

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 37 Minnesota Trout Unlimited Coldwater Fish Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Program

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A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:

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

Hundreds of miles of Minnesota's coldwater aquatic habitats are seriously degraded and need urgent action to again support quality fisheries. For this reason the L-SOHC identified the restoration and enhancement of coldwater fish habitat as a priority action in most L-SOHC Sections, including those in which the projects are located. The project stream reaches are no longer providing habitat benefits, angling opportunities, clean water benefits, or enticements to encourage greater public appreciation and stewardship of aquatic ecosystems. If we seize these opportunities to restore/enhance habitat we can create productive trout fisheries in highly visible and accessible areas. In addition to addressing the pressing habitat needs of the streams and improving water quality, the projects will increase the use and enjoyment our coldwater ecosystems, tangibly re-connect people to the land and water, foster greater understanding of threats to them, and ultimately motivate citizens to become advocates for broad watershed and water quality improvements. Failure to seize these six opportunities will not only delay long overdue habitat restoration/enhancement, but will only serve to deny Minnesotans these myriad benefits and opportunities, as well as substantial economic impacts.

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 six projects proposed are entirely habitat restoration and/or enhancement projects. No acquisition is anticipated, as all of the projects will restore or enhance degraded habitat located on land previously acquired by the State as aquatic management areas or state park lands.

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 projects are on easily accessible sites permanently protected by public fee ownership or perpetual easements which also guarantee angling access. Numerous measures which will be undertaken to reconnect floodplains, create overhead cover, and increase beneficial sunlight, have the net effect not only of making the streams more habitable for the entire coldwater ecosystem, but also making them easier to fish. Thus anglers will be able to easily access the sustained increases in trout abundance which the habitat work typically produces. Two of the projects are in, or adjacent to, popular campgrounds and thus sure to be extensively used by the public.

C. PRIORITIES

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

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Each project will directly restore or enhance fish and wildlife habitat in coldwater streams and thus squarely address these regional priority actions: “enhance and restore coldwater fisheries systems” (Metro Urbanizing Area Section) and “protect, enhance and restore habitat for fish, game and non-game wildlife in rivers, cold water streams and associated upland habitat.” (Southeast Forest Section).

Each project also addresses the following statewide priorities: (1) are part of an ongoing program (MNTU’s decades old program of coldwater fish habitat restoration and enhancement) directly addressing the L-SOHC Planning Section priority actions noted above; (2) produce multiple conservation benefits including game and non-game wildlife benefits, clean water benefits, etc.; (3) leverage effort and funds to supplement any OHF appropriation; (4) allow (and facilitate) public access; (5) address conservation opportunities that will be lost if not acted on; (6) make use of MNDNR, and other, science-based strategic planning and evaluation models to guide protection, restoration and enhancement; (7) in each location, consider how to integrate one or more design practices to maintain and enhance habitat for species of greatest conservation need; and (9) provide Minnesotans with greater public access to high quality angling, and other recreational, opportunities.

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

Minnesota Trout Unlimited begins with the MNDNR’s scientifically grounded fisheries management plans, and other existing conservation planning efforts, and consults with area fisheries professionals in the MNDNR to identify streams where habitat restoration or enhancement is needed to improve or sustain quality coldwater fisheries. MNTU, as well as the MNDNR, then apply extensive criteria to determine the highest priority projects. These criteria are enumerated under item # B 24 of MNTU’s funding proposal of November 2, 2009. Determining the pool of highest priority streams is science-based, considering such things as whether the lack of quality habitat is a limiting factor for the fishery, but MNTU narrows its site selections from within this pool by considering other factors such whether the project helps ensure that robust trout populations will thrive where citizens can most enjoy them - near their homes. Final site selections from this group then include consideration of what additional opportunities (educational, conservation partnerships, local support) could be seized now, or lost through delay. All things being equal, MNTU considers a project’s potential to draw new anglers outdoors, increase public awareness of the value of, and threats to, coldwater resources, foster important conservation partnerships, and increase public support for Outdoor Heritage Fund projects and stream restoration in general. For example, the project on the North Branch of the White Water River is a highly visible and provides an opportunity to work with the state park managers and the local Lions Club from nearby Plainview. It will provide the park an opportunity to teach visitors about the impacts of land use practices and expose campers and picnickers to quality coldwater angling. Visitors and local residents will see their tax dollars making concrete improvements to natural resources in Southeast Minnesota.

