

Wetland Collaborative Proposal



Prepared for the:

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council

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Wetland Collaborative Proposal Outline

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Executive Summary

Wetlands are the connections between water and land. They can be wet year-round, but often are only moist seasonally and sometimes dry. They are normally landscape features such as marshes, swamps, bogs, fens, playas, prairie potholes, vernal pools, shallow lakes, intermittent and ephemeral streams and bays of larger lakes. Regardless of the name, wetlands are considered to be some of the most fertile and productive ecosystems in the world. They also serve as filter systems that improve water quality as water percolates into the underground water table, as well as being important fish and wildlife nurseries. Key to their productivity is the variability in water levels in wetlands within and among years.

This Wetland Collaborative proposal was developed for the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC) in response to their “Strategy and Process for Developing 2009 Funding Recommendations” as adopted on January 12, 2009. The Collaborative held its first and only open-door planning meeting nine days after the LOHC made this recommendation. During this condensed schedule, significant effort was made to publicize the planning meeting and bring together as many stakeholders as possible. As a result of this promotion, 32 distinct agencies, organizations, private businesses, local sportsmen clubs and others attended the meeting. Furthermore, the attendance of four members of the outdoor media helped ensure transparency and accountability.

The collaborating groups involved in developing this proposal are pleased to provide the LOHC with a comprehensive suite of accelerated programs and projects for consideration. The Wetland Collaborative proposal respectfully requests \$65,160,375 from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) to be leveraged with \$47,289,289 of other financial resources. Collectively, the stakeholders will protect, restore and enhance 58,113 acres. Many strategic plans were referenced and further utilized in the development of this proposal and the proposed work will incrementally, but significantly make progress toward common goals and objectives. Each stakeholder that brought forth a request has agreed their project/program complies with the minimum criteria established by the LOHC.

Although the focus of this collaborative is on wetland habitat, the proposal recommends projects and programs that also include the restoration and protection of prairie and grassland. This is a key element to ensure the wetland values are enduring and to provide multiple conservation benefits, especially for many species of game and non-game wildlife. Thus, approximately 42 percent of all the acres restored, enhanced and protected in this proposal are grasslands and other upland habitat types.

In summary, this Wetland Collaborative proposal focuses on accelerating the work of proven partnerships with an established track record of delivering science-based conservation programs and initiatives. The majority of conservation outcomes will be fee ownership of lands by state and federal conservation agencies or perpetual conservation easements held by federal and state agencies and conservation organizations. Another important aspect of the proposal is the enhancement of existing habitats to sustain and improve their values to wildlife and society.

I. Process and participant description

The brief time available for developing a stakeholder-supported proposal necessitated rapid electronic communication with three types of conservation groups and partners: (1) stakeholder groups with a history of collaboration on statewide wetland projects and programs using funding such as Minnesota Waterfowl Stamp funds, Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, etc., (2) groups with a regional/local focus working independently, and (3) potential stakeholder groups with an interest in wetland protection, enhancement, and restoration. The proposal organizer (PO), Ryan Heiniger, Ducks Unlimited, Inc. Director of Conservation Programs, volunteered on January 14, 2009 to initiate a collaborative effort to develop this wetland proposal for the LOHC by February 9. Given the abbreviated time-line, the PO contacted a group of approximately 17 known stakeholder groups by email on January 14 requesting attendance by up to two representatives from each organization at a January 21 open-door meeting at the US Fish and Wildlife Service Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Bloomington. In addition, the Department of Natural Resources was requested by PO to send the same email invitation to a DNR Roundtable and LOHC listserv containing approximately 530 unique email addresses. Lastly, the meeting was also publicized in the St. Paul Pioneer Press in the Outdoors Section on Sunday, January 18 (See Appendix A).

As a result of these multiple publicity efforts, 45 participants attended an initial face-to-face meeting on January 21 to work on the development of this proposal (see Appendix B). The group included federal and state agency representatives, local soil and water conservation districts, MN rural county association, non-profit conservation organizations, private industry and environmental consulting businesses, University of Minnesota, local sportsmen clubs, and the media. The primary objective of the January 21 meeting was to discuss critical aspects of a wetland proposal that would benefit from broad stakeholder input on criteria for prioritizing stakeholder proposals, sources of information on wetland trends and issues, strategic short-term opportunities for wetland efforts, and identification of volunteer teams to draft and present the proposal. Teams were recruited to develop and present the proposal and stakeholder groups were solicited to submit proposals electronically on spreadsheets with mutually agreed upon information fields including: (1) geographic scale – county, eco-region, or statewide, (2) sense of importance or urgency – missed opportunity versus urgent need, (3) specific Joint Venture benefited – Prairie Pothole or Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes, (4) schedule status – “shovel ready”, (5) connections to existing strategic plans, (6) conservation activity – upland versus wetland and restored, enhanced or protected, (7) funds requested, and (8) source and amount of leveraged funds.

II. Statewide and regional conservation issues

Minnesota’s wetland crisis may be best explained through a broader historical overview of landscape change. The pristine wetlands of the United States provided good quality water and ideal habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife for the inhabitants. The coastal areas and inland lakes were a rich source of food resources for the early settlers. However, as the frontier moved westward and agriculture expanded, wetlands were viewed as impediments to progress. Development of coastal waterways increased capability for drainage of these adjacent lands.

Ever since settlers first moved into the prairie pothole region of the mid-western states during the late 1800's, the advancement of mechanized equipment has continually improved farming and construction operations and subsequent ditching and tile drainage operations have taken their toll on countless wetlands. It is estimated that more than 50% of the original 221 million acres of wetlands present in the United States had been lost by 1972. Even with passage of the Clean Water Act, which has helped to slow the rate of wetland loss, we are still losing more than 80,000 acres per year. Since 1986, the United States has lost more than 2 million acres of vegetated wetlands and 1.4 million acres of freshwater marshes. While the impact of drainage varies considerably in different regions of the United States, wetland losses in the prairie pothole and parkland regions of the Midwest have reached critical thresholds for many species of migratory birds. For that reason, primary consideration was given to the prairie pothole region which includes Minnesota.

The original wetlands of Minnesota provided excellent habitat for waterfowl, many other migratory birds and other wetland wildlife. These wetlands also helped maintain good water quality throughout the state. These conditions began to change with the beginning of settlement during mid-1800's, with the plowing of the prairie grasslands for farming. As human populations and agriculture increased, development of suitable farmland and clearing of timber moved into the transition zone and portions of the forested regions of the state. Through the years, mechanization of farming operations and improved construction equipment made it easier to remove water from the landscape through drainage ditch systems and tiling.

Around the turn of the century and right after World War II, many large "legal ditch" systems were constructed that drained large wetlands and shallow lakes, and facilitated the subsequent drainage of smaller isolated wetlands in adjacent farm fields. In the transition zone and forested regions of Minnesota, these large ditch systems were sometimes unable to fully drain wetlands for farming, but wetland functions and values were severely degraded and they remain relatively unproductive for wildlife compared to pre-settlement conditions. While beneficial to farming, drainage had adverse impacts on fish and wildlife, especially in the prairie and bog habitats. Unfortunately, there is no precise record of the acreage of pristine wetlands, especially smaller basins in the prairies of Minnesota, but estimates range from 18 to 20 million acres.

