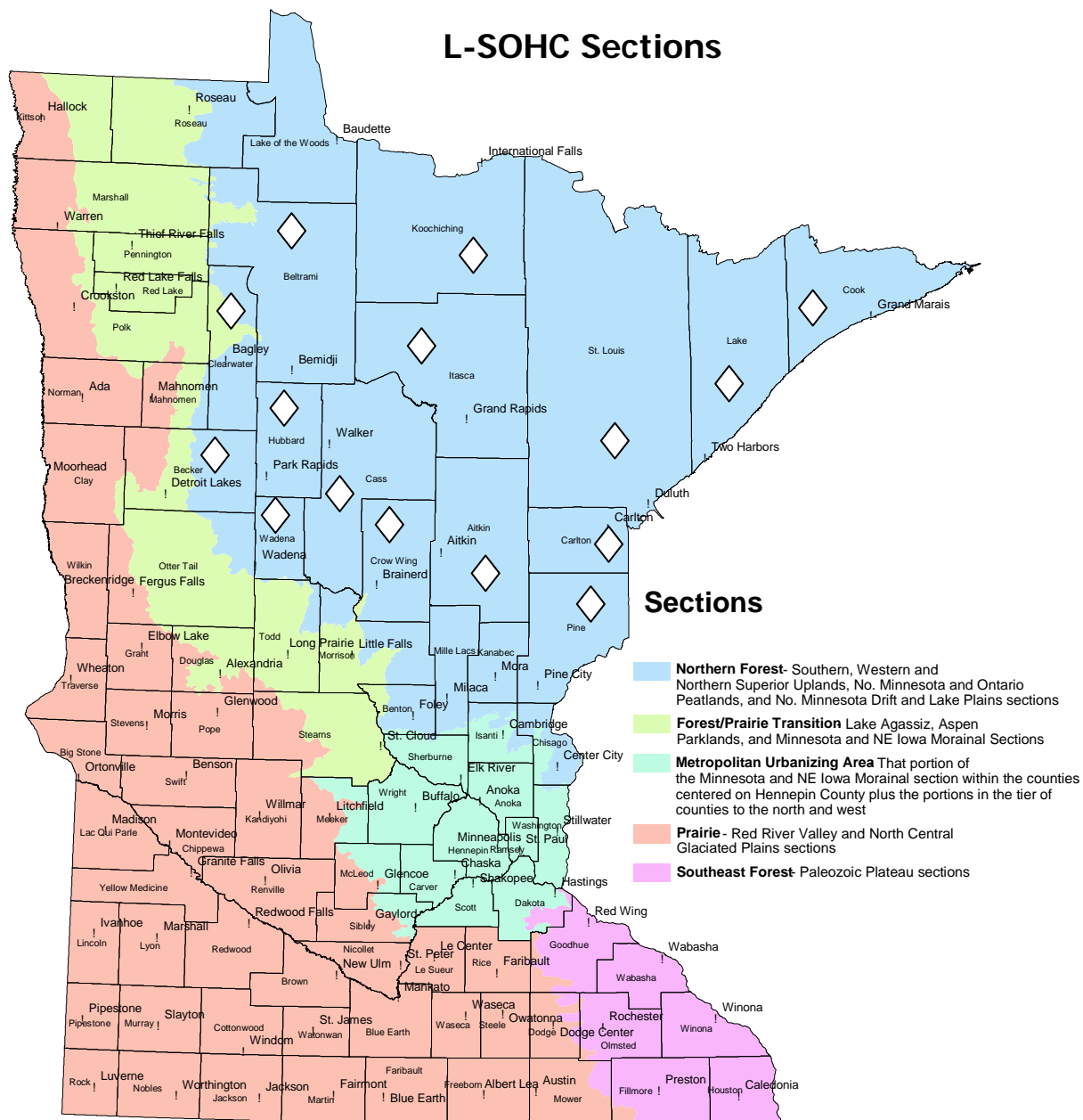
J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?

Perpetual easements managed through an approved forest stewardship plan will sustain the habitat improvements realized.

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.

The projects will be spaced throughout a 15-county region of the state. This region will be generally located in northeastern Minnesota in the Northern Forests region. The 15 counties are identified on the Minnesota map by a white diamond.

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