

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 29 Restoring and Enhancing Wildlife Habitat on Key Public Lands across the Anoka Sand Plain through Collaborative Partnerships

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A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:

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

Critical Imperilment of Habitat and Associated Species - Wildlife habitats of the Anoka Sand Plain (ASP) are critically imperiled, with oak savanna being the single most imperiled ecological system in Minnesota. These habitats are identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (CWCP) and Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan as conservation priorities. Habitat loss and degradation has had profound impacts on the wildlife of the ASP; some 97 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) in the state are known or predicted to occur within the ASP. This decline in habitat has had major impacts on game species.

Major Threats & Pressures Requiring Urgent Action - Invasive species, coupled with lack of prescribed fire and other basic management/restoration practices have resulted in declines in value of public lands as wildlife habitat over time. Minnesota's CWCP identifies maintenance, enhancement and protection of oak savannas as its first priority for this ecological subsection.

The ASP is among the fastest growing areas in the state. Urban sprawl is placing immense pressure on remaining natural resources and threatening existing protected areas. As the Metro grows, wildlife habitat in the ASP will face elevated pressures, accentuating the importance of enhanced habitat management on existing public lands.

Increased Cost of Management Actions as Habitats Decline - Inadequate funding for restoration/management activities on public lands has resulted in general declines in the condition of Minnesota's most imperiled habitats, and their value as wildlife habitat. Costs to restore these habitats rise every year that management is delayed.

B. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

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

Total Funding Request:	\$1,425,563
Acquisition Component:	\$ 0
Restoration/Enhancement Component:	\$1,425,563

(Matched by \$679,000 leveraged funds)

2. How will the public be able to use the all the projects in this program and enjoy the benefits of this public investment? All public lands included in this proposal are open to the public.

- **Scientific and Natural Areas** – open for nature observation and education, but are not meant for intensive recreational activities. Hunting is allowed at Uncas Dunes SNA.
- **State Wildlife Management Areas** – are part of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system and are key to protecting wildlife habitat for future generations, providing citizens with opportunities for hunting, fishing and wildlife watching, and promoting important wildlife-based tourism in the state.

- **Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge** – recreation and education opportunities include fishing, hunting, environmental education, interpretation, wildlife observation, hiking/skiing and photography.
- **Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve** – Cedar Creek bridges the gaps between science, community, and government through research, conservation, and education. It participates conducts on-site workshops and public tours of the site, and is working with state and local governments for additional public access, including regulated hunting.
- **Isanti County Parks** - Isanti County Parks preserve natural areas and provide passive recreation opportunities. Hunting and camping are not permitted.

C. PRIORITIES

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

STATEWIDE PRIORITIES

Priority 1. Ongoing Programs. The ASP Habitat Partnership is a collaboration of 19 seasoned conservation organizations with the long-term goal of elevating and capitalizing on resources available for conservation of natural resources in the ASP.

Priority 2. Multiple Conservation Benefits. Restoration/enhancement actions will result in:

- improved habitat for a broad suite of game/non-game species
- improved recreational assets and richer experiences for hunters and others;
- enhancement of an existing and irreplaceable investment in land/habitat protection;
- opportunities to enhance public awareness, appreciation and a constituency for these important lands;
- improvement of habitat within the State's premier ecosystem research facility whose science serves to both underpin oak savanna restoration efforts.
- jobs, through work completed by local vendors, businesses and MCC crews.

Priority 3. Leverage. The ASP Habitat Partnership is leveraging at least \$679,000 to match the requested \$1,425,563 OHF appropriation.

Priority 4. Public access. This proposal does not have an acquisition component; however, all targeted sites are publicly owned and open to the public for a variety of uses.

Priority 5. Immediacy/Urgency. See Section A.1 for an in-depth discussion of this priority.

Priority 6. WMAs, AMAs, SNAs. 76% of sites (13 of 17) are either WMAs (8) or SNAs (5).

Priority 7. Science-based Strategic Planning. See Section 3 below.

Priority 8. Consider state T&E, SGCN species and habitats. Each of these is integral to our priority-setting process. Together, this information serves as one of the foundational building blocks for our identified conservation priorities.

Priority 9. Greater public access. See Section B.2.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Metropolitan Urbanizing Area Section

Priority 1. Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity.

Priority 2. Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain). Our priorities include oak savanna, prairie and other systems as mapped by Minnesota County Biological Survey, and habitat corridors that link these lands together (as mapped by the DNR). Actions proposed focus on restoration and enhancement of these habitats/corridors through prescribed fire, invasive species control, and seeding/planting of natural

communities to the benefit of associated species. Three sites are adjacent to the Mississippi River, specifically enhancing wildlife habitat within one of the river corridors emphasized by the Council.

