

## L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 15 RIM for Forest Habitat

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### **A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:**

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

**Over the past ten years, many critical habitats have been lost to development. An aging landowner population means that many additional parcels will soon be passed on to heirs and may be sold for development. Due to the economic conditions, land development pressures are in a temporary lull. When the economy completes its recovery, development pressures will again increase.**

### **B. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

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

**Our proposal is to convey permanent conservation easements on critical riparian habitats. It is not fee title acquisition, but is the conveying of permanent conservation easements.**

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

**Private parcels exist adjacent to or surrounded by public land. If these private parcels were developed it would negatively impact not only that parcel but the lake habitat and the public use of the adjacent public land. Resources such as shallow lakes are very sensitive to increased use and have very little buffering capacity to avoid severe changes in plant communities and habitat values.**

### **C. PRIORITIES**

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

**Our program will address all of the following priorities found in the Resource and Species Specific Plans and Strategies:**

LSOHC Priority I. PLAN

1. Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife for final review; FAW

STRATEGY

1. Protect and manage at least 1,800 shallow lakes for ecological, recreational, and economic value

ACTIONS

1. Assess habitat condition of shallow lakes

2. Maximize management on 1,715 shallow lakes with a portion of shorelines under public ownership

3. Increase awareness and protection of lakes with wild rice

**Our project will: Expand the Rim program to the forested region of the State and specifically target priority private parcels on shallow wild rice lakes. These parcels will be protected from development through permanent conservation easements.**

#### LSOHC Priority II. PLAN

##### 1. Minnesota Forests for the Future (DNR; Forestry)

Advisory Team made recommendations to create a state program to work with public and private sector partners to use conservation easements and other tools to retain Minnesota's healthy, working forests

#### STRATEGIES

1. Greatest threat to working forests is conversion of private forests lands to other uses.
2. Changes in ownership and parcelization need to be addressed to reduce loss of public access to large tracts of forest land.
3. Working forest conservation easements are a cost effective tool.

#### ACTIONS

1. Build on public-private partnerships. Gain local government support. Focus on public benefits and geographic focus.
2. Identify and prioritize acquisition targets. Develop project selection process; monitor and evaluate results.

**Our Project will: Protect high priority forest habitats through the use of conservation easements. All forests protected will remain as working forests, and will never be subdivided into smaller tracts.**

#### LSOHC Priority III. PLAN

##### 1. Long Range Duck Recovery Plan (FAW)

By 2056 increase the state's average breeding duck population from 636,000 to 1 million birds producing a fall population of 1.4 million birds from Minnesota. Protect 2 million acres of duck habitat.

#### STRATEGIES

1. Accelerate efforts to restore 1,800 shallow lakes, including wild rice lakes.

#### ACTIONS

1. Utilize state and federal acquisition and easement programs to protect waterfowl habitat.
2. Protect, enhance, and manage 1,800 shallow lakes.

**Our project will: Specifically target priority private parcels on shallow wild rice lakes. These parcels will be protected from development through permanent conservation easements.**

#### LSOHC Priority IV. PLAN

##### 1. Fisheries Management Plan for the Minnesota Waters of Lake Superior (FAW)

Protect, restore, and enhance the quantity and quality of fisheries habitat in the Minnesota waters of Lake Superior

#### STRATEGIES

1. Protect, restore, and enhance riparian areas in Lake Superior basin.
2. Protect spawning area and other critical habitats in Lake Superior and tributary streams.

#### ACTIONS

1. Minimize erosion, beaver damage, high flows, groundwater degradation, and poor land-use practices in watersheds.
2. Restore fisheries habitat in streams on impaired waters list and critical habitats on non-listed streams.

**Several of the counties are located in the Lake Superior watershed and will implement the conservation easement protections in the Lake Superior watershed and tributaries to Lake Superior. We will place permanent conservation easements on riparian properties that are adjacent to shallow water lakes, deep high quality lakes and cold water trout streams.**

#### LSOHC Priority V. PLAN

1. A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use –Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012 (FAW)

#### STRATEGIES

1. Increase habitat management efforts on shallow lakes/wetlands, prairies/grasslands, savannas, forests, and brush lands both on public and private lands.

#### ACTIONS

1. Shallow lakes and wetlands: Increase management to 300 basins annually. Increase active management to 130-170 natural wild rice basins annually.

**Our project will: Expand the Rim program to the forested region of the State and specifically target priority private parcels on shallow wild rice lakes. These parcels will be protected from development through permanent conservation easements.**

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

**We will prioritize those private land parcels that hold the key to the long-term protection of a valuable resource; an example would be a parcel of land that is the only remaining private land on a shallow water lake. The public land is managed for the future forest and wildlife benefits and provides protection for the waterbody. However, private land is susceptible to changes in ownership and development into smaller parcels with the resulting increase in pressure on the waterbody. Wild Rice cannot survive boat wakes and other disturbances during some periods of the year. Increased use by many additional landowners will result in more shoreland disturbance and increased surface water use thereby negatively impacting the critical and sensitive vegetation that provides habitat.**

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

**We will use existing and on-going inventories of priority wild rice resources, from the DNR and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, to help us in the prioritization process. Increased runoff is a result of land management decisions that fail to retain adequate natural vegetation. To strategically plan and prioritize for the easement parcels a local steering committee will meet to review progress and identify future target parcels. The local steering committee will include professional land managers from DNR, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, County Land Departments, USFWS and SWCD’s knowledgeable in wildlife habitat needs and requirements.**

#### **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.

1. work with our partners on the steering committee to ensure efficient project implementation
2. identify and prioritize the highest value lakes and streams that exist in the project area
3. contact landowners of targeted private parcels to begin the conservation easement process
4. complete the easements including habitat restoration and include them in the BWSR RIM program

b. What species will be helped?

**A variety of birds, animals and fish, both game and non-game species, will benefit. Typical species that will benefit include: mallards, wood ducks, teal, and other ducks; trout, musky, walleye and other fish; whitetail deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, songbirds, eagles, and other birds.**

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

**Yes, local counties have personnel in their SWCD's that are trained and experienced in the implementation of the project activities. Some conservation easements have already been obtained through easement donations and others were purchased through Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program.**

## 2. Program Work Location

- a. What percent of your work will be prairie?
- b. What percent of your work will be wetland? **35%**
- c. What percent of your work will be forest? **65%**
- d. Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.

**All of the targeted riparian parcels are key components of the adjacent public lands and serve as a critical upland and aquatic interface that provides unique wildlife habitat.**

## 3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

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

**We can provide a meaningful habitat project with as much as a 60% reduction of our application. As described earlier, all parcels will be prioritized and easements will be sought starting at the top of the priority list. Reductions in funding would result in fewer critical parcels being protected.**

- 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?

**Local county and SWCD funds, Water Plan Funds, local lake associations, conservation groups, are all possible funding sources.**

## 4. Personnel Details

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

**Most of the personnel will be field staff with office support also required. We will accomplish the project activities through existing staff.**