In 1951 Minnesota launched a "Save the Wetlands" campaign, which was the beginning of the Wildlife Management Area Program. The National Wetland Inventory for the period 1982-1995 indicated that approximately 10.6 million acres of wetlands remained. Losses since then have decreased that base substantially. In the intensively farmed areas of southwest and west central Minnesota, less than 1% of the original wetlands remain. As the wetland basins were drained and prairie converted for agriculture, habitat for wetland wildlife species decreased substantially and water quality deteriorated throughout the larger watershed systems. Adjacent grasslands also were lost, further decreasing wildlife use. The greatest impact was the destruction of prime waterfowl nesting and brood habitat, resulting in a decrease in waterfowl production and fall use. Neighboring states such as Iowa and South Dakota have experienced similar losses. By 1960, wetland and grassland habitat losses began to occur in the prairie region of Canada as well. Approval of the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* (NAWMP) in 1986 provided new opportunities for protection, restoration and enhancements of wetlands and adjacent habitats. This pioneering plan created Joint Ventures to deliver habitat conservation in priority landscapes, including two in Minnesota.

Despite the numerous federal, state and private conservation organization programs that have been developed in the past 60 years to reduce the loss of wetlands and grasslands, losses continue. While the commodity provisions of the U. S. Farm Bill encouraged more intensive land use, the conservation practices have played an important role in protection and restoration of wetlands and grasslands across the country, especially in the prairie region. Passage of the Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Act (WCA) in 1991 was a new chapter in wetland management. The Act also contained provisions for a policy to achieve “no net loss” of wetlands and to “increase the quantity and quality of biological diversity” of wetlands. The WCA, administered by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) has achieved many significant accomplishments. From 1994 to 2003, more than 40,000 acres of wetlands were protected and/or restored. During this same period, the BWSR reported a net loss of 1,367 acres, but there were concerns about procedures and criteria under WCA for granting exemptions and wetland replacement. There also was concern about the application of the “no net loss” policy and how that might be strengthened. These aspects were subsequently examined and corrective measures taken.

Other federal and state agency and private conservation organization programs that directly involve wetland and grassland habitats have developed plans that establish acreage goals for protection, restoration and enhancement. These plans as outlined in the following sections provide specific information on programs and projects, including short-term funding requests, from which “shovel ready” projects and programs are listed for immediate consideration by the LOHC.

In summary, the wetland issues in Minnesota are concentrated largely on wetland loss and degradation of remaining wetlands and shallow lakes throughout the historic prairie in Minnesota. Wetland losses are not as severe as we look eastward from the prairie except in urban areas. In the northern forests, most wetlands tend to be larger and more permanent in nature. The greatest challenge in this area relates to development as populations increase dramatically over the next 30 years. Throughout Minnesota management of existing wetlands and shallow lakes to improve their quality is a major thrust of several ongoing wetland initiatives.

III. Long-term resource goals

Several recent statewide Minnesota planning efforts have called attention to the dramatic loss of wetland and shallow lake habitat over the last century and a half (*Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare; Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan; A Fifty-Year Vision – Minnesota Campaign for Conservation, MN DNR Duck Recovery Plan*). A complete list of strategic plans considered in the development of this proposal and related programmatic requests is included as Appendix C.

Over 90% of Minnesota's prairie wetlands have been drained or filled, including 1,500 shallow lakes. The Pollution Control Agency estimates that two-thirds of the remaining prairie lakes have poor water quality and consequently limited wildlife value. While wetland habitat in the forested region of Minnesota is relatively intact by comparison, past attempts at drainage have too often altered natural hydrology. Residential development continually threatens wetlands and shallow lakes with fragmentation. Future increases in population are projected to dramatically affect the forested “lake country” of north central Minnesota. Lakes, even the shallow wild rice lakes favored by breeding and migrating waterfowl, are a primary target of this development (*Natural Wild Rice in Minnesota – 2008 Report to the Legislature*).

Of our remaining wetlands, quality has increasingly become a concern throughout the state, especially in prairie areas. Landscape drainage has altered the natural hydrology of remaining wetlands. Even wetlands that are permanently protected through inclusion in publicly owned management units suffer from losses of quality. Invasive species, both plants and fish, have negatively impacted wetland habitat regardless of ownership. There is a recognized need for intensive water level management to mitigate these negative influences, yet an estimated 35% of DNR Wildlife managed water control structures are more than 30 years old, ready for replacement and, in some cases, at risk of failure. Similarly, larger shallow lakes suffer from similar negative influences, but only 40 are formally designated for active wildlife management. Many others remain unmanaged and in a turbid, degraded state. Around both prairie wetlands and shallow lakes, upland grass buffer areas have been largely converted to cropland. In the forest, the combination of past wetland drainage attempts, loss of natural outlets, and the presence of both beaver and manmade dams has negatively impacted wild rice plant growth and seed production

Duck populations in Minnesota have been the “canaries in the coal mine”. Devastated by the loss and degradation of habitat, Minnesota’s breeding duck population in 2007 was estimated at just over 488,000, more than 20% below our long-term average despite good climatic conditions. Numbers of migrating ducks stopping in Minnesota are fewer than numbers observed years ago, and those that do stop here are not able to locate sufficient food resources and quickly depart. Correspondingly, our duck harvest dropped to 8.4% of the Mississippi Flyway harvest, one of the lowest proportions recorded and barely half of the 1970’s average of 16%.

Wetland habitat complexes suitable for ducks also benefit many other birds, mammals, and amphibians. More than 50% of the amphibians and birds listed in *Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare* as species of special concern use wetlands during their life cycle.

While all of the plans above note that wetland and shallow lake restoration is a key strategy, the *Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan* (Habitat Recommendation 5, Land Use Strategy 2) and the *Minnesota Wetlands Restoration Strategy* specifically recommend that wetland and shallow lake restoration efforts need to be targeted in order to provide significant benefits as wildlife habitat. However, these strategies and plans do not specify wetland acreage targets

Minnesota’s *2006 DNR Duck Recovery Plan* has identified even more specific habitat restoration objectives to restore a productive spring breeding population of ducks averaging 1 million birds. The landscape necessary to support this population will also provide spring and fall migration habitat attracting abundant migrant waterfowl, 140,000 waterfowl hunters and 600,000 waterfowl watchers. The goals and strategies of this plan are consistent with the *Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Implementation Plan* and the *Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Joint Venture Plan* under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, including the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*.

