

Request for Funding

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

Program or Project Title: Wirth Park Habitat Enhancements

Funds Requested: \$865,000

Manager's Name: Jennifer Ringold
Title: Director of Strategic Planning
Organization: Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board
Street Address: 2117 West River Road N
City: Minneapolis, MN 55411
Telephone: 612-230-6464
E-Mail: jringold@minneapolisparcs.org
Organization Web Site:

County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban

Activity Type:

- Enhance

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest

Abstract:

MPRB requests \$865,000 to enhance 213 acres of Wirth Park habitat. This project benefits animal species including the pileated woodpecker and the threatened Blanding's turtle. Primary outcomes include better quality plant communities, reduced fragmentation, and improved shoreline habitat.

Design and Scope of Work:

Theodore Wirth Regional Park was established more than 100 years ago to protect natural resources. Its 750 acres have always provided critical wetland, woodland, savanna, shoreline, and lake habitat for reptiles, amphibians, pollinating insects, fish, and migratory birds within the rapidly urbanizing metro area. The park was recently designated by the Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area and features the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary, the extremely rare habitats of the quaking bog and oak savanna, and several lakes that are important fishing venues for urban families. The park straddles the border between Golden Valley and Minneapolis.

The diversity of native habitats in proximity to the urban landscape puts Wirth on par with internationally known urban preserves like the Presidio in San Francisco, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve in Scottsdale, AZ, and Vancouver's Stanley Park. All of these parks are habitat oases carefully protected and managed across decades. The preservation of Wirth Park more than 100 years ago and its ongoing management for high quality habitat is an early example of exactly what LSOHC funding is intended to protect, restore, and enhance. Any land that is set

aside through this program may some day need to benefit from a significant enhancement and restoration project, in order to maintain the high habitat quality desired by the people of Minnesota.

Invasive species have increased their foothold since Wirth was envisioned. Buckthorn, reed canary grass, honeysuckle, and other invasives threaten the integrity of Wirth's habitat mosaic. The MPRB therefore requests \$865,000 in LSOHC funding to enhance four different types of native habitat in two distinct areas. The Twin and Sweeney Lakes area in the northwest corner of Wirth (sometimes called the "Back 40") includes approximately 49 acres of oak forest and two lakes with 5000 feet of shoreline. The South Wirth Area is comprised of 142 acres of oak forest and oak savanna and 22 acres of wetlands primarily south of Glenwood Road. This area is home to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, the quaking bog, and globally rare examples of oak savanna.

Enhancements in these two project areas will improve shoreline, wetland, forest, and savanna habitats for a variety of animals, including migratory birds on the Mississippi Flyway, just three miles to the east. Wirth, combined with the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, creates an alternate migratory route through the heart of the metro area. Activities in all habitat types will include removal of invasive vegetation, planting of appropriate local ecotype native species, and mitigation of erosion caused in part by invasive species choking out important native shrubs, groundcovers, and young trees upon which wildlife depend for survival.

The MPRB battles invasive species because they regenerate easily unless aggressively removed. In forests, invasive species removal will allow germination of native oak acorns and regeneration of these forests over time. A more diverse age range of native trees and shrubs provides greater variety in habitat niches for birds and small mammals. In the savannas, grassy openings can be reclaimed, thereby providing rare edge habitat for nesting birds and hunting grounds for raptors. Removal of reed canary grass and reduction of cattails from the Wirth Lake wetlands will increase the amount of open water and allow the existing native seed bank to germinate and diversify the species mix. This greater diversity will in turn provide broader food and nesting options for birds and aquatic animals. Correction of erosion and removal of buckthorn along the Twin and Sweeney Lake shorelines will stabilize the littoral zone and create habitat for spawning fish, as well as for reptiles and amphibians. Because these two lakes have residential frontage everywhere except in Wirth Park, the 5000 feet of shoreline included in this project comprise the single largest opportunity to improve habitat on these lakes.

Enhancing four types of habitat together will provide full life cycle benefits to a variety of animals. Many species require a range of landscape types to successfully breed, feed, and find shelter. The close proximity of these different habitats within each of Wirth's project areas is extremely rare in the metro area, and is one of the reasons the land was originally purchased and permanently protected.

