

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 2 Little Nokasippi River Wildlife Management Area

Program Manager: Mr. Dan Steward

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A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:

1. Why there is an urgent need to act NOW?

Federal funding is currently available and has been available to support the Camp Ripley Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program since 2004. The funding is provided by the Department of Defense through National Guard Bureau (NGB) and is allocated to the MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) for executing the ACUB program. Approximately \$13 million has been provided to date not including the FY 2010 allocation that is intended to match this L-SOHC proposal. As competition within the Department of Defense grows for buffer funding the likelihood of funding into the future is uncertain. Camp Ripley's ACUB is postured for continued funding given its success thanks to the efforts of DNR and BWSR and the tremendous support from willing landowners.

B. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

1. Tell the Council how much of your proposal is acquisition and how much restoration/enhancement?

- \$225,000 is dedicated to fee title acquisition for expanding the existing 357 acres Little Nokasippi River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) from 357 acres to 609 acres.
- \$1,000,000 is dedicated to securing perpetual conservation easements on 1,025 acres of land within the area for influence of the WMA.

2. How will the public be able to use the all the projects in this program and enjoy the benefits of this public investment?

The Little Nokasippi River WMA is established and operated in accordance with MN Statute 97A.133 and therefore will be open to public recreational use such as hunting, fishing, and hiking. The project will also protect the long-term viability of the WMA by enrolling 1,025 acres of land into permanent conservation easements on surrounding lands that comprise the area of influence on the WMA. It is conceivable that in the future the lands enrolled in conservation easements could be available for public access at the discretion of the landowner by expanding the terms of the conservation easement. In addition, the lands under conservation easement could be acquired in the future as an expansion of the Little Nokassippi River WMA.

C. PRIORITIES

1. Specifically, how does your program address the Council's statewide and/or regional priorities?

The project addresses the Council's priorities by protecting and enhancing habitat for fish, game, and wildlife in the interest of the public.

2. Tell the Council how do you set priorities among the opportunities available to this program? Be SPECIFIC

A comprehensive database has been created to evaluate all land parcels lying within the 110,000 acre ACUB area which includes the area of influence on the Little Nokasippi River WMA. The data base is linked to 13 criteria that are used to prioritize all candidate land parcels based on a total score. The following criteria are use to score each land parcel:

1. Adjacent to Highway 371
2. Adjacent to the Camp Ripley Boundary
3. Greater than or equal to 80 acres in size
4. Borders a primary lake, river, or stream
5. Impacted by blast noise (zone 2 or 3) from Camp Ripley
6. Impacted by Camp Ripley airfield noise
7. Located within the Camp Ripley airfield potential crash zone
8. County biological survey findings
9. Cultural resources
10. Proximity to lakes, streams, and wetlands
11. Rare or endangered species
12. Vegetative cover/habitat
13. Proximity to public land

3. Tell the Council how you define "science-based strategic planning"

As presented above, the entire basis for parcel selection in this proposal is science-based using specific criteria to ensure objectivity in decision making.

Strategic comprehensive planning at the local level is an integral part of land management decisions including but not limited to the development of a state wildlife management area such as the Little Nokasippi River WMA. Without local support a WMA is not possible nor is it possible without a solid documentation for the necessity and viability of a WMA. Science based documentation ensures objectivity in successful decision making and therefore minimizes political influences due to controversy.

The habitat value of the project is captured in the science-based planning process that included the entire area as an Important Birding Area (IBA) in according to the Audubon Society.

D. PROGRAM DETAILS:

1. The Work

- a. Enumerate the specific kinds of action you plan to take to protect, enhance, and/or restore natural systems.**

The project will result in restoring 252 acres of land into natural habitat for public use. In addition, 1,025 acres of surrounding lands within the center of influence of the Little Nokasippi River WMA will be secured through a conservation easement to ensure compatible land use.

- b. What species will be helped?**

The aquatic system of the WMA includes the Little Nokasippi (4,498 feet) and the Nokasippi (13,161 feet) Rivers. In addition to a complex forage base, fisheries within this system that will be enhanced include Walleye, Northern Pike, and Small Mouth Bass.