Based on the best science available, Minnesota’s *2006 DNR Duck Recovery Plan* specifically notes that achieving this

<u>Long-Term Resource Goals</u>
➤ Restore and protect 600,000 acres of wetlands
➤ Enhance and protect 1,800 shallow lakes
➤ Restore and protect 1.4 million acres of adjacent grassland

landscape vision in Minnesota will require the net gain of 1.4 million acres of grassland and 600,000 acres of additional wetlands (about 64,000 restored basins) in addition to enhancing and protecting 1,800 shallow lakes through management and permanent conservation easements or fee-title acquisition of sensitive shore-land. The plan suggests that 80% of this habitat objective should be restored within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture portion of Minnesota. This habitat should contribute to prairie wetland complexes with a minimum of 4 square miles characterized by at least 20% wetlands and 40% idle grasslands. Smaller complexes compromise waterfowl production and in some cases even create a population “sink” for ducks and other birds.

This inclusive proposal seeks a strategic and comprehensive approach involving the restoration, enhancement and protection of wetlands and adjacent upland buffer areas through:

- both fee-title acquisition and permanent conservation easements;
- enhancement and protection of shallow lakes formally designated for wildlife management, or within wildlife management units, through water level management and invasive fish control. Techniques include engineering and installing water level control structures and fish barriers for improved habitat and water quality;
- accelerated management of wild rice lakes not currently managed; and
- the improvement of existing wetland habitat on wildlife management areas by replacing outdated and damaged water control structures.

IV. Existing partnerships, initiatives and delivery systems

Minnesota is fortunate to have a wealth of partner organizations and agencies knowledgeable and interested in wetland restoration and conservation. At the local, state, and federal levels, there are entities in Minnesota that deal with wetland regulation, restoration, enhancement, and acquisition. The Wetland Collaborative Proposal includes partners from all of these areas and expertise all focused on the conservation of wetlands in Minnesota.

The proposal includes existing partners with considerable experience dealing with land acquisition (i.e. fee and easements), from willing sellers. They include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Board of Water and Soil Resources and Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Pheasants Forever, Minnesota Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, Ducks Unlimited, Minnesota Waterfowl Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Wetland restoration and enhancement expertise included within this proposal originates from organizations such as Board of Water and Soil Resources, Ducks Unlimited Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Minnesota Waterfowl Association. Other cooperating partners include the The Minnesota Valley Trust, Friends of Minnesota Valley, Cook Waterfowl Foundation, Bois de Sioux Watershed District, Washington County and Duluth Township. In addition to their land acquisition and restoration expertise, the state and federal agencies are experienced land managers and welcome the opportunity and responsibility to ensure newly acquired lands are managed optimally into the future.

To ensure the public’s investment is enduring, all restoration and enhancement initiatives funded with OHF will further enhance and protect lands and water that have permanent protection already in place through fee title acquisition or perpetual conservation easements.

Wetland programs and initiatives funded with OHF will apply the best science available to strategically target habitat areas. This will enable wetland partners to maximize leveraging of other funding by partnering with key stakeholders to ensure we optimize the use of OHF on behalf of the citizen's of Minnesota. Significant effort will be placed on using OHF to leverage federal wetland funds, such as through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA). In addition, the wetland partners will use OHF dollars to target the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture (PPJV) area of Minnesota. The NAWMP identified the PPJV, which includes a substantial portion of Minnesota (see Appendix D), to be the most important area in the nation to protect and restore wetland and grassland complexes for waterfowl and a wide diversity of other wildlife

Collectively these organizations have been involved with the vast majority of the wetland conservation occurring in Minnesota, and will cooperate in the future to accelerate wetland protection and restoration.

Existing partnerships that will be accelerated with this proposal include:

- 1) Board of Water and Soil Resources/Natural Resources Conservation Service/Minnesota Waterfowl Association – will cooperate to accelerate the acquisition of perpetual wetland easements under the Reinvest in Minnesota/Wetland Reserve Program implemented at the local level by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- 2) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Minnesota Department of Natural Resources/Pheasants Forever/Ducks Unlimited/Minnesota Waterfowl Association/Trust for Public Land/Cook Waterfowl Foundation/Minnesota Valley Trust/Friends of Minnesota Valley – will cooperate to accelerate the acquisition and restoration of new Waterfowl Production Areas and Wildlife Management Areas.
- 3) Minnesota Department of Natural Resources/US Fish and Wildlife Service/Ducks Unlimited/Minnesota Waterfowl Association – will cooperate to improve large wetlands and shallow lakes by engineering water control structures and invasive fish barriers that allow agencies to actively manage wetland water levels to simulate temporary drought and fish winterkill conditions.
- 4) Protection options for wetlands beyond fee-title acquisition is important because not all sensitive land is for sale, and thus both the Minnesota Land Trust and Ducks Unlimited seek to purchase permanent conservation easements on wetland and shallow lake shoreland to prevent future development and habitat destruction.

All of the above partnerships involve the permanent protection and restoration of acquired wetlands and significant tracts of adjacent buffers. **All lands acquired in fee will be open for public hunting, fishing, bird watching, photography, environmental education and interpretations.** Conservation easements acquired in this proposal may be open to the public subject to individual landowner permission.

V. Highest priority projects and programs by partner

Each partner was asked to submit a one-page summary of their project and/or program and they are listed in the following order:

Trust for Public Land
Minnesota Land Trust
Board of Water and Soil Resources
Minnesota Waterfowl Association
Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Minnesota Valley Trust
Friends of Minnesota Valley
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Duluth Township
Cook Waterfowl Foundation
Bois de Sioux Watershed District
Washington County
Pheasants Forever

The cumulative Wetland proposal budget is listed as Appendix E and contains the program name, partner, wetland and upland acres restored, enhanced and protected, OHF request and other funds leveraged.

Cooperative Wetlands Protection Initiative 2010

Your name: Bob McGillivray
Your organization: The Trust for Public Land
Mailing address: 2610 University Ave. W., Suite 300, St. Paul, MN 55114
Phone/fax number: 651-999-5300
Email address: bob.mcgillivray@tpl.org

Short narrative of program/project, delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

The Trust for Public Land works in partnership with public agencies from the local to the federal level to protect high priority lands for public use and enjoyment. TPL's Cooperative Wetlands Protection Initiative 2010 includes land protection efforts that are expedited because of landowner urgency for financial or other reasons. If not protected now, these tracts of land may be lost for conservation. All protection efforts included in this proposal include transfer of fee title to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) by June 30, 2010, to be managed as either Wildlife Management Area, Aquatic Management Area, or Scientific and Natural Area.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: The protection work within this program will be accomplished with help from The Trust for Public Land, which uses privately-raised funds to cover its acquisition activities including the due diligence costs associated with the transaction. The lands will ultimately be conveyed to the DNR, which will be responsible for making payments in lieu of taxes. TPL will work with the agency to plan for funding of stewardship costs.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: For any land acquisitions in which the ultimate landowner is the DNR, any required township notification will be made and County approval will be sought.

