

## L-SOHC Questionnaire

**Program Request Title: 20 Metro Big Rivers Habitat**

**Program Manager: Deborah Loon, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.**

**Telephone Number: 612-801-1935**

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

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

Important Habitat in Major Wildlife Corridors -- The Big River valleys provide essential habitat for resident wildlife and migrating wildlife, both game and non-game species.

Development Pressure and Current Opportunity -- The Metro Big Rivers Habitat area is under heavy development pressure, especially on natural areas with high amenity value. We have a tremendous opportunity right now because the economic recession has driven down some of the land values and slowed development pressure.

Outdoor Recreation Close to Home -- Minnesotans need increased access to hunting, fishing and other wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities close to home.

Project Readiness -- The projects are time-sensitive and ready to go. If we do not act now, the opportunities may be lost or become much more expensive.

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

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

- Protect 850 acres: \$4,200,000 OHF grant funds and \$4,210,000 other, leveraged funds (private and public)
- Restore and enhance 338 acres: \$290,733 OHF grant funds and \$140,000 other, leveraged funds (private and federal)

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

100% of the land targeted for Metro Big Rivers Habitat acquisition (700 acres) will be open to hunting and fishing on an unlimited or limited basis. The 150 acres to be put under conservation easement will not be open to public hunting and fishing.

All 850 acres protected and 338 acres restored and enhanced will be open and accessible to the public for some forms of outdoor recreation.

### **C. PRIORITIES**

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

This program directly addresses ALL of the statewide priorities of the L-SOHC:

- Are ongoing programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the L-SOHC Sections → The partnership has worked extensively in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section and will meet two of the three priorities of the L-SOHC for this section.
- Produce multiple conservation benefits → This program will expand and enhance wildlife habitat, protect species of greatest conservation need, improve water quality, expand outdoor recreation opportunities for the public and more.

- Leverage effort and other funds to supplement the OHF appropriation → This program's leverage of other funds is practically 1 to 1.
- Allow public access → 100% of the lands protected and enhanced will be open to public outdoor recreation.
- Address conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately acted on → All of our projects are ready-to-go and may be lost forever or become significantly more expensive if not completed soon.
- Restore and enhance state-owned WMAs, AMAs and SNAs → All projects build upon, expand or enhance existing publicly-owned habitat complexes.
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement → Our planning and evaluation is based on extensive scientific data available through the County Biological Survey and mapping by the DNR and Metropolitan Council.
- Consider locations of state endangered, threatened and special concern species → See our extensive, but not exhaustive, list of species that will be protected.
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments to hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities → This program will ADD 850 acres now in private ownership to the public lands in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area that will be open to the public for its use and enjoyment.

Metro Big Rivers Habitat meets two of the L-SOHC's three priorities as stated in its request for proposals for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area Section:

- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers.
- Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity.

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

The Metro Big Rivers Habitat partnership will acquire and restore lands that meet the following threshold criteria:

- Are within habitat corridors mapped by DNR and partners based on analysis of regional ecological significance and within one of the three Big River Corridors.
- Are on or adjacent to permanently-protected public lands.
- Expand public access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.
- Provide multiple conservation benefits.

Highest priority will be given to lands that meet the following additional criteria:

- Are within regionally significant ecological areas, including presence of Minnesota County Biological Survey quality ecological system(s) and/or concentration of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) / Threatened or Endangered Species
- Need to be acted on immediately or the opportunity will be lost.
- Are feasible. Landowners and communities are ready, habitat restoration plans are prepared and approved by public landowner, and full funding is assembled.

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

The program utilizes extensive state of the art scientific data available in the Metro Area in the County Biological Survey maps, Regionally Significant Natural Area maps and Field Guide to the Native Plant Communities of Minnesota. These resources are used to identify the remaining high quality natural communities, prioritize project selection, and guide and evaluate restoration activities.

## 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.**

Protection: Acquire fee title on at least 700 acres and conservation easement on 150 acres of high priority wildlife habitat in the Big River corridors and key tributaries within the Metro Urbanizing Area.

Restoration and Enhancement: Restore at least 338 acres of floodplain forest, wetland, oak savanna, and prairie habitat in the Big Rivers corridors.