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

For many years, MNTU and its national organization have recognized that habitat restoration projects must be designed and prioritized based upon “good science” to ensure the greatest natural resource benefit is achieved for the resources invested. Our approach has traditionally focused on identifying the limiting factors a trout stream is facing (i.e. impaired water quality, degradation or lack of spawning or winter habitat, etc.) and developing solutions for addressing

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those limiting factors. For streams and rivers, this process of prioritization can take on many forms, many of which cross regulatory and jurisdictional boundaries. Successful aquatic habitat restoration planning will compile and synthesize information regarding water quality trends, indices of biological integrity, and current and projected future land usages into a project plan that will be supported by landowners, regulatory agencies, and anglers alike.

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 six projects will be very similar to the projects undertaken by MNTU chapters in the past several years and take into consideration new research to improve project designs. The specific habitat restoration or enhancement methods used on each stream will be tailored depending upon the distinct natural resource characteristics of each site, as well as variations in the type and magnitude of poor land uses practices within each watershed. They will include sloping back stream banks (accumulated sediments) to better reconnect the streams to their floodplains, stabilizing stream banks using vegetation and/or rock, installing overhead and other in-stream cover for trout, installing soil erosion blankets, mulching and seeding exposed stream banks (including with native prairie plant species where appropriate), improving or maintaining stream access roads and stream crossing, and removing undesirable woody vegetation (box elder, buckthorn, etc.) from riparian corridors to reduce competition with desirable plant and grass species and allow beneficial sunlight to reach the stream corridors. The Vermillion River project will also remove invasive vegetation (reed canary grass) from approximately 15 acres of the adjacent floodplain and restore native prairie grasses here.

These actions are designed using the best available science to restore and/or enhance coldwater habitat through reducing bank erosion and associated sedimentation, increasing overhead bank cover, increasing large trout and trout wintering cover, improving habitat for invertebrate and other non-game species, reconnecting streams to their flood plain, adding native plant species whenever appropriate and possible, and increasing beneficial energy inputs (sunlight) to streams.

- b. What species will be helped?**

The projects are designed primarily to restore and enhance habitat for brook trout and brown trout, and other aquatic game and non-game species associated with coldwater ecosystems, including native sculpin, redhorse and other non-game fishes, as well as aquatic invertebrates too numerous to list. The projects will incorporate elements to improve habitat for numerous non-game species, both aquatic and terrestrial, including turtles, snakes, frogs and other amphibians. The deterioration or loss of habitat is the primary causes of species' rarity according to Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Regional biologists have identified a number of amphibians and reptiles in Southeast Minnesota watersheds which they consider species of greatest conservation need. Trout Unlimited and an ensemble of professionals have developed a riparian habitat guide for reptiles and amphibians occupying the riparian corridors. We will use this to integrate non-game habitat measures into our projects to help protect, preserve, or increase habitat for a variety of these and other species

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

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Yes. The two projects proposed for the greater metropolitan area are very similar in terms of scope and methods used to those which the Twin Cities Chapter of TU completed in 2009. The Hiawatha Chapter in Southeast Minnesota has increased its capacity to complete the highest quality projects through the use of experienced local contractors and foresees no delay in completing the four projects in this FY20011 funding proposal.

2. Program Work Location

a. What percent of your work will be prairie?

A small percentage of the work will restore native prairie grasses to approximately 15 acres.

b. What percent of your work will be wetland? Not applicable.

c. What percent of your work will be forest? Not applicable.

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

Nearly 100 % of the work is habitat restoration/enhancement of coldwater aquatic ecosystems. One project includes restoring native prairie grasses on approximately 15 acres of land in the floodplain, and coordinating this with an adjacent 35 acre prairie restoration.

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

3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

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

Each project in our restoration and enhancement program is a “stand alone” project which could not be completed with significantly less funding than requested. We would not undertake any given project unless we had adequate funding to produce quality, durable habitat outcomes. We would be forced to delay a given project indefinitely while we search for other funding.

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

No.

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

Minnesota TU will contribute volunteer labor on all projects and pursue cash donations to provide additional matching funds. MNTU will continue to aggressively pursue funding from every source, private, federal and state, and look for partners to get quality habitat restoration and enhancement done. However, while Minnesota Trout Unlimited has increased fundraising efforts, these efforts are unlikely to produce results adequate to replace significant funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. We could realistically hope to raise private funds for just one of the projects. We cannot continue to accelerate the restoration and enhancement of habitat in Minnesota without continued funding from citizens via the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

4. Personnel Details

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

The personnel undertaking some duties to facilitate the completion of these projects are all in existing positions. They include both limited office staff and field staff.