Other considerations: The Trust for Public Land is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting land for people. TPL works to achieve communities' conservation goals through conservation finance and conservation real estate services. We rely on our legal, real estate, and finance expertise to successfully complete complicated conservation transactions that public agencies may not have the staff or resources to do themselves. We offer a professional and streamlined approach, and bring extra hands and minds to assist often over-extended government staff. Since TPL's founding 36 years ago, we have conserved over 2.4 million acres with a fair market value of approximately \$5.3 billion in over 3,600 separate conservation transactions across the United States. In Minnesota, we have protected over 84,000 acres of important conservation lands since 1986.

Private Wetlands Protection Initiative

Your name: Kris Larson
Your organization: Minnesota Land Trust
Mailing address: 2356 University Ave. W., Suite 240, St. Paul, MN 55114
Phone/fax number: 651-647-9590; Fax: 651-647-9769; Duluth: 218-722-4641
Email address: klarson@mnland.org

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less): Within the next year, the Land Trust proposes to complete approximately 6-8 new conservation easements on 500-700 acres of an important wetland and upland habitat within its Edge of the Prairie Critical Landscape. This landscape encompasses the State's primary migratory waterfowl corridor extending from Meeker County northwest to Becker County. Within this corridor, the Land Trust has already identified 15 properties covering more than 2,000 acres whose landowners have expressed interest in protecting their properties. These projects are both "shovel ready" and urgent. Discussions are underway with the identified landowners and the Land Trust has the mechanisms in place to secure the conservation easements. In addition, because the improved federal tax benefits for donations of easements sunset in 2009, we have a narrow window of time to utilize these important incentives. The easements will prohibit alterations or conversions of the wetlands and limit development and other detrimental uses on the adjacent uplands.

Most of the plans developed to protect Minnesota's wildlife heritage—including the Statewide Conservation Plan—cite the protection and restoration of the state's remaining wetlands as one of the top priorities to achieve the State's conservation goals. Moreover, these plans cite the use of conservation easements on private lands as one of the primary strategies to protect this important habitat backbone.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: These projects will be sustained long term through the Minnesota Land Trust accredited Conservation Easement Stewardship Program. The conservation easement properties will be monitored annually, appropriate easement management and record keeping conducted and any potential violations enforced as appropriate. Funds from this grant will be dedicated to the Land Trust's Stewardship Fund for this purpose. Additionally, ecological management plans will be required for protected properties. The properties will remain in private ownership and property taxes will continue to be paid by these private owners.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: The Minnesota Land Trust has a history of working with local governments throughout Minnesota to achieve mutual conservation objectives. Where appropriate, these local governments will be informed of the easement acquisitions, while simultaneously respecting issues of landowner confidentiality. The Land Trust routinely consults local plans when evaluating private conservation projects.

Other considerations: As described above, conservation easements have been identified as one of the primary strategies for protecting wildlife habitats on private lands and the Minnesota Land Trust has a long and successful history of excellence in conservation easement activity, as suggested by its designation as one of the first accredited land trusts in the country. The Land Trust will work with each landowner to determine the appropriate management of the property to maximize its habitat values. In addition, many of the projects identified by the Land Trust are adjacent to publicly accessible lands; as such, the easements help improve and maintain the wildlife productivity of the entire public/private complex of land.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve-Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Leveraging Project

Kevin Lines
Board of Water and Soil Resources
520 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-297-1894/651-297-5615
kevin.lines@state.mn.us

Tim Koehler
Natural Resources Conservation Service
375 Jackson Street, Suite 600
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101
651-602-7857/651-602-7914
tim.koehler@mn.usda.gov

The State of Minnesota, as recommended by the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC), is being requested to provide \$23,000,000 of Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program funding to leverage \$33,000,000 of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wetlands Reserve Program funds. This partnership will expand past efforts and provide valuable resources to the citizens of the state to protect and restore priority wetland and associated upland wildlife habitat and create and sustain jobs and income to local landowners, businesses and others in the State of Minnesota. With full funding, we anticipate protection of approximately 12,000 new habitat acres under the RIM-WRP Partnership.

This opportunity will be offered statewide but has a priority focus in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Area of western Minnesota. It will be delivered by local staff of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff and assisted by program staff from both NRCS and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Since the local SWCD is responsible for the delivery of the RIM Reserve program to private landowners on behalf of the State of Minnesota, they are ideally suited to work in concert with their local NRCS staff to efficiently and effectively deliver the RIM-WRP partnership. Once an easement is acquired, NRCS is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring during the life of their 30-year WRP easement. The State of Minnesota assumes responsibility via its RIM Reserve easement once the 30-year WRP easement has expired. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements.

The USDA NRCS currently has \$8 million of WRP funds on hand with an additional \$7 million requested for WRP easement acquisition. RIM Reserve funding is needed to leverage federal dollars in order to provide fair compensation to willing landowners to secure wetland and associated upland easements. In October, 2009, NRCS in MN is projected by its Washington D.C. office to receive another \$15,000,000 of WRP funding that can be obligated for new easements, if RIM funds are available. Local staff and partner employees and contractors (Ducks Unlimited and MN Waterfowl Association) are working on the RIM-WRP effort from previously funded bonding bills. If additional funds are secured experienced technical staff will be able to continue to assist landowners with protecting and restoring critical habitat. If RIM funds are not received USDA NRCS will not be able to obligate the WRP funds and they will be lost back to the national budget. The ultimate consequence will be 12,000 acres of new habitat lost due to lack of RIM-WRP Partnership funding.

In 2008 BWSR and NRCS accepted nearly 300 applications for RIM/WRP Easements on over 33,000 acres for an estimated cost of over \$75 million. The applications were scored and ranked and the top scoring highest priority 98 applications were funded. This left a backlog of 184 applications offering approximately 22,000 acres. The total cost to fund this backlog is \$49,165,600. The breakdown of these costs is as follows:

	RIM	WRP
Easement acquisition	\$16,666,000	\$19,230,000
Restoration	2,220,000	6,660,000
Technical Assistance	<u>1,866,600</u>	<u>2,583,000</u>
	\$20,752,600	\$28,413,000

BWSR and NRCS are preparing for Phase II of the RIM/WRP. Local offices are currently working with landowners on applications. Interest remains high and it is estimated that we will be to secure in excess of \$100 million of applications. This demonstrates that the true need is much greater what the current backlog shows. As new applications are received and existing Phase 1 applications are considered again we will once again fund the highest scoring priority applications. Much of the newly received applications could indeed score higher than the existing backlog and provide better environmental (wildlife, water quality, flood reduction, erosion control, etc.) benefits than those not funded in Phase 1. Each year that an easement is not secured from a willing seller the price increases. This is true, based on U of M collected data, even though the economy as a whole is in a recession. The demand for recreational land continues to be strong.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Focused Acceleration Project

Your name: Brad Nylin
Your organization: Minnesota Waterfowl Association
Mailing address: 901 First Street N. Hopkins, MN 55343
Phone/fax number: (952) 767-0320 – (952) 767-0324
Email address: brad.nylin@mnwaterfowl.com

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

The Minnesota Waterfowl Association is requesting \$100,000 of funding to leverage \$100,000 of funds, services, equipment and supplies from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). This partnership will expand past efforts and provide valuable resources to the citizens of the state to Protect and Restore priority wetland and associated upland wildlife habitat and create and sustain jobs and income to local landowners, businesses and others in the State of Minnesota.

