

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: **23 Riparian and Lakeshore Protection, Restoration and Access in Dakota County**

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A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:

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

- *There currently are substantial, naturally-reproducing brook and brown trout populations in jeopardy due to warm water and other impairments.*
- *Capitalizes on recent and widespread educational efforts associated with developing and approving of local comprehensive and water management plans*
- *Capitalizes on the credibility and success of the Farmland and Natural Areas Program*
- *Responds to increasing pressure on agricultural land for producing food and fuel*
- *Availability of non-State matching funds(Federal, County, Local, and Watershed)*
- *Implementation of the soon-to-be-completed Vermillion River Corridor Plan funded as a model project by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources*
- *Takes advantage of the decline in residential development and associated reduction in land and easement values. At the same time, future development will likely further degrade and fragment these resources*
- *Provide incentives for cities and townships to budget and fund future CIP projects associated with local comprehensive and water management plans, and to include wildlife habitat in those projects*
- *Prevents water quality impairments and addresses MPCA listed impairments*
- *Validates the 2010 County Board goal of developing a comprehensive and integrated land conservation vision*
- *This is a comprehensive, medium-term project and it is important to initiate the first phase.*
- *Provide a means for contributing to significant cellulosic biomass production*

B. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

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

- 82% Easement acquisition
- 11% Restoration/enhancement

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 comprehensive nature of this project will eventually protect, connect, expand and improve fragmented and degraded riparian habitat along 55 miles of the estimated 90 miles of coldwater trout streams (Darden and Pine Creeks, Trout Brook, and designated portions of the Vermillion River) in the metropolitan region, the highly diverse (23 fish species) Chub Creek system, the wild and scenic Cannon River and non-designated trout stream portions of the Vermillion River and its tributaries. As a result, the public will be able to use and enjoy the hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational benefits that depend on intact and functioning ecosystems. Already, 23 miles of riparian areas have been protected within these corridors. Especially in the agricultural portions of these watersheds, these habitat areas will provide critical year-round game and non-game refuges.

The easements on Marcott Lakes and Lake Marion are intended to be the first phase of ensuring public use and enjoyment to these areas. The Chub Lake easement is adjacent to the existing Chub Lake WMA. The improvements in Spring Lake are to provide better and safer public access to the newly established, 733-acre Spring Lake Islands WMA. The shoreline and other improvements in Thompson Lake in West Paul will enhance the fishing opportunities for many people who have virtually no other opportunity to fish.

C. PRIORITIES

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

Statewide: Conservation and Preservation Plan

- H 1 Protect priority land habitats
- H 2 Protect critical shorelands of streams and lakes
- H 5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland associated watersheds
- H 7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU 2 Support local and regional conservation-based community planning
- LU 3 Ensure protection of water resources in urban areas
- LU 4 As much as possible, transition renewable fuel feedstock to perennial crops
- LU 6 Reduce streambank erosion through reduction of peak flows

Statewide: A Fifty-Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota's Future

- Project is based on a very finely focused natural resource inventories and scientifically-identified ecological stressors
- Monitoring has already been completed and waters have been listed as impaired by the MPCA.

Regional:

The primary framework for land conservation in the metropolitan urbanizing section is the individual focus areas developed through the collaborative Metro Conservation Corridors Initiative. All of the proposed projects would be located within either the Vermillion River Focus Area, the Lower Mississippi River Focus Area or the Chub Lake/Cannon River Focus Area.

Specifically, this project is designed to protect, connect and enhance extensive habitat corridors and enhance and restore cold water fishery systems. This includes protection and enhance of a "trophy" trout stream within the region and providing a sport fishing opportunity for the population center of the state.