Specifically, these enhancements will have positive effects on species currently found in the park, such as pileated woodpecker, green heron, scarlet tanager, red-eyed vireo, and broad-winged hawk; red fox, mink, and bats; painted and snapping turtles, western chorus frog, leopard frog, gray tree frog, and Blanding's turtle. The proposed habitat enhancements would also provide appropriate environments for birds listed in Audubon's Top 20 Birds in Decline, such as common grackle, eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, horned lark, snow bunting, and whip-poor-will.

These enhancements are supported by the public and are a key component of the Wirth Park Master Plan. Since 2005, MPRB Citizens Advisory Committees have consistently listed resource enhancements as top priorities. This funding would allow for more economical management in the future, because the MPRB would be able to focus on ensuring quality habitat in perpetuity, rather than just trying to keep the buckthorn and other invasive species under control. LSOHC funding would also leverage additional cash and in-kind assistance from the Conservation Corps, the Teen Teamworks Green Team (a MPRB summer youth employment program that focuses on environmental job skills training for inner city youth), and The Friends of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. The restoration costs per acre for this request are well within LSOHC funding metrics.

When Wirth Park was established more than 100 years ago as an urban natural area, the land was relatively untouched and not impacted by invasive species or urbanization. Times have changed. Buckthorn, reed canary grass, honeysuckle, and resultant erosion threaten the quality of this critical mosaic of metro area habitat. Every year that passes allows these species a greater foothold. LSOHC funding will allow MPRB and its partners to get out ahead of habitat loss. It will return Wirth to its historic place as a prime example of wetland, woodland, savanna, shoreline, and lake habitats.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H4 Restore and protect shallow lakes
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H6 Protect and restore critical in-water habitat of lakes and streams
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU6 Reduce Upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices

Plans Addressed:

- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Sustainability Framework
- National Audubon Society Top 20 Common Birds in Decline
- National Fish Habitat Action Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for States and Physiographic Regions
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Projects Joint Ventures Plan
- MPRB Theo. Wirth Regional Park Master Plan (under approval)

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- 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:

- Parks and Trails Fund

Theodore Wirth Park has received funding from the Parks and Trails fund in past years which has improved recreational facilities and existing recreational structures in the park. Wok has improved trails, beaches, playgrounds, a picnic pavilion and other features. Some parks and trails funding enhanced a wetland adjacent to Wirth Lake. Claen Watrer funds recieved by the bassett Creek watershed improved the Wirth Lake outlet to

Bassett Creek, a key project in its TMDL.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

Wirth was established more than 100 years ago to provide habitat within the urban area. Over the years, portions of the 750 acres, such as the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary and the quaking bog, have been set aside as nature areas because they provide rare and unique habitats for plants and animals. In essence, LSOHC funding would further the decades of effort by MPRB staff and volunteers to protect, preserve, and enhance the Wirth landscape. The Eloise Butler garden and the quaking bog, specifically, have been carefully managed, but sit within South Wirth woods increasingly impacted by invasive species. LSOHC funding would extend the work done in these two habitat islands out into the broader landscape. Volunteers and youth teams have been working to remove buckthorn and other invasives, especially on the shorelines of Twin and Sweeney Lakes. Without a major removal and erosion stabilization effort, however, these invasives will return. LSOHC funding will leverage the volunteer and youth hours already used and allow these groups to participate in enriching habitat management and enhancement work in the future, rather than continued invasive species removal.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The stewardship plan for the restored habitat in Wirth Plan will be led by MPRB environmental services staff. Their primary focus will be to continue removing the seed beds of the invasive species, stabilizing eroded areas, and supporting the re-establishment of native species. They will contract with organizations like Conservation Corps and engage Green Team of Teen Teamworks, as necessary. The Green Team consists of youth workers who spend their summer developing job skills in the Minneapolis park system. A portion of their time is dedicated to invasive species removal. The 5-year grant is expected to significantly decrease the level of invasive species, thus maximizing the impact of \$60,000 in annual habitat restoration funding and efforts of staff and contractors. In addition, committed volunteer groups such as the Friends of the Eloise Butler Garden will help sustain the restored habitat. The Friends of Eloise Butler have found that after about five years of intensive invasive control, the level of invasive species is reduced to around 10% of the initial effort. Finally, all erosion work is expected to be stabilized before the end of the grant.