This effort will be focused on both the southwestern and west central part of the State of Minnesota and will have a priority focus in the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Area of Minnesota. It will be delivered by MWA staff working in and with local NRCS field office staff in Detroit Lakes and south west Minnesota.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: This work is on private land under federal easements so landowners will continue to pay property tax and NRCS will monitor easements.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: N/A

Lost Opportunity

Each year that an easement is not secured from a willing seller the price increases. This is true, based on U of M collected data, even though the economy as a whole is in a recession. The demand for recreational land continues to be strong. Currently local staff and MWA employees have worked on the WRP effort. If these funds are secured experienced technical staff will be able to continue (in Detroit Lakes) and expand (in south west Minnesota) to assist landowners protect and restore critical habitat. The current position of MWA located in Detroit Lakes will expire in September of 2009 with no additional funding being available to extend it.

Urgency

Currently USDA NRCS has \$8 million of WRP funds on hand with an additional \$7 million requested for WRP easement acquisition. WRP and RIM/WRP continues to be available and requires dedicated staff to implement all phases from applications to securing easements to final restoration. On or about October 1, 2009, NRCS in MN is projected by its Washington Office to receive another \$15,000,000 of WRP funding that can be obligated for new easements when it is received.

Wildlife Management Area Restorations and Enhancements

Your name: Brad Nylin
Your organization: Minnesota Waterfowl Association
Mailing address: 901 First Street N. Hopkins, MN 55343
Phone/fax number: (952) 767-0320 – (952) 767-0324
Email address: brad.nylin@mnwaterfowl.com

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

Bejou and Dittmer WMA: Wildlife Management area and restoration and enhancements. The work done on this 6,000 acre's is complete topographic, hydrologic and soils engineering survey data for all three WMA's and plans and specifications for future wetland restoration structures and access development. All work will be completed by local contractors. Project completion June 30, 2011.

Ranum WMA: Engineering and restoration of 7 wetlands, construction of access trail for restorations prescribed burning and maintenance of WMA. Restoration of 75 acres of grass, and construction of parking area. All work will be completed by local contractors. Project completion June 30, 2011.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

This work is on existing WMA's so this will far under the DNR's existing monitoring plans.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:
N/A

Other considerations:

Wildlife Management Area Roundouts

Your name: Brad Nylin
Your organization: Minnesota Waterfowl Association
Mailing address: 901 First Street N. Hopkins, MN 55343
Phone/fax number: (952) 767-0320 – (952) 767-0324
Email address: brad.nylin@mnwaterfowl.com

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

MWA will negotiate acquisition of parcels from willing sellers to be turned over to the DNR. MWA will be main partner and will seek other conservation NGO's for partnering opportunities. Completion for these acquisitions will be June 2010. There are a total of five parcels of land on two WMA's.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

These acquisitions will become part of two separate existing WMA's. that will protect 555 total acres and round out WMA's. Reformulated DNR P.I.L.T. payments would be used for property tax implications, these payments would be comparable to existing property tax's.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

MWA will contact county commissioner.

Other considerations:

These acquisitions have willing sellers and they would help round out existing WMA's. There would be partnering opportunities within this area, and would expand public use in these areas.

**Wildlife Management Area Acquisitions
Wild Rice Accelerated Management
Wetlands and Shallow Lake Assessment and Management**

Your name: Ray Norrgard
Your organization: MN DNR – Wildlife Management Section
Mailing address: 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul State: MN Zip: 55112
Phone/fax number: (651) 259 – 5227/(651) 297-4961
Email address: ray.norrgard@dnr.state.mn.us

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

The MN DNR is working with partners in a targeted approach to assess, restore, enhance and protect the aquatic ecology of wetland and shallow lake habitat complexes. These complexes provide the migration, brood rearing, and hibernia critical for shorebirds, waterfowl, water birds, turtles and amphibians. The work will be completed by the end of calendar year 2010 in order to accommodate a full field season.

Shallow lake assessments, including both pre and post project lake monitoring, will provide the information necessary to design, implement, and evaluate lake management strategies including outlet modification and management activities such as drawdowns.

Enhancement includes replacement and upgrading water level control structures. DNR currently has management responsibility for over 600 such structures. 35% of these are more than 30 years old and potentially risk failure. Active management of wild rice lakes focuses on keeping lake outlets free flowing to maintain natural water levels beneficial to wild rice production.

Fee acquisition for wildlife management areas will allow wetland restoration, management and protection in perpetuity. This proven program will target wetland habitat complexes.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

The long-term management costs of these projects will be borne by the DNR Game and Fish Fund, federal excise taxes on hunting equipment, donations and grant applications. In lieu of tax payments will be made on acquired lands through existing mandates and procedures.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

Local governments will be informed of proposed management actions such as acquisition and water level manipulations through established procedures that are already in place.

Other considerations:

Accelerated Shallow Lake Enhancements

Name: Jon Schneider, Manager – Minnesota Conservation Programs
Organization: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Mailing address: 311 East Lake Geneva Road, Alexandria, MN 56308
Phone/fax number: 320.762.9916
Email address: jschneider@ducks.org

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success: DU requests \$5,800,000 to provide wetland bio-engineering services to the Minnesota DNR and US Fish & Wildlife Service to structurally enhance approximately 18 shallow lakes totaling about 12,728 wetland acres. These complex structure projects constitute a backlog of shallow lake and large wetland water control structure and/or fish barrier projects previously engineered by DU for DNR and the Service. Structures will be constructed on public land or on private land under permanent easement, and will be used by state or federal land management staff to conduct temporary draw-downs to improve shallow lake ecology and habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds by reducing invasive fish and rejuvenating aquatic plants and invertebrates. With this funding, DU staff will provide final engineering and construction management oversight throughout the process, and will solicit competitive bids and award construction contracts to private firms to implement the projects. This request also includes funding for DU shallow lake project field coordinators and engineering staff and travel costs to assess and develop engineering plans for 10 or more future shallow lake enhancement projects, and assist state and federal agencies in securing structure or flowage easements from private landowners, permits, and the legal “wildlife lake” designation process required to allow active water level management of additional shallow lakes.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: All projects engineered by DU will be constructed on land under state or federal agency control (permanent easement or fee-title), and all structures constructed will be managed by the Minnesota DNR or US Fish & Wildlife Service. Taxes will not be affected by these projects, and the DNR or Service will annually monitor and manage all projects in partnership with DU.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: DU will work with the Minnesota DNR and US Fish & Wildlife Service to secure all necessary permits and permissions from counties and other local units of government such as townships and watershed districts. At the very least, all projects will require a permit from the Minnesota DNR Division of Waters, the application of which is routed for review and comment to all relevant local units of government such as county Land & Resource Management divisions and Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

Other considerations: DU will work closely with the Minnesota DNR and US Fish & Wildlife Service in advance regarding the final engineering and planning of these projects, and also with private landowners, lake associations, and other key stakeholder individuals and groups.