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

Size of Area	0 -10 points	Proximity to Protected Areas	0 -15 points
Ecological Quality	0 -15 points	Water Quality Benefits	0 -15 points
Leveraged Resources	0 -10 points	Public Access Allowed	0 -10 points
Landowner Donation	0 -15 points	Restoration/Stewardship	0 - 5 points
Unique Characteristics	0 - 5 points		

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

Science -based Strategic Planning involves the following components:

- *Developing a well-designed planning process including goals, priorities, roles, responsibilities, budget, schedule, products, and communications*
- *Reviewing existing state, regional, county, and local plans to ensure familiarity, alignment and opportunities for collaboration, and to determine gaps and issues.*

- *Reviewing relevant literature, studies, practices, and plans from across the country*
- *Reviewing, interpreting and applying the best scientific data and technology available*
- *Involving outside technical experts throughout the planning process*
- *Involving elected and other officials, the public and a wide range of interested parties in meaningful ways throughout the planning process*
- *Utilizing proven land protection and restoration techniques*
- *Commitment to fostering partnerships and long-term stewardship*

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.

- *Respond to landowner inquiry*
- *Conduct in-office site assessment using pictometry and updated landcover*
- *Follow-up site visit with landowner*
- *Receive and process applications*
- *Advisory Committee and County Board review and approval*
- *Initiate title work and conduct environmental and natural resource assessment*
- *Develop Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP) and initial Work Plan*
- *Survey easement and develop legal description*
- *Finalize purchase agreement and easement language and Property Report*
- *Closing*
- *Install signage and begin implementing NRMP priorities*
- *Annual monitoring*

b. What species will be helped?

<i>Game Species:</i>	<u><i>Fish</i></u>	<u><i>Birds</i></u>	<u><i>Mammals</i></u>
	<i>Brown Trout</i>	<i>Wild Turkey</i>	<i>White-tailed Deer</i>
	<i>Brook Trout</i>	<i>Ring-necked Pheasant</i>	<i>Red Fox</i>
	<i>Rainbow Trout</i>	<i>Morning Dove</i>	<i>Eastern Cottontail</i>
	<i>Northern Pike</i>	<i>Mallard</i>	
	<i>Walleye</i>	<i>Wood Duck</i>	
	<i>Smallmouth Bass</i>	<i>Blue-wing Teal</i>	
	<i>Largemouth Bass</i>	<i>Woodcock</i>	

Non-Game Species: A wide variety of wildlife found in the four ecological sub-sections, including Prairie Vole, Franklin Ground Squirrel and American Badger will benefit from this project. Other small native mammals along with many birds, particularly Loggerhead Shrike and Rose-breasted Grosbeak will also likely benefit. The potential for many other species listed in "Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare" Appendix E: Occurrences of Species in Greatest Conservation Need by Ecological Subsection.

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

Yes and No. The County already has the systems and processes in place to complete these projects. County staff will be available in July 2010 to work on some of these new projects. However additional contracted and or term-limited staff will be necessary.

2. Program Work Location

- a. **What percent of your work will be prairie?** 12 percent*
- b. **What percent of your work will be wetland?** 8 percent*
- c. **What percent of your work will be forest?** 8 percent*
- d. **What percent of your work will be aquatic systems?** 72 percent*

* Note: All projects will be focused on the interface between upland, wetland, riparian/ lakeshore habitat and will involve some combination of converting agricultural land to prairie/savanna, restoring floodplain or other adjacent forest types.

- e. **Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes, BRIEFLY describe the complex.**
The 335-square mile Vermillion River watershed is the largest watershed in the metropolitan region. The 150-square mile North Cannon River Watershed is part of the much larger 1,440-square mile Cannon River Watershed. The significance of this portion of the larger watershed is the existence of trout within three tributaries.

3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

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

The availability of \$3 million for FY2011 would allow us to proceed and have a refined proposal based upon actual results for FY 2012 and beyond.

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

Yes, but for other projects.

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

NRCS, Dakota County, landowner donation, Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization, North Cannon Watershed Management Organization Cannon River Watershed Partnership and Municipalities

4. Personnel Details

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

Office: Existing In-kind Staff

Project Management and Administrative, County Attorney, Financial Services, Water Resources, Parks and Open Space, GIS, Survey, and Communications

Existing Contractual

Title Review and Acquisition Closings

Field: Existing In-kind Staff/Contractual

Landowner Interactions, easement boundaries, environmental site assessment, development and implementation of Natural Resource Management Plans, install signage, and monitoring easements

New Contractual/Limited-term Staff

Landowner Interactions, developing and implementing Natural Resource Management Plans and monitoring easements