

Request for Funding

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2015 / ML 2014

Program or Project Title: Washington County's Last Best Places

Funds Requested: \$775,000

Manager's Name: Peter Mott

Title: Parks Manager

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County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban

Activity Type:

- Restore
- Enhance

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest
- Prairie

Abstract:

This project would restore and enhance the last best public places in Washington County ownership. At the core of these restoration efforts are rare and unique plant and animal communities identified in the DNR's County Biological Survey. This project would create mosaic landscape-level restorations.

Design and Scope of Work:

This proposal focuses on restoring and preserving Washington County's last best public lands, as identified by the DNR's County Biological Survey, the Metro Conservation Corridors program, and the County's Top 10 Priority Conservation Areas (January 2012). Restoration activities will take place at several locations including along the St. Croix River, within a major watershed of the Mississippi River, and within a wetland dotted landscape that is characteristic of east-central Minnesota and the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines landscape subsection.

The St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines subsection contains 149 species in greatest conservation need, the second most of all subsections in Minnesota. Due to an ever-present growing metropolitan population and the fact that only 6.5% of the land is in public ownership, considerable collaborative efforts on public lands are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of these species in this subsection. This proposal greatly improves the health and biological carrying capacity of lands stewarded by Washington County, one of the largest landowners

on the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines subsection.

The design of the work is intended to maximize benefits for all wildlife, both game and non-game species found in this ecological subsection, by restoring and enhancing existing DNR identified rare and unique plant and animal communities within Washington County ownership. The project also goes a step further by enhancing the connectivity of these areas to existing landscape restoration 'investments' on Washington County lands. The intent of this work is to create mosaic, interconnected landscapes of sufficient size that provides the broadest range of habitat types in order to accommodate the greatest biological diversity. This project will significantly increase the biological carrying capacity of these public lands.

The scope of work for the restoration project along the St. Croix River includes both enhancement and restoration activities. Additionally, the project stitches-together other ongoing restoration efforts initiated by Washington County in recent years. This will create a connected mosaic of maple-basswood & oak forests, oak savanna and tallgrass prairie on a 160 acre site along the St. Croix River.

The scope of work for the restoration project within a major sub-watershed of the Mississippi River includes both restoration and enhancement activities. Enhancement activities at this site involve the removal of invasive tree and ground cover species (primarily buckthorn and garlic mustard). Additionally, relatively small areas of oak wilt will be brought under control and monitored in perpetuity. Restoration opportunities exist on the margins of these forests, where ecological transitions to oak savanna and dry gravel prairie occur. When complete, this 100 acre restoration project will include an ecologically connected oak forest, oak savanna and dry prairie. There are approximately 100 additional acres, also identified in the DNR County Biological Survey, adjacent to this restoration site which will become a focus for future Washington County-led restoration activities.

The scope of work for the wetland restoration site includes both restoration and enhancement activities. Enhancement activities will focus on a diverse assemblage of existing wetlands that dot a 200 acre natural area. Additional enhancement activities will occur within the natural area and include enhancement of the forb diversity (adding 25 forb species) on an established 115 acre tallgrass prairie and enhancement of an existing DNR identified rare and unique forest community. These individual habitats will be stitched together to create a dynamic landscape that includes oak forest, oak savanna, tallgrass prairie, and an assemblage of wetlands including seasonally flooded, mixed emergent marsh, wet meadow and littoral open water wetlands.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU6 Reduce Upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices

Plans Addressed:

- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Washington County Land and Water Legacy Conservation Priorities

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Attempts to ensure conservation benefits are broadly distributed across the LSOHC sections
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work; provides the most cost-effective use of financial resources; and where possible takes into consideration the value of local outreach, education, and community engagement to sustain project outcomes

- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Restore or enhance habitat on permanently protected land
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity
- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)
- Protect, enhance, and restore riparian and littoral habitats on lakes to benefit game and nongame fish species

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

This proposal greatly accelerates Washington County's efforts to restore public land under their stewardship by targeting the most complicated and labor intensive restoration needs on the lands that have the greatest potential for increased biological diversity. In doing so, this funding would be transformational in how limited financial resources would be utilized in the future. Specifically, a portion of funding that currently goes towards primary management activities such as integrated invasive species management and disease tree management could be shifted to more technical activities such as plant community diversification and habitat connectivity. Additionally, this proposal would create an opportunity for the County to double the amount of land in 'pre-settlement' condition over the next two decades.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The lands identified in this proposal were selected strategically to 1.) Get the biggest ecological bang for the investment and 2.) Allow for the continued maintenance of these investments. This was accomplished by connecting existing managed native landscapes to previously isolated vestiges of DNR identified rare and unique plant and animal communities. The sustainability of the proposed landscape restoration work will rely on the timely use of controlled burns. Washington County has a reputable 25-year history of developing and managing tallgrass prairie habitats – currently there are over 200 acres of native prairie under the County's direct stewardship. Because of this established history of prairie management, the County has an experienced prescribed fire program that includes experienced staff and all of the necessary equipment and supplies.

Permanent Protection:

*Is the activity on permanently protected land and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15? - **Yes***
(County/Municipal)

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Plant and animal inventory (5 occasions)	August 2014-2018
Collaborative plan development & consultation (5 occasions)	February 2015-2019
Contracted services: Phase 1 Invasive Species Removal	October, 2015
Migratory bird inventory (3 occasions)	October, 2015,17, 18
Site assessment/collaborative plan development & consultation	February, 2016
Contracted services: Phase 2 Invasive Species Removal	October, 2016
Site assessment/collaborative plan development & consultation	February, 2017
Contracted services: Phase 3 Native Ground Cover/Prairie Installs	October, 2017
Site assessment/collaborative plan development & consultation	February, 2018
Contracted services: Phase 4 Canopy and sub-canopy tree and shrub installations	October, 2018
Site assessment/collaborative plan development & consultation	February, 2019
Contracted services: Phase 5 Final connectivity installs	July, 2019
Performance measurement report	July, 2019

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- Core areas protected with highly biologically diverse wetlands and plant communities, including native prairie, Big Woods, and oak savanna *Biological diversity will be surveyed before and after the restoration work. A 20% increase in the diversity of plants and animals will be documented.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$775,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Contracts	\$685,000	\$0		\$685,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	\$90,000	\$0		\$90,000
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$53,000		\$53,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$24,500		\$24,500
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$775,000	\$77,500	-	\$852,500

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	18	10	17	0	45
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	40	120	200	0	360
Total	58	130	217	0	405

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$72,000	\$40,000	\$68,000	\$0	\$180,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$80,000	\$115,000	\$400,000	\$0	\$595,000
Total	\$152,000	\$155,000	\$468,000	\$0	\$775,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	45	0	0	0	0	45
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	360	0	0	0	0	360
Total	405	0	0	0	0	405

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$180,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$180,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$595,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$595,000
Total	\$775,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$775,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

0 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Washington

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Washington County Woodlands and Wetlands	02721223	100	\$258,000	Yes
Washington County Woodlands and Wetlands	02921222	200	\$317,000	Yes
Washington County Woodlands and Wetlands	02720227	105	\$200,000	Yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type protect.

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.