

## **L-SOHC Questionnaire**

**Program Request Title: 19 Critical Shoreline Habitat Protection Program**

**Program Manager: Kris Larson, Executive Director, Minnesota Land Trust**

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

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

There is a sense of urgency with this project due to two factors: 1) we have multiple landowners in the Arrowhead region who are ready and willing to grant conservation easements on exceptional shoreline habitat, thus providing high-leverage, immediately-tangible protection on these diminishing habitat types; and 2) the current lull in the real-estate market has given many landowners an opportunity to prioritize protection over development, thus providing a narrow window of time to invest in these shoreline protection projects at a fraction of the cost of full fair market acquisition in the future.

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

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

All of the projects in this proposal relate to acquisition and perpetual enforcement of conservation easements on shoreline habitat essential to the health of fish, game and wildlife. While this proposal does not include any funding for restoration or enhancement, the conservation easements could provide the basis for future restoration efforts on protected land.

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

As a charitable organization, Minnesota Land Trust only completes projects that are in the public's interest. The projects completed with this program will benefit the public in four ways: 1) the shoreline habitat is essential to the health of fish, game and wildlife species of great importance to Minnesota's economy and way of life; 2) the protected properties will be adjacent to public waters, thus the fishing and boating public will be able to travel or fish the waters immediately adjacent to the protected property; 3) the properties are often of great scenic quality and are highly visible to the public; and 4) by protecting property along public waters in their natural condition, the projects help protect the water quality and ecological integrity of the adjacent water body, such as near-shore spawning areas which help maximize fish production in the lake.

### **C. PRIORITIES**

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

This program meets statewide priority criteria in the following manner:

1. It is an ongoing program with a very successful track-record of effective shoreline protection, as the Land Trust has protected more than 100 miles of shoreline in the past 10 years. Through this grant we intend to accelerate shoreline protection in this

region of the state, ultimately securing an additional 100 miles of sensitive shoreline habitat or more.

2. Shoreline protection has multiple public benefits as outlined above.
3. It is a high-leverage, cost-effective program due to the great number of landowner donations and efficient organizational delivery.
4. It addresses opportunities that will be lost if these sensitive private lands are developed or the forest managed improperly
5. These projects help buffer and enhance the public benefits of SNAs, AMAs and WMAs
6. It is based in sound science and helps protect species in greatest conservation need

This program addresses two of the L-SOHC Priority Actions for the Northern Forest Section by:

1. Permanently protecting shoreland on cold water lakes, shallow bays, streams, rivers and spawning areas; and
2. Permanently protecting forest land through conservation easements

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

The Minnesota Land Trust will collaborate with other programs and partners in the region to determine which of the potential projects should be prioritized for protection with this funding. We will utilize the following criteria in making these determinations:

1. Habitat Quality and Quantity on the Parcel: which projects have the best opportunity for greatest conservation outcomes for fish, game and wildlife (best habitat characteristics, presence of species in greatest conservation need, most shoreline feet and acreage)
2. Context and Multiple Benefits: which projects have opportunities for multiple benefits, including potential public access and buffers to existing investments in SNAs, AMAs, WMAs, State Parks, etc..
3. Threat and Urgency: which projects have the highest degree of vulnerability and potential loss if we do not act now
4. Cost Effectiveness: which projects will we be able to maximize financial leverage and extend the benefits of the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

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

Simply speaking, the most effective conservation-based strategic plans utilize the best available scientific information as a foundation for determining where, when and how to best implement conservation efforts. This includes the best available information on the state’s existing habitat and the species it serves, on the needs for conserving additional habitat through protection, restoration or enhancement activities, and on the outside threats to that habitat.

The scientific foundation for the protection of critical shoreline habitat in Minnesota is well established in numerous plans and publications, including Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan, the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan, the DNR’s recent studies of shoreland development, and many others. The potential threats to North Shore trout streams and the priority trout lakes of the Arrowhead region are also well-documented by DNR, the Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan, and many others. Finally, Trout Unlimited, the DNR and others are currently conducting an analysis of the habitat

improvement needs of North Shore trout streams. We intend to use these data when available to coordinate our efforts with other potential partners.

#### **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 Land Trust will secure permanent conservation easements on 10-12 highest priority parcels with the most critical shoreline habitat for fish, game and wildlife. Overall more than 50,000 feet of shoreline and 1,000 acres of forestland will be protected.

- b. What species will be helped?**

Shoreline habitat is such an essential natural resource because of its benefits to both terrestrial and aquatic communities. This project will help protect fish species, including native trout such as the coaster brook trout; migratory waterfowl species, especially cavity nesting ducks such as wood ducks, goldeneye or hooded mergansers; and species of greatest conservation need including reptiles such as the wood turtle, songbirds such as the black-throated blue warbler, raptors such as the peregrine falcon, and mammals such as the Canada lynx

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

With the funding requested in the proposal, we will have sufficient capacity to implement the projects as outlined above and defend the easements in perpetuity. The Minnesota Land Trust has a successful history of and solid foundation for securing, holding and defending conservation easements.

##### **2. Program Work Location**

- a. What percent of your work will be prairie? *n/a***

- b. What percent of your work will be wetland? (see below)**

- c. What percent of your work will be forest? (see below)**

- d. What percent of your work will be aquatic systems?**

The primary conservation target for this program is critical shoreline habitat. As such 100% of our work through this program will contain this feature, which benefits fish, game and wildlife. However, we will also be protecting more than 1,000 acres of quality northern Minnesota forest and numerous wetlands in the process.

- e. Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.**

One of the program criteria outlined above is to select projects based on their context and multiple benefits. Many of the projects we have already identified are part of a larger habitat complex and as such, these projects serve to augment the existing public investment already made. For example, there is one potential

project on Moosehorn Lake (a designated trout lake) which fills in a gap between a large SNA and an AMA, with nearly 4,000 feet of shoreline habitat and more than 200 acres of important forest habitat.

This is representative of the strategic approach of the Land Trust: to identify private parcels with exceptional habitat which are adjacent to already protected lands or fill significant gaps in existing protection to help complete the preservation of a larger complex.

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

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

As described in the proposal, the Land Trust has already identified more than 40 high-quality projects and had initial discussions with the landowners. If it were to get less than the full request, the Land Trust would scale project deliverables accordingly, with a potential loss of several of the highest quality parcels due to the need for acquisition funding.

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

Yes, but not for these projects or this geography. The project the Land Trust submitted to the Partners Grants Program was for trout stream protection near Red Wing.

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

In order to maximize its conservation goals, the Land Trust will continue to seek other sources of funding, including federal funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the LCCMR where appropriate and private funding through foundations and others. It is worth noting, however, that this region of the state has experienced a lower level of state habitat funding in recent years when compared with other regions.

### **4. Personnel Details**

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

Minnesota Land Trust staff funded through this program will 1) help select projects through the scientific analysis described above, 2) conduct landowner outreach and site visits, 3) negotiate the easement terms, 4) complete all necessary documentation, and 5) monitor and defend the easements. Staff will include field staff and office staff and will be a combination of both existing and new staff. Final staffing arrangements will depend on funding levels and organizational structure at the time of implementation.