Shallow Lake Shoreland Easements

Name: Jon Schneider, Manager – Minnesota Conservation Programs
Organization: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Mailing address: 311 East Lake Geneva Road, Alexandria, MN 56308
Phone/fax number: 320.762.9916
Email address: jschneider@ducks.org

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success: DU requests \$1,600,000 to work with private landowners on key shallow lakes of critical importance to ducks and other migratory birds to secure permanent conservation easements on unprotected shoreland. One or more easements will be secured through appraisal and purchase from willing private landowners to protect approximately 460 acres of uplands and 40 acres of wetlands on shallow lakes actively managed for wildlife by the Minnesota DNR or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. These easements will protect private shoreland from future development, and will help prevent further degradation of sensitive shallow lake shoreline and lake ecology. They will also help to minimize conflicting lake management expectations in the future by minimizing subdivision of private shoreland tracts. Easements may also be tailored to help secure agency access to shallow lake outlets for lake management purposes, and to place, operate, and maintain water control structures and fish barriers. This funding request includes cost of easements, appraisals, title and closing costs, legal survey, baseline property condition documentation, stewardship endowment for future annual easement monitoring and landowner stewardship to ensure easement conditions are maintained, and for DU staff and travel costs. DU conservation easement will also include first right of refusal for future fee-title acquisition. Public access to DU easements is a landowner right they will retain, and public access will be determined by the landowner.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: All lands under DU conservation easements will continue to be privately owned and managed, and property taxes will be paid by landowners according to local and county tax assessment methods which vary by location throughout Minnesota. DU will annually monitor and inspect protected properties to ensure that easement terms are being sustained, and will work to steward landowners on best management practices that will protect the conservation features of the property in perpetuity.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: DU conservation easements are recorded on the property deed at the county level upon closure. In some counties, DU will work with county and local government to protect certain natural environment lake shoreland properties to meet the objectives of their county conservation plans and water plans.

Other considerations: DU conservation easements compliment fee-title acquisitions by providing an alternative land protection tool for use in situations where sensitive shoreland is not for sale, but where private landowners desire to permanently protect their properties. DU easements also secure future right of refusal for future fee-title acquisition.

Shallow Lake Shoreland Acquisitions

Name: Jon Schneider, Manager – Minnesota Conservation Programs
Organization: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.
Mailing address: 311 East Lake Geneva Road, Alexandria, MN 56308
Phone/fax number: 320.762.9916
Email address: jschneider@ducks.org

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success: DU requests \$900,000 to work with private landowners on key shallow lakes of critical importance to ducks and other migratory birds to acquire unprotected shoreland. One or more tracts will be secured through appraisal and purchase from willing private landowner sellers to protect approximately 150 acres of uplands and 40 acres of wetlands on shallow lakes actively managed for wildlife by the Minnesota DNR or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Acquisitions will target sensitive shoreland and tracts with high restoration potential, especially those that contain drained wetlands and converted uplands. These acquisitions will protect shoreland from future development, and will help prevent further degradation of sensitive shallow lake shoreline and lake ecology. Acquisitions may also be tailored to help secure agency access to shallow lake outlets for lake management purposes, and to place, operate, and maintain water control structures and fish barriers. This funding request includes cost of easements, appraisals, DU land protection staff and travel costs, title clearance, legal survey, and closing costs.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: All lands acquired by DU will be transferred to either Minnesota DNR or US Fish & Wildlife Service for incorporation into their existing public land management system where tracts will be open to public access. DU will assume tax payments of land upon acquisition. Upon transfer to the state, in lieu of tax payments will be made by Minnesota DNR on lands transferred to the state for inclusion into the Wildlife Management Area System. All future land management activities will be assumed by the state or federal agencies that accept the transfer of these lands, and state or federal agencies will sustain the wildlife habitat features of the properties and ensure public access. Tracts acquired for water control structure and/or fish barrier placement will be developed for those purposes in close consultation and collaboration with wildlife agencies.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: DU will work with the Minnesota DNR and US Fish & Wildlife Service to secure county board approval for permission to transfer acquired lands to the state or federal government. In some counties, DU will work with county and local government to protect certain natural environment lake shoreland properties to meet the objectives of their county conservation plans and water plans.

Other considerations: DU will work closely with the Minnesota DNR and US Fish & Wildlife Service in advance of negotiating with private landowners and purchasing properties to ensure that state or federal agencies are comfortable with assuming future land management responsibility.

Acquisition and Restoration of Waterfowl Production Areas for Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District

Your name: Deborah Loon
Your organization: Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.
Mailing address: 2312 Seabury Avenue, Minneapolis MN 55406
Phone/fax number: 612-801-1935 (phone) / 612-728-0700 (fax)
Email address: DebLoon@comcast.net

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less): Acquisition of 80 acres, restoration of 1,055 acres and enhancement of 49 acres of wetland / upland habitat in the Prairie Pothole Region (Blue Earth and Sibley Counties). The Minnesota Valley Trust will work in partnership with the USFWS / MN Valley Wetland Management District, Friends of the Minnesota Valley, soil and water conservation districts, DNR and local conservation clubs. All projects will be completed by June 30, 2011. Upon completion, we will have restored 215 acres of wetlands and 840 acres of associated uplands / grasslands, providing new critical habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds and land birds.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: USFWS will be responsible for ongoing habitat management, monitoring and enforcement after the land has been donated to the Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District. All lands will be open for public hunting and, if applicable, fishing. USFWS will make payments to local units of government in lieu of property taxes in compliance with the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act.

Describe how local governments will be involved / informed, if relevant: MN Valley Trust and MN Valley Wetland Management District personnel meet with local units of government, including soil and water conservation districts and local conservation clubs, during planning of a project to share information. All projects comply with local administrative and legal requirements. After acquisition and restoration are complete the property is donated to the USFWS. The Refuge works cooperatively with local units of government as neighbors and partners.

Other considerations: The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc. has an excellent track record of completing fee title acquisition and restoration of high quality habitat for Waterfowl Production Areas. In just the last few years, the Trust has completed land acquisition deals with 26 willing sellers, for a total of over 2,800 acres for the Refuge and Wetland Management District. All properties have been restored or are in the process of being restored.

Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District Restoration and Enhancement Project

Your name: Joseph Pavelko
Your organization: Friends of the Minnesota Valley
Mailing address: 10800 Lyndale Avenue South, Suite 120, Bloomington, MN 55420
Phone/fax number: 612-532-3800 (phone) / 952-881-3174 (fax)
Email address: jpavelko@friendsofmnvalley.org

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less): Restore and enhance at least 657 acres of wetland and associated grasslands on Waterfowl Production Areas within the Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District. All restoration and enhancement work will be protected, monitored, and managed in perpetuity by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Restoration and enhancement work will be completed by December 31st, 2011.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: USFWS will be responsible for monitoring, ongoing habitat management, and completion of restoration and enhancement work. All restoration and enhancement activities will be completed on Waterfowl Production Areas within the MN Valley Wetland Management District. MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge makes payments to counties and municipalities in lieu of taxes under authority of the Refuge Revenue Sharing Act.

