

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 33 DNR AQUATIC HABITAT PROGRAM
Program Manager: MICHAEL DUVAL
Telephone Number: 218.833.8612 (office) / 218.232.2774 (cell)

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

In the short-term, land markets are depressed along with the general economy, which has temporarily eased speculative development influence on land sale prices. This will provide a short-term opportunity to extend the state's acquisition buying power. In the long-term, steadily rising land costs, increasing urban development from population expansion, declining water quality, and conversion of existing shoreline habitats to residential lots make protection and restoration of remaining shoreline habitats urgent.

Identified shoreland areas in need of enhancement are no longer providing habitat benefits or are eroding and compromising in-lake habitat. The DNR has a number of willing local government partners ready to initiate shoreline enhancement work with assistance through agency matching grant funds.

Many stream restoration projects are based on timing. Considerable effort has been expended by the DNR on developing projects that are at the top of the priority list.

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

Approximately 60% of the dollar value of this proposal represents acquisition principally to protect critical habitats but also, to a lesser extent, to provide management access for conducting restoration or enhancement activities. Acquisition will be a required preliminary step for some proposed river channel modification activities and future trout stream restoration work not included within this proposal.

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

DNR acquired lands are open for public use consistent with Minnesota statute and rules. Allowable uses of Aquatic Management Area lands are described in Minnesota Rules Chapter 6270. These rules allow for low-impact, non-motorized types of recreation including hiking, fishing, and gathering of nuts, berries, and mushrooms; and hunting and trapping on General Use designated AMAs.

For some restoration and enhancement projects included within this proposal, public use and enjoyment will be tangential and arise through direct participation in the fishery benefited by the project. Removal or modification of a fish barrier, for example, is highly site specific and offers limited public recreational use at a road crossing or dam. However, the movement of fish across the barrier enhances upstream angling opportunities as well as improves access to spawning habitat that can later translate into catchable fish.

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

The DNR's Aquatic Habitat Program proposal meets all nine of the Council's statewide goals. We are proposing projects under established programs, that produce multiple habitat benefits to aquatic and terrestrial species, that leverage other funds or real estate value donations, that allow public access, that represent conservation opportunities that will be lost if not acted upon, that restore and enhance AMAs, that use science-based decision framework, that consider locations of state SGCNs, and that provide Minnesotans with greater public access.

This proposal meets the regional priorities of the Council in the following ways by program (corresponding Section priority action in parentheses):

Planning Section	AMA	Stream Restoration	Shoreland Enhancement	Dams	Fish Passage
Northern Forest	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)	(1)
Forest/Prairie Transition	(1)		(1)		
Southeast Forest	(2)	(2)			(2)
Prairie	(4)		(4)	(3)	
Metro-Urbanizing	(3)	(3)			(3)

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

The DNR uses scoring criteria to rank AMA and stream restoration project opportunities and select priority sites. Please refer to Question 24 of the funding proposal for an overview of the prioritization framework used to decide where to work on the landscape.

For lakeshore enhancement projects, project proposals are solicited and evaluated based on project goals (including connectivity to other habitat, benefit to fish and wildlife SGCNs, and existing limiting factors of the site), capacity of partner/proposer to do the work, appropriateness of approach and costs, quality of the proposal, public visibility of the site, and communication/dissemination of project outcomes. This evaluation process ensures that the best project proposals receive funding consideration.

Coldwater restoration and fish passage projects proposed within this L-SOHC request are very discrete, high-value resources that are being targeted because of their importance to restoring and enhancing quality fish habitat where this is currently lacking or severely compromised. Especially for Lake Superior tributaries, habitat available for migratory fish is at a premium and cannot be created – it has to be accessible. The proposed projects will reconnect significant stream miles of habitat through relatively focused project activities.

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

Science-based strategic planning is when the science drives the decision making process. Science-based strategic planning employs a four-part circular sequence that includes assessment of current conditions (Where are we?), identification of desired conditions (Where do we want to go?), determining challenges and needed strategies to attain the desired conditions (How do we get there?), and assessment of accomplishments (Did we make it?). Throughout our adaptive management evaluation model, science is the driver.

Department habitat actions are guided by statewide, regional, and species-specific strategic plans, which are outlined in Section C of the funding proposal.

D.1.a. Enumerate the specific kinds of action you plan to take to protect, enhance, and/or restore natural systems.

Please refer to Question 5 of the funding proposal for an enumeration of proposed actions. The following information is intended to expand on the information provided in the funding proposal.

Aquatic Management Areas (AMA) on lakes, warmwater streams, and trout streams will protect critical habitat as required by statute and recommended by the Aquatic Management Area Acquisition Plan. The DNR will use a combination of fee title and permanent easement acquisition to achieve this habitat protection target.

Dam modifications may employ engineering solutions ranging from physical by-pass channels around high dams to back-sloping the downstream face of low-head dams with rocks to create an extensive riffle that replicates natural rapids that fish can negotiate. DNR has many successful examples of how each of these engineering solutions has been utilized across the state.

Targeted lake outlet control structures are presently in disrepair and this proposal will restore the function of the outlet control while enhancing fish passage across these existing barriers by back-sloping with rock to create a riffle.