In the Minnesota River Corridor, the program will prioritize among the following projects:

- Expand the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge through fee title acquisition of 500 acres of wildlife habitat, increasing public access for wildlife-based recreation on one or more refuge unit in Carver, LeSueur, Scott and Sibley Counties.
- Restore and enhance habitat quality for wildlife on 100 acres of Minnesota Valley Refuge in Carver, LeSueur, Scott or Sibley County.
- Expand the Savage Fen / Teepee Hill Natural Area through fee title acquisition of 50 acres of Minnesota River bluffland, adjacent to existing protected land.
- Expand the Pike Lake Natural Area through fee title acquisition of 20 acres of lakeshore, wetland, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.
- Remove invasive species from rare calcareous fens on 75 acres in three Scientific and Natural Areas in Scott, Carver, and Dakota Counties.

In the Mississippi River Corridor, the program will prioritize among the following projects:

- Protect 150 acres adjacent to the Pine Bend Bluffs SNA by purchasing a conservation easement of lands with mesic prairie, floodplain forest, floodplain lakeshore, oak woodland and wetland.
- Protect through fee title acquisition up to 600 acres on the Wild and Scenic Rum River just a few miles upstream of the Mississippi River.
- Restore and reconstruct 38 acres of Mississippi River floodplain forest and enhance existing forest within the Pine Bend Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area.
- Restore 2 acres of native prairie and oak savanna on Mississippi blufflands at Indian Mounds and Cherokee Bluff in St. Paul.

In the St. Croix River Corridor, the program will prioritize among the following projects:

- Protect through fee title acquisition up to 30 acres of forest in the Franconia- Scandia St. Croix River corridor, complementing existing protected lands along the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.
- Protect through fee title acquisition up to 1,000 acres of forest and wetlands in the vicinity of Big Marine Lake on the St. Croix Greenway that connects to the St. Croix River.
- Restore and manage 125 acres of habitat targeted for species of greatest conservation need in the six-mile Franconia-Scandia St. Croix corridor and Lower St. Croix Valley.

- b. **What species will be helped?**

Game species include wood duck, mallard, grassland nesting birds, squirrel, rabbit, woodcock, Canada goose, pheasant, wild turkey, common snapping turtle, deer, northern pike.

Non-game species include bald eagle, American woodcock, northern rough-winged swallow, warblers, gopher snake, veery, common nighthawk, eastern wood pewee, rosebreasted grosbeak, ovenbird, red shouldered hawk, acadian flycatchers, cerulean warblers, Louisiana waterthrush.

Vegetative communities include mesic and dry prairie, floodplain forest, oak savannah, wet meadow, and hardwood forest.

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

The partners have sufficient capacity and extensive experience. Since 2004, the Metro Big Rivers partners collectively have protected over 60,000 acres in Minnesota through fee title acquisition and conservation easement, and restored 9,000 acres of critical habitat. We are poised and ready to complete the work once funding is arranged.

**3. Program Work Location**

- a. **What percent of your work will be prairie? -- 15%**
- b. **What percent of your work will be wetland? -- 10%**
- c. **What percent of your work will be forest? -- 6%**
- d. **What percent of your work will be habitat for fish, game and wildlife? – 69%**
- e. **Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.**

Each of the potential projects is part of one of the following large habitat complexes along the three Big Rivers: Big Marine Area of the St. Croix Greenway, Minnesota River Valley Fen and Wetland Complexes, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Mississippi River Blufflands of St. Paul, Pike Lake / Pike Creek Natural Area, Pine Bend Bluffs Natural Area, Teepee Hill Natural Area, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and Wild and Scenic Rum River / Confluence of Mississippi River.

**4. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested**

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

The amount of acquisition and restoration work completed by the partnership will be directly related to the amount of funding available. We have more projects ready than this request will fund. We will pursue the highest priority projects with funds granted.

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

We have not applied to the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partners grant program for any of the projects included in this grant proposal. Some partners have submitted other projects to the OHF Conservation Partners grant program.

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

The partners are constantly pursuing many public and private funding sources for this work. That is why we are able to bring essentially a 1 to 1 match to the table for this OHF money.

**4. Personnel Details**

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

All personnel positions are existing and almost all are directly involved in the delivery of the work. Of the \$145,529 for personnel, only \$5,954 is for administrative support. No personnel funds are requested for contract management by the project manager.