Describe how local governments will be involved / informed, if relevant: The Minnesota Valley WMD and Friends of the Minnesota Valley work with and meet all administrative and legal requirements of the local units of government throughout the restoration and enhancement process.

Other considerations: During these times of increased pressures on our natural resources, especially wetlands, it is critical that protected lands provide the best possible wetland habitat to protect and ensure sustainable populations of waterfowl and other wetland dependant species. Funding as recommended by the COUNCIL will further complete the restoration/enhancement work on the Waterfowl Production Areas which will provide quality habitat for nesting, breeding, and brood-rearing of migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wetland dependant species.

Accelerating the WPA Program in Minnesota-Protecting Our Investment

Your name: Jim Leach
Your organization: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Mailing address: One Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN
Phone/fax number: (612) 713-5406
Email address: jim_leach@fws.gov

Short narrative of program/project: Key elements to include are: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), will cooperate to permanently restore and conserve approximately 800 acres of grassland, and 400 acres of wetland as Waterfowl Production Areas in western and southern Minnesota. All lands acquired through this grant proposal will be owned and managed by the Service as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

All lands will be acquired from willing sellers. Once acquired, drained wetlands on these properties will be restored and converted grasslands will be re-planted with native grass seed. Longterm management of these lands will be the responsibility of the Service. Annually, the Service makes Refuge Revenue Sharing payments to Counties to off-set the loss of property taxes.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

The Service will seek County Board certification of all tracts proposed for acquisition. In addition, all proposed WPA acquisitions will be brought before the Minnesota Land Exchange Board for their approval.

Urgency and opportunity:

The Service currently has a backlog of willing landowners but lacks the financial resources to acquire these lands.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Private Lands Habitat Restoration Program

Your name: Sheldon Myerchin
Your organization: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Mailing address: 434 Great Oak Drive, Waite Park, MN 56387
Phone/fax number: (320)253-4682 / (320)253-0710
Email address: sheldon_myerchin@fws.gov

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners to restore or enhance wetland and upland wildlife habitat on their land. The PFW program was initially started in Minnesota and celebrated its 20th Anniversary nation-wide in 2007. The PFW program in Minnesota is delivered out of the USFWS Wetland Management Districts or National Wildlife Refuge Offices and our State Private Lands Office. There is currently 10 full-time staff in place to assist landowners with habitat restoration projects. The PFW program partners with landowners, NGOs, local, state, and other federal agencies to cost-share the completion of projects. Since the start of the program, PFW has completed approximately 70,000 acres of wetland restoration and approximately 50,000 acres of upland restoration or enhancement.

Currently the program completes approximately 2000 acres of wetland restoration per year and approximately 5000 acres of upland restoration or enhancement per year.

Funding recommended by the LOHC will accelerate the restoration or enhancement of wetland and prairie grassland on tracts protected by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service perpetual easements, RIM easement, County owned land, and lands owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. Wetlands will be restored by filling drainage ditches or installing water control structures. Upland grasslands are enhanced by removing invasive species or restored by seeding with prairie grass and forb mixtures. The majority of projects will be initiated in summer 2009 with completion by the year end 2010.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: The USFWS provides annual monitoring of its easement lands. Follow-up management of projects is completed by USFWS staff. The PFW program works with its landowners/partners for long-term sustainability of other projects completed.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: The Ney Park wetland restoration project in Wright County is a county owned park. The USFWS PFW program has been requested by the county to assist them with completion of this project.

Other considerations: Present funding for work on these projects is very limited. Funding as recommended by the LOHC will provide for a more timely completion of these habitat restoration and enhancement projects.

Preservation of Stanley Creek (Knife River) wetlands

Your name: Dave Mount
Your organization: Duluth Township
Mailing address: 6092 Homestead Road, Duluth, MN 55804
Phone/fax number: Town Hall (218) 525-5705; Dave Mount days (218)529-5169
Email address: davemount@lakenet.com

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

This project involves a 10-acre tax-forfeited parcel which St. Louis County intends to offer for public sale as developable land, despite the wetland and stream features which dominate the parcel and which would make it impossible to develop without significant disturbance. In addition to the on-site ecological values of the property, this parcel lies in the Knife River watershed, which is a federally-listed impaired water for excess sediment; clearly, avoiding disturbance to remaining, functioning wetlands is important to the recovery of this system. The Duluth Township has asked the County to delay public sale to allow time to pursue alternatives for the parcel; the purchase can proceed immediately after obtaining funds. Although the Town does not have formal collaborators on this project at present, we are working to establish partnerships with stakeholders in the Knife River TMDL development and the Lake Superior Steelhead Association, both of which are undertaking active conservation and restoration activities in the watershed. As the parcel is already a functioning wetland, project success can be measured simply by completion of the acquisition and maintenance as in its current condition as public land; there are no additional construction or restoration activities required.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

As the goal of the project is preservation of the existing condition, little ongoing cost is expected. With regard to property tax implications, ownership of the parcel by the local unit of government will exempt the parcel from property taxes. Further because the parcel is currently in public ownership, there will be no net change in property tax revenue.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

Not applicable; the applicant is the local unit of government.

Other considerations:

Because the County is not willing to delay sale of the parcel indefinitely, there is significant time pressure on this project. Fortunately, there are no administrative barriers to completing purchase immediately after receipt of funds. Because the applicant is a rural township with a total annual budget of only \$270,000, purchase of the property without outside funds is not possible.

Revolving Acquisition Fund

Your name: Rod Ustipak
Your organization: Cook Waterfowl Foundation
Mailing address: 7850 Metro Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55420
Phone/fax number: 218-839-5711/800-328-1860
Email address: rodustipak@charter.net

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less):

Lands suitable for State Wildlife Management Areas and Federal Waterfowl Production Areas may not be available for acquisition as a result of the cumbersome process this entails. The process can take up to 18 months to complete from initial contact. Many sellers are unable to wait that long. These agencies also cannot bid on land sold at auction, which is a popular means of conveyance, because of the long process required.

As a private foundation, we function under few such constraints. We would, therefore, propose to purchase lands when requested to do so by the Minnesota Department of Resources or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in those special cases. Other suitable stakeholder requests would receive full consideration.

We would expect this to be a once or twice per year occurrence, used to supplement the normal acquisition process where no other option is available to acquire a key wetland tract. The measure of success will be measured by how many purchases are made each year, how many wetland acres are restored and how many acres of wetlands are enhanced. This development work would all be done in close consultation and cooperation with the acquisition partner. Therefore, once the transfer would take place, the enhancements would be either complete or in progress according to agency specifications. 100% of the initial grant amount would be used for acquisition costs.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: The long term costs for sustaining the project would be born by the appropriate agency according to their established protocols. The short-term costs and management would be absorbed by Cook Waterfowl by using monies from existing resources, state and federal private lands programs and grant money interest income.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

We will inform and involve local governments at every step to insure interagency and local cooperation as well as a smooth transfer to the eventual fee holder.