Forest/Prairie Transition Section

Priority 2. Protect, enhance and restore rare native remnant prairie. Restoration actions (prescribed fire, seeding, invasive species control) focusing on oak savanna and prairie will increase the quality of habitat for a broad suite of species.

2. **Tell the Council how do you set priorities among the opportunities available to this program? Be SPECIFIC.** MCBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance, Regionally Ecological Significant Areas, and Habitat Corridors (MN DNR) were used to define priorities at the regional scale. Inherent within this priority-setting process are the following assumptions:
 - Presence of MCBS quality ecological system(s); SGCN/T&E species. Weight = High;
 - Size of habitat block/managed area. Weight = High;
 - Presence within habitat corridors. Weight = Moderate;
 - Protected lands (public or private with easements). Weight = Moderate;
 - Multiple conservation benefits to both game and non-game species. Weight = Moderate;
 - Immediacy of need/action as determined by MCBS. Weight = High;
 - Ability to effectively manage lands over the long. Weight = Moderate.

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

We are well versed in and utilize science-based strategic planning, at the heart of which is scientific rigor and adaptive management. We use the following framework:

- a. **Setting Conservation Priorities: Biological Planning and Conservation Design** We use a suite of existing priority-setting efforts and data sets to identify focal conservation targets and corresponding priorities for conservation efforts.
- b. **Strategy Development and Conservation Delivery** – We identify conservation strategies to abate priority threats to focal conservation targets.
- c. **Research, Evaluation and Monitoring** – We evaluate assumptions and assess the effectiveness of strategies in achieving conservation goals.

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.** For specific restoration/enhancement actions proposed at each individual site, please refer to our initial proposal. Our actions will result in:
 - elimination of invasive plants (trees, shrubs and forbs) over 2,254 acres of oak savanna, oak woodland, and deciduous forest habitats;
 - seeding/planting of 1,269 acres of oak savanna habitat;
 - seeding of 16 acres of oak woodland habitat; and
 - prescribed fire over 2,140 acres of oak savanna habitat.
- b. **What species will be helped?** Actions will benefit a broad suite of native species that require high-quality oak savanna, prairie, and oak woodland habitats:
 - SGCN (direct impact on 35 species): bobolink, gopher snake, American badger, etc.
 - Native song birds, mammals, herps and others
 - Game species: white-tailed deer, pheasant, turkey, ruffed grouse, and small-game animals (squirrel, rabbits, fur-bearers, etc.) and waterfowl (upland nesting habitat).
- 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 capacity through existing staff

and consultants to complete outlined activities. Each partner has a long track record of achievement in conserving natural resources within and beyond the project area. All potential projects have been identified, vetted and prepared and are ready to go.

2. Program Work Location

- a. **What percent of your work will be prairie?** 70%
- b. **What percent of your work will be wetland?** 0%
- c. **What percent of your work will be forest?** 30%
- d. **What percent of your work will be aquatic systems?** 0%
- e. **Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.**

Yes, it is part of a prairie/oak savanna/oak woodland complex that historically occurred across the ASP, and it is common to find all within a given site. Work on savanna and prairie has been placed into "prairie" above, while work with oak woodland was placed into "forest."

3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

- a. **What percent reduction could you accept without rendering your project inoperable?** Scope of work and funding estimates are based on the broad experience of the partners. If funding is limited, the Partnership will reduce the scope of work, focusing on a subset of sites considered to be most important/urgent. We would prefer funding at no less than 50% of the requested amount.

- b. **Have you also applied to the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partners Grant Program operated by DNR?** No. We have not applied to the OHF CPG Program.

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

As a broad partnership, we will be seeking funding from a wide array of sources to grow conservation impact in the ASP. We are and will be seeking funds through a variety of mechanisms as non-state match to this and other proposals:

- Fundraising: foundations (e.g., McKnight, NFWF), industry and private individuals.
- Grants from federal agencies (e.g., USFWS, NRCS and others).
- Program support from existing Partnership members.

4. Personnel Details

- a. **Describe the personnel duties. Are they office staff or field staff – existing or new positions?** Approximately \$460,000 of the requested funds will be used for personnel unique to this program as detailed below.

Great River Greening

<i>Project Management, Reporting (3 Positions: Office/Field, Existing)</i>	\$101,000
<i>Crew Management (Field, Existing)</i>	\$ 34,000
<i>Crew Technicians (2 positions, New)</i>	\$ 41,000
<i>Volunteer Management. (Office, Existing)</i>	\$ 2,000
<i>Budget Accounting (Office, Existing)</i>	\$ 13,000
<i>Budget Manager (Office, Existing)</i>	\$ 7,000

Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve

<i>Field Technicians (24 positions, field - New)</i>	\$ 95,000
<i>Field Restoration Specialist (1 position, field – New)</i>	\$ 60,000

USFWS

<i>Forester (1 position, field – New)</i>	\$105,000
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