

This story was published in the Feb. 2, 2009 Redwood Gazette

Outdoor legacy funding offers opportunity

By Troy Krause, Editor

This past November when Minnesota voters approved the amendment to the state Constitution dedicating funding to various programs from the outdoors to the arts, history was made.

In fact, it has been hailed as the most significant financial investment by a state in history. With the amendment approved, the work of determining how to spend the funding in each of the four categories begins.

A group met this past Thursday to talk about the outdoors portion of the funding, which is 33 percent of the three-eighths of one percent sales tax collected in the state annually. The conversation, which was held at the RACC in Redwood Falls included comments by those who helped get the bill approved and from those who have an idea about how to spend some of those dollars.

Bob Lessard, a former Minnesota senator, was the leader in the legislature who worked to get the proposed amendment on the November ballot. He was in attendance at the meeting talking about the bill and encouraging people to get involved.

“This is a historical opportunity,” said Lessard. “We all need to get with our legislators to make sure the money is spent the way it is supposed to be spent.”

In order to help determine how that 33 percent is being allocated statewide, the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council has been formed. It is going to make recommendations to the legislature.

The appointed council has its work cut out, as it must make its first recommendation by April 1.

“The success of the council depends on your input,” said Bill Becker, a member of the council. “We are under a tight timeline this year.”

Becker said the council is going to make a recommendation each year to the legislature, but added the ultimate decision about how the funding is spent is being made by the legislative body and the governor.

After recommendations are made by the council, the public is going to be encouraged to speak with its legislators emphasizing the importance of abiding by the recommendations.

One of the projects being proposed for funding is called the Green Corridor Legacy. The project is focused on acquiring land from willing landowners in the mid-Minnesota River Valley to help create permanent easements for conservation and recreations.

Mark Matuska, director for the southern corridor of the DNR, said the people in his department are focused on improving those same aspects in the Minnesota River, which is why he said the project makes sense.

The Green Corridor Legacy is the next phase of a project first introduced to the Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) which allocated funds to help with land acquisition.

Brad Cobb, who is helping coordinate the Green Corridor program said funding is being requested from the outdoor heritage council to help it further its efforts.

He said the efforts are being made to bring more wildlife into the region, but more importantly to make it possible for the next generations to hunt and fish in the Minnesota River area.

“Doing this helps establish a lasting foundation,” Cobb told the group. “Imagine what investing in this for 25 years is going to look like.”

Cobb said the expectation is not to receive full funding for its concept in one year, but added he thinks over the 25 years the sales tax is collected major strides forward can be made to improve this area of the state.

That he said is good for the economy, good for the environment and good for the future of recreation in southern Minnesota.

A board of directors has been set up with nine members in the mid-Minnesota area who are going to work to help determine how any money is allocated and to help raise additional dollars. The group is also being assisted by the Southwest Initiative Foundation.

Posted with permission from Pat Schmidt, Publisher, Redwood Gazette