Wildlife species by primary habitats to be protected: oak forests (Red-shouldered Hawk, Wild Turkey, Barred Owl, Great Crested Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, White-tailed Deer, black bear, gray wolf, etc.); riparian forests and associated river/wetlands (Gray Treefrog, Blanding's Turtle, Wood Duck, Great Blue Heron, Hooded Merganser, Belted Kingfisher, Northern River Otter, etc.); and open areas/old fields (Prairie Skink, Eastern Hognose Snake, Red-Tailed Hawk, American Badger, etc.).

c. Do you currently have the capacity to get the work done that you are requesting dollars for in FY 2011? -- Explain

The proponent has a proven track record based on actions in the project area since 2004 in support of the Camp Ripley ACUB. Since 2004, the Minnesota Army National Guard (MNARNG) has invested about \$13 million in the ACUB program for Camp Ripley and has leverage approximately \$45 million in other funds. This has been accomplished in partnership with BWSR, DNR, TNC, MNARNG, and Cass and Crow Wing Counties. BWSR and DNR are the primary partnering agencies since they have executed formal cooperative agreements with NGB to receive and expend funds on behalf of the Camp Ripley ACUB. This strategy has resulted in the initial development of the Little Nokasippi River WMA and has proven to be the most successful ACUB program in the nation complements to these partnerships.

2. Program Work Location Note: The following pertains specifically to the land within the boundaries of the Little Nokasippi River WMA which encompasses 779 acres including existing WMA (357 acres), proposed acquisition (252 acres), and Crow Wing County land (170 acres). For those lands that will be enrolled in conservation easements the properties are primarily forested and prairie interspersed with wetlands.

- a. What percent of your work will be prairie? 18%**
- b. What percent of your work will be wetland? 17%**
- c. What percent of your work will be forest? 61%**
- d. What percent of your work will be aquatic systems? 4%**
- e. Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.**

The landscape within which the project is located is designated as one of the highest biodiversity landscapes in the state. This designation resulted from an eco-regional planning process through The Nature Conservancy which defined the landscape as the most functional/intact landscape within the Prairie Forest Eco-region. Also unique to the project area is its position within a larger habitat complex that encompasses the Mississippi River Corridor including the Mississippi Flyway and the rugged Eastern Bluff shoreline. What's more the WMA includes the confluence of the Little Nokasippi River and the Nokasippi River which occupies 4,498 feet and 13,161 feet of river shoreline, respectively. The confluence of the Nokasippi River with the Mississippi River is located about 1,000 feet west of the WMA.

3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

- a. **What percent reduction could you accept without rendering your project inoperable?**

The principal element of the proposal that requires 100% funding consideration is the fee title acquisition/expansion of the WMA in the amount of \$225,000. The conservation easement element of the proposal could be adjusted if need be by as much as 30% or \$300,000 without impacting the entire benefits of the proposal.

- b. **Have you also applied to the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partners Grant Program operated by DNR?**

NO

- c. **Where else might you get money for this project?**

The total estimated cost for this Outdoor Heritage proposal is \$3,662,000. As a result the proposal will be leverage at a ratio of 2 to 1. Of the total \$3,662,000 proposal \$1,225,000 will be secured through the Outdoor Heritage Fund and the balance through NGB (\$1,931,000), landowner contributions (\$256,000), BWSR In-Kind (\$75,000), DNR In-Kind (\$75,000), and MNARNG In-Kind (\$100,000). The coordination of funds will be accomplished through existing cooperative agreements between NGB and BWSR and DNR. These agreements serve to track the expenditure of all funds relative to the Camp Ripley ACUB program.

The cost per acre for conservation easements will be shared based on an estimated land value of \$2,450 /acre as follows:

L-SOH Fund	\$975/acre
National Guard Bureau	\$1,225/acre
Land owner contribution	\$250/acre
Total	\$2,450/acre

The fee title acquisition element of the proposal will require \$675,000 in funding from National Guard Bureau.

4. Personnel Details

- a. **Describe the personnel duties. Are they office staff or field staff – existing or new positions?**

The proposal will not require the use of Outdoor Heritage funds for personnel since National Guard Bureau does include a portion of its funding for administration of the ACUB program. These funds are made available to DNR and BWSR for implementing ACUB related duties and responsibilities including the greater Little Nokasippi River WMA proposal. Field staff from Morrison and Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation Districts is responsible for implementing the conservation easement element of the proposal on behalf of BWSR. DNR field staff is responsible for the fee title acquisition element of the WMA expansion. Office personnel from DNR, BWSR, and MNARNG are responsible for program administration.