

## L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: \_\_\_\_\_ 39 Porter Creek Conservation Area \_\_\_\_\_

Program Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Mark Themig \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ 952-496-8783 \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

*185 acres of the total 317 acres is under control of Premier Banks as a result of a failed residential development effort. Premier Banks is actively marketing this property. The opportunity to acquire the property is immediate, and we believe could be acquired at a reasonable value. This opportunity will not likely be available again as the land has approved residential development rights.*

*The remaining 109 acres consists of two additional privately-owned parcels. Both private land owners have indicated an interest in selling. If this initiative is not funded, this land could be conveyed to another private property owner in the near future.*

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

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

*The full funding request is for acquisition, and costs related to the acquisition process.*

#### **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 lands acquired in this proposal would remain, forever, in public ownership for the public's use and enjoyment, consistent with the requirements of the funding source. If the proposal is funded, Scott County would like direction from the Lessard Council on management of the land for hunting. There appears to be a number of different management approaches that could be taken, including a Minnesota DNR WMA model, U.S. Fish and Wildlife model, a "modified WMA model" (Vermillion Highlands), or the model provided in 2009 legislation for Anoka County's program.*

*One of the concerns expressed by neighbors in a recent public meeting is the proximity of hunting to existing residential homes. While there was consensus that conservation of the land is preferred over development, there was a concern about hunting. (Hunting adjacent to residential homes occurs in the nearby Bradshaw Lakes WMA without incident.) To address neighbor's concerns, Scott County has been meeting with the DNR to learn different management strategies, and we believe we can effectively manage the site to address neighbors concerns.*

*In addition, we have identified a potential unique opportunity that could fill a gap in hunting opportunities: creation of a permanent accessible hunting site designed for hunters with disabilities. While there appear to be a number of special hunts for people with disabilities, there appears to be a limited number of public sites that are designed specifically for use by hunters with disabilities (strategically placed permanent blinds, accessible routes, etc.). Scott County would like the opportunity to discuss this concept with the Council to determine if there would be interest in funding this kind of facility. In our initial research, we believe it could be a "win/win" by providing a valuable service and helping to address neighbor concerns.*

## C. PRIORITIES

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

*Scott County's approach to natural resource protection planning and this proposal is not unlike that described in the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan's 'Integrated Planning' strategic area. Our conservation-based community planning focus resulted in the development of the Scott County Natural Area Corridors. This acquisition is a strategic project resulting from this process.*

*The Plan ranks Cedar Lake Township (project location) high in terms of having vulnerable key habitat, and scores it moderately on the 'Integrated terrestrial value score' (Figures H16 and H7; Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, pp. 53 and 44). The proposed project is in-line with many of the plan's recommendations, including several key habitat recommendations as indicated in our grant proposal.*

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

*The criteria used to prioritize land acquisition for conservation and habitat protection are:*

- **Location** in relation to the Scott County Natural Area Corridors
- **Adjacency** to other important natural resource and habitat lands
- **Extent of natural resource benefit** expected from the acquisition
- **Availability** (willing seller)
- **Ability to form partnerships** to help ensure the project is a success

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

*We define science-based strategic planning as using science to improve decisions; set strategic priorities, targets and goals; direct implementation; evaluate, learn and adapt. We believe that the Porter Creek Conservation Area project is a great example of this type of planning. The general concept of protecting the Porter Creek Conservation area emerged as a result of the Scott County Natural Areas Corridors planning effort. This was a participatory, science-based planning process for conserving natural lands in Scott County that resulted in a collaborative and strategic approach for preserving and enhancing natural areas.*

## 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.

*This project will protect via fee title acquisition 317 acres of land containing wetlands, grasslands, cropland, and shoreland.*

*Following this acquisition project, we will restore 190 acres of cropland and non-native dominated grasslands to prairie and oak savanna beginning in fall 2011. Ten acres of drained, small, shallow wetlands will be restored as cropland is converted to prairie. The Scott Watershed Management Organization will investigate the feasibility of restoring 1000' of the Porter Creek channel within the project site, if this acquisition proposal is successful. Following initial restoration activities, basic maintenance needs will include weed and brush control, and sapling protection. Portions of the prairie will be harvested for biomass production on a 3 to 5 year cycle providing weed and brush control and a revenue source for a portion of maintenance needs.*