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 |
|---|----------------------------|
| upland Invasive species removal | 2019 |
| upland erosion repairs and establishment | 2019 |
| upland native tree, shrub and forb enhancement planting and seeding | 2019 |
| wetland/shoreline grading and erosion repair | 2019 |
| wetland/shoreline invasive species removal | 2019 |
| wetland/shoreline native re-vegetation | 2019 |

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest

conservation need *Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of restored habitat.*

- Improved aquatic habitat indicators *Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of wetlands and littoral areas restored habitat.*
- The system will not allow us to enter our outcomes. They are as follows:

A network of natural land and riparian habitats....

Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of restored habitat.

Improved aquatic habitat indicators.

Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of wetlands and littoral areas restored habitat.

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$865,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

| Budget Name | LSOHC Request | Anticipated Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Personnel | \$40,000 | \$160,000 | | \$200,000 |
| Contracts | \$600,000 | \$0 | | \$600,000 |
| 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 | \$125,000 | \$0 | | \$125,000 |
| Direct Support Services | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| DNR Land Acquisition Costs | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Capital Equipment | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Other Equipment/Tools | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Supplies/Materials | \$100,000 | \$0 | | \$100,000 |
| DNR IDP | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Total | \$865,000 | \$160,000 | - | \$1,025,000 |

Personnel

| Position | FTE | Over # of years | LSOHC Request | Anticipated Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|----------------------------|------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| planning project manager | 0.16 | 5.00 | \$20,000 | \$45,000 | MPRB General Fund | \$65,000 |
| environmental coordinators | 0.20 | 5.00 | \$20,000 | \$60,000 | MPRB General Fund | \$80,000 |
| summer youth crew leaders | 0.30 | 5.00 | \$0 | \$9,000 | MPRB General Fund | \$9,000 |
| summer youth crew workers | 2.70 | 5.00 | \$0 | \$46,000 | MPRB General Fund, grants | \$46,000 |
| Total | 3.36 | 20.00 | \$40,000 | \$160,000 | - | \$200,000 |

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

| Type | Wetlands | Prairies | Forest | Habitats | Total |
|--|----------|----------|--------|----------|-------|
| Restore | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 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 | 22 | 0 | 191 | 0 | 213 |
| Total | 22 | 0 | 191 | 0 | 213 |

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

| Type | Wetlands | Prairies | Forest | Habitats | Total |
|--|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Restore | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| 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 | \$363,300 | \$0 | \$501,700 | \$0 | \$865,000 |
| Total | \$363,300 | \$0 | \$501,700 | \$0 | \$865,000 |

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

| Type | Metro/Urban | Forest/Prairie | SE Forest | Prairie | Northern Forest | Total |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-------|
| Restore | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 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 | 213 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 213 |
| Total | 213 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 213 |

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

| Type | Metro/Urban | Forest/Prairie | SE Forest | Prairie | Northern Forest | Total |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| Restore | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| 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 | \$865,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$865,000 |
| Total | \$865,000 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$865,000 |

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

1 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Hennepin

| Name | TRDS | Acres | Est Cost | Existing Protection? |
|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Wirth Park | 02924220 | 213 | \$1,025,000 | 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.



7800 Golden Valley Road
Golden Valley, MN 55427

June 12, 2013

Bill Becker
Executive Director
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
State Office Building, Room 95
St. Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Support of Lessard-Sams Grant Application for Wirth Park

Dear Mr. Becker and Outdoor Heritage Council:

The City of Golden Valley is supportive of any effort that would enhance and improve the habitat and natural resources within Theodore Wirth Regional Park. As most of Wirth Park lies within the City of Golden Valley, we understand the importance and the value of this park to our community of residents, businesses, and institutions, and we have a vested interest in the long-term health and sustainability of the park and its natural resources.

We understand that, consistent with the Wirth Park Master Plan, the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage funds will be used to restore and enhance large areas of shoreline, wetland, and forest habitat which sustain the native plant and animal species in the park.

For all of these reasons, we strongly support the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Lessard-Sams grant application in the amount of \$800,000.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shepard M. Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Shepard M. Harris
Mayor of the City of Golden Valley

C: Heather Koop, LSOHC Project Analyst Manager
Honorable Ryan Winkler, State Representative
Honorable Mike Freiberg, State Representative
Honorable Ann Rest, State Senator
Honorable Ron Latz, State Senator
John Erwin, President, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board of Commissioners
Jayne Miller, Superintendent, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board
Golden Valley City Council



Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

PO Box 3801

Minneapolis, MN 55403

To: Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

The Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis strongly supports the grant application that enhances habitat in Theodore Wirth Park. We understand that it will repair erosion and improve native vegetation of: 5000 feet of shoreline on Sweeney and Twin Lakes; 13 acres of wetlands near Wirth Lake; and 150 acres in two sections of large contiguous forest and oak savannah (the latter of which is a globally endangered ecosystem).