High visibility public lakeshore sites will be selected, native vegetation will be reestablished on upland and in-lake areas, eroding shorelines will be stabilized using bioengineering techniques, and interpretative signage will be placed at project sites. Aquatic habitats will benefit from reduced sedimentation of nearshore spawning areas, reduced physical disturbance of in-lake habitats by human activity, and natural reestablishment of aquatic vegetation following site enhancement. Upland revegetation will enhance habitat structural complexity for non-game species by creating an understory component in addition to existing canopy vegetation and restored native ground-cover.

D.1.b. What species will be helped?

SGCNs like northern cisco, pugnose shiner, longear sunfish, and least darter; piping plover and neo-tropical migrant songbirds; hairy-necked tiger beetle.

Game species such as northern pike, walleye, brook trout and other stream trout species, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill, lake sturgeon, yellow perch, catfish species, etc.

Other non-game species such as white sucker, redhorse, and a host of others; mink frogs and other amphibians; various minnow species essential to survival and growth of game fish species.

D.1.c. Do you currently have the capacity to get the work done that you are requesting dollars for in FY 2011? -- Explain

DNR has the expertise and experience to complete the project elements proposed in this program request. However, because this request represents an accelerated delivery of existing programs, this funding proposal includes temporary positions to conduct the increased work load. In a November 4, 2009 letter to Chairman Kilgore, DNR Commissioner Holsten provided additional context for positions within DNR proposals.

D2. Program Work Location

d. 100% of this proposal will be aquatic systems.

e. Some of the work will be part of larger habitat complexes. For example, for trout stream habitat protection work proposed, priority will be given to segments that connect existing easement segments in order to create continuous habitat protection corridors. The DNR has invested several decades of focused effort to stitch together habitat protection and angler access corridors along high quality coldwater streams of Southeast Minnesota and the North Shore. Scoring criteria used to prioritize and select projects for many of the programs in this funding proposal consider and favor proximity to other established public lands.

D.3.a. What percent reduction could you accept without rendering your project inoperable?

To help guide the Council, some elements of this proposal (i.e., AMA, Stream Habitat Restoration, Dams) are based on prioritized lists of projects, of which only a portion of those are proposed for funding under this proposal (see list in Section K of proposal). The Department would respond to a reduced level of funding by scaling back how many projects can be accomplished from these lists.

While not rendering the Aquatic Management Area Acquisition program inoperable, lesser allocations will cause us to miss unique opportunities to permanently protect critical shoreland habitat. In the long term we have been losing shoreland habitat at an alarming rate. LSOHC funding at the level of DNR's request will help achieve a significant portion of the Aquatic Management Area Acquisition Plan goals.

Fish passage elements of this proposal reflect site-specific costs and staffing needed to implement the scope of work; reductions in funding would directly affect the viability of these projects. We would choose to fund these entirely or not at all based on the Council's recommended appropriation.

Shoreland enhancement work and fish passage incentive grants to LGUs proposed under this proposal are somewhat scalable and each could still be viable down to half the proposed level of funding, with a proportionate reduction in outcomes on-the-ground.

D.3.b. Have you also applied to the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partners Grant Program operated by DNR?

No.

D.3.c. Where else might you get money for this project?

The Governor's 2010 Capital Bonding proposal currently includes \$10M for DNR AMA funding, \$4M for repairs to hazardous dams, and \$3M for river and stream restoration and dam modification. This L-SOHC request represents additional funding needs above and beyond these "base level" bonding requests.

The Department continues to actively pursue other funding from a variety of federal, state, and private sources to achieve aquatic habitat management and conservation objectives. Under Section I of the funding proposal, the Department outlined program budget allocations pooled by all sources that have funded these program activities. These traditional funding sources often have included "soft money" such as LCCMR, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grants, federal State Wildlife Grants, and others where continuation funding is never assured.

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

Please refer to the personnel duties described under Question 3 of the funding proposal and consider together with the additional detail below. All of the positions included in this proposal and listed below will work exclusively on Outdoor Heritage funded projects.

The following positions contained in this proposal are new positions:

- Land Acquisition Specialist (0.5 FTE): New position that will be about 75% office and 25% field oriented. Duties as described in funding proposal Question 3.
- Field Acquisition Specialists (2 FTE): New field based positions. Duties as described in funding proposal Question 3.
- Restoration Coordinator (1 FTE): New office based position responsible for the selection and implementation of stream restoration projects. All facets of this work, from science to financial to informational, are within the realm of responsibilities for the position. Specific responsibilities would include, overseeing budgets, soliciting and developing future projects, coordinating with area staff and experts on specific projects, assisting with the completion of permits, maintaining and updating the Stream Habitat Restoration List and Criteria, reporting to LSOHC on progress and products, and supervising river ecologists in the collection of relevant stream data and implementation of the restorations.
- River Ecologists (2 FTE): New field based positions. Duties as described in funding proposal Question 3.
- Fish Passage Specialist (1 FTE): New field based position. Duties as described in funding proposal Question 3.
- Shoreland Restoration Specialist (0.5 FTE): Existing field based position that will be reallocated to the project activities of this proposal. Duties as described in funding proposal Question 3.