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

*A diversity of game, non-game and rare animal species will benefit from the project. Preliminary surveys have documented 115 bird species on and immediately adjacent to the site. Waterfowl species documented include: Canada goose, tundra swan, wood duck, gadwall, mallard, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, canvas back, redhead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, bufflehead, and ruddy duck.*

*Other water and wetland birds documented and which will benefit from this project include hooded merganser, red-breasted merganser, common loon, pied billed grebe, red-necked grebe, American white pelican, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, green heron, black-crowned night heron, and sora.*

*Upland game birds to benefit include wild turkey and pheasant. White-tail deer are common in the area and are expected to benefit as well.*

*Documented rare species that will benefit include sandhill crane, Blanding's turtle and bald eagle.*

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

*Yes. The acquisition would be handled by existing county staff. Since 2004, Scott County has planned for, secured funding, negotiated the purchase, and closed on the acquisition of 724 acres of land that will be protected, forever, as park and open space land. In December 2009, Scott County will close on a real estate acquisition where the property owner has agreed to sell the property for approximately \$100,000 below the appraised value, and provide the difference as a charitable contribution.*

*In addition, Scott County recently began implementing the Natural Area Corridor Program developed through its 2030 Comprehensive Plan. This program, described in more detail above, will conserve land that has been identified as the highest priority by Scott County residents.*

*We believe we have the capacity to deliver this project on time and within budget.*

**2. Program Work Location**

**a. What percent of your work will be prairie?** *59% will be prairie and oak savanna*

**b. What percent of your work will be wetland?** *32% of the site*

**c. What percent of your work will be forest?** *9% of the site*

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

*The site contains access to Lennon Lake, a popular water fowl hunting lake, and Porter Creek that meanders through wetlands and shallow water lakes.*

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

*Yes. The site lies within a large habitat complex. It is adjacent to six Sites of Ecological Significance (DNR identification) and has a Regionally Significant Terrestrial Species Route (DNR identification) traversing the site. The property lies within the Scott County Natural Area Corridors and the Metro Corridors mapped area, occurring at a crossroads or 'hub' of*

several corridor arms. The site and lands immediately surrounding it make up a smaller 2700 acre habitat complex planned to be publicly owned (state and county) with 1800 acres currently in public ownership and utilized for conservation, recreation and hunting.

### **3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested**

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

*The lands proposed for this acquisition are available now, from willing sellers. There would be the potential of purchasing only some of the land that is available. However, that ultimately would affect the overall project proposal.*

*Scott County is aware that the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council provided phased funding for an Anoka County project. If there were a similar commitment for this proposal, we may have the opportunity to extend the acquisitions over a two-year funding cycle, similar to the Anoka County project.*

#### **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?**

*The acquisition identified in this proposal is proposed to be funded fully by the Outdoor Heritage fund. Funding for future restoration and development of the site could come from other sources, including county highway department, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife Program, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Outdoor Heritage Conservation Partners grant program, Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council grant programs, New Market Sportsmens Club, State Board of Water and Soil Resources, and the Scott Watershed Management Organization.*

### **4. Personnel Details**

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

*There are no new positions associated with this proposal.*

*Mark Themig (Parks Program Manager) would provide overall program management for the acquisition process, Patricia Freeman (Parks and Natural Resources Planner) would provide assistance with the acquisition and natural resource processes, and Paul Nelson (Natural Resource Program Manager) would provide natural resource expertise. In addition, Scott County has had great success in collaboration within the County and with external agencies. For example, the County Surveyor frequently provides surveying assistance for acquisitions, the County's right-of-way agent assists with real estate transactions, the County Attorney's Office provides legal assistance, and outside agencies such as the Soil and Water Conservation District frequently assist with County projects.*

*When restoration activities begin (after acquisition is complete), additional resources may be needed but would likely be contract services. Long-term management of the site would fall under Scott County's existing programs if it were not conveyed to the Minnesota DNR.*