These enhancement activities will remove invasive species; repair and stabilize eroded soils; and plant local ecotype native species, based on documented pre-settlement plant communities.

The Project outcomes include improving habitat for native pollinators, migrant and resident bird species including rare birds which rely on large forest patches, such as the Pileated woodpecker, waterfowl, amphibians, reptiles including the endangered Blanding's turtle, and small mammals and native plants. Natural resource and habitat improvement work is strongly supported as a top priority of the community-driven draft Wirth Park Master Plan (approval anticipated 2013).

The Wirth Park area is part of a National Audubon and BirdLife International Important Birding Area. These areas are important for bird's survival during migration and breeding periods. They are important areas for bird watchers to see and hear many birds.

We urge you to approve this grant to help improve this very important habitat in an urban setting.

Thank you,

Jerry Bahls
President
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis



Friends Of The Wild Flower Garden

June 10, 2013

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, I am writing in support of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board's application for a Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council grant to fund natural resource enhancement in Theodore Wirth Park. Our organization is the volunteer-based friends group in service to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary in SE Wirth. The Garden, a unique 15 acre, 106 year-old native plant preserve, is comprised of cultivated but naturalistic woodland, wetland and prairie habitats, providing a home for more than 120 bird species, including hawks, owls and warblers, a wide variety of small mammals and insects, and several types of frogs and toads, in addition to the wildflowers, woody plants and trees. The Garden is the oldest public wildflower garden in the United States and is considered by many park patrons to be the gem of the nationally renowned Minneapolis park system, at the heart of our largest park.

The Friends of the Wild Flower Garden is a group of private citizens who provide volunteer services, substantial funding and community advocacy for the benefit of the Garden and its visitors. We have proudly partnered with the MPRB in our commitment to the Garden since our founding in 1952. We believe that the Garden is a vital preserve for native flora and fauna of Minnesota, as well as a uniquely accessible nature education resource for people of all ages. In the last 10 years, we have become increasingly concerned about declining habitat health in Wirth Park, particularly the widespread distribution of invasive plants. While the most serious non-natives (buckthorn, garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed) are nearly eliminated inside the Garden fence by vigilant MPRB staff, our volunteers have been vigorously clearing the areas immediately around the Garden to create a Preservation Zone, both to protect the Garden and to begin the enormous task of controlling these invasives in SE Wirth.

In order to stem the tide of destructive species, Wirth Park needs a multi-year and multi-method strategy of heroic proportions. This means many trained workers and an on-going pattern of removal and/or treatment at different stages of the invasive plant's life cycle. Additionally, Wirth has endangered wetlands, severe erosion and several areas where remnants of native forest and oak savannah are at risk of serious decline without major intervention. The rehabilitation and enhancement of these natural zones will provide habitat for insect, bird, mammal and amphibian populations as well as significant educational and recreational opportunities for students of botany, ecology and birding. Recent research has highlighted the need for contiguous habitat corridors to enable successful nesting and breeding by birds and raptors. Wirth Park has been home to Great Horned Owls and Pileated Woodpeckers, 2 species that require large wooded areas in order to thrive.



Friends Of The Wild Flower Garden

We believe that this grant opportunity can provide much needed and highly effective habitat improvement for Wirth, thereby enhancing the diversity of its plant and animal species and the ecological value of its natural environment. As the Friends of the Wild Flower Garden seek to continue our long and active history of service to the Garden, the Preservation Zone and all of South Wirth, we welcome the outcome potential of this project. In conjunction with our commitment to the protection of native species in and around Eloise's Wild Garden, we wholeheartedly endorse this endeavor for habitat restoration in Theodore Wirth Park.

Sincerely,

Pamela Weiner

President, Board of Directors

Friends of the Wild Flower Garden

Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Grant - 2014

Theodore Wirth Regional Park, Located in Minneapolis and Golden Valley, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