Other considerations:

We have a 30-year track record of acquiring and maintaining high quality wetland projects throughout the prairie pothole regions of Minnesota and North and South Dakota. Our desire in this case is solely to facilitate the acquisition of properties and wetland restorations that would otherwise be lost to future generations of Minnesotans.

Redpath Project

Your name: Jon Roeschlein, Administrator
Your organization: Bois de Sioux Watershed District
Mailing address: 704 Highway 75 South, Wheaton, MN 56296
Phone/fax number: 320-563-4185/320-563-4987
Email address: bdswd@frontiernet.net

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success(200 words or less): The Redpath Project is a multipurpose project that will provide ~16,000 acre feet of flood storage, downstream flow augmentation, wetland restoration and management for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, northern pike spawning habitat, ~7.5 miles Stream Corridor Restoration, ~9 miles of Mustinka River Restoration, and water quality improvement. It is estimated the project will take 3 years to construct. Success would be measured by the monitoring of the benefits achieved in regard to the ability to store flood waters, use by migratory species and fish, and monitoring of before and after conditions of the water quality entering and leaving the site.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: Operating costs will be generated partially by assessment to drainage systems for providing an outlet along with utilizing water quality monitoring programs like River Watch and others under the MPCA programs, as well as assistance from the MnDNR Fisheries and Wildlife divisions and the USFWS. The BdSWD will also provide funding for operations and maintenance. The BdSWD is authorized by state law to make a one-time up-front payment in lieu of taxes to the taxing entity as a project cost. The average annual tax for that entity is calculated and multiplied by 20 to determine the payment. The theory is with proper management of the payment, interest from this payment will replace the loss in tax revenue.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: Local governments are involved in developing the project as members of the Project Team. The project alternative has been developed by the Project Team with representation from MnDNR Waters, Wildlife, and Fisheries, MPCA, MCEA, USFWS, BdSWD, SWCD, Local Landowners, Township Officials, County Officials. They all will continue to be informed as the project progresses through construction and operation via periodic team meetings and mailed reports. Project Team List attached.

Other considerations: We currently have willing sellers for the land needed to develop pools 1 through 4. These are the pools that will provide the wetland benefits of the project. Our only hold up is the need for the funds to make the purchases of the property. Note that this request for funding is for land acquisition purposes. This project will provide many benefits to many people for many purposes. It will provide flood damage reduction from along the Mustinka River to the Red River including Lake Traverse and beyond. It will reduce sedimentation and turbidity in the surface waters of the area which the Mustinka River is listed as an Impaired Water for turbidity. It will totally reconstruct the TMDL listed reach which is currently an unstable ditched channel. It will take farmland out of production and restore riparian wetlands to the area. It will provide spawning habitat for Northern Pike and return a meander to the Mustinka River system. It includes restoration of the natural flows to a 9 mile reach of the Mustinka River that was eliminated with the USCOE construction of the Mustinka River Diversion in the early 1940s. It will provide jobs in the area when construction begins as there will be a large earth moving component and requires many people to accomplish. This project provides a very diverse range of benefits.

North Ottawa Impoundment Project

Your name: Jon Roeschlein, Administrator
Your organization: Bois de Sioux Watershed District
Mailing address: 704 Highway 75 South, Wheaton, MN 56296
Phone/fax number: 320-563-4185/320-563-4987
Email address: bdswd@frontiernet.net

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success(200 words or less): The North Ottawa impoundment Project is a multipurpose project that will provide ~18,000 acre feet of flood storage, downstream flow augmentation, wetland restoration and management for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, and water quality improvement. The project is in the final phases of construction. The project area is in the process of being designated as a State of Minnesota Wildlife Refuge. Phase V (the final phase) consists of installing the interior dikes and controls to manage a series of 9 cells for migrating shorebird and waterfowl purposes as well as improve water quality and augment low flows on the Rabbit River. Success would be measured by the monitoring of the benefits achieved in regard to the ability to store flood waters, monitoring of use by migratory species, and monitoring of before and after conditions of the water quality entering and leaving the site. A resource management committee has been organized to make the NRE management decisions for this portion of the project, consisting of MnDNR Wildlife, USFWS, MPCA, BWSR, and the BdSWD.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: USFWS and MnDNR Wildlife have each committed an initial amount of cash totaling \$5K each year for 5 years to begin operations. The BdSWD has a construction fund to use for operation and maintenance, along with utilizing water quality monitoring programs like River Watch and others under the MPCA programs. The BdSWD is authorized by state law to make a one-time up-front payment in lieu of taxes to the local taxing entity as a project cost. The average annual tax for that entity was calculated and multiplied by 20 to determine the payment. The interest from this payment will replace the loss in tax revenue. This payment has been made to the North Ottawa Township .

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: Local governments are involved in developing the project as members of the Project Team. The project alternative has been developed by the Project Team with representation from MnDNR Waters, Wildlife, and Fisheries, MPCA, MCEA, USFWS, BdSWD, SWCD, Local Landowners, Township Officials, County Officials. They all will continue to be informed as the project progresses through construction and operation via periodic team meetings and mailed reports. Project Team List attached

Other considerations: The requested \$3.0M along with \$1.0M from the Red River Watershed Management Board will complete the project. Phase V is the final construction phase of this project and has been discussed as part of the refuge application to the MnDNR. The inability to secure the final portion of funding may limit the management capabilities envisioned, that maximize the benefits of this project as a wildlife refuge. This project provides a very diverse range of benefits. It will provide flood damage reduction for lands and communities in the Rabbit River watershed area and downstream on the Bois de Sioux River, and the Red River of the North including those communities of Tintah, Campbell, Breckenridge, Wahpeton, Fargo, Moorhead and beyond. It will reduce sedimentation and turbidity in the surface waters of the area. It will provide jobs in the area when construction begins as there will be a large earth moving component that requires many people to accomplish.

Washington County Wetland Restoration

Your name: John Elholm
Your organization: Washington County
Mailing address: 11660 Myeron Road North
Phone/fax number: (651) 430-4303
Email address: john.elholm@co.washington.mn.us

Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success(200 words or less):

This program works in partnership with the local Conservation District, Watershed District, and local private and non-profit restoration agencies to restore wetlands in Washington County. Washington County owns 58 acres of degraded wetlands (12 basins) and associated uplands adjacent to 110 acres of restored tallgrass prairie. The 12 wetland basins were inventoried in 2003 and individualized restoration plans were established for each basin.

Work would begin in the fall of 2009 with invasive species removal. Additional mechanical and herbicide treatments of invasive species would occur in 2010. Seeding and installation of natives would occur in the spring of 2011. Spot spraying of invasive species would continue through 2011, as needed. Work would be performed by Washington County staff, private contractors, and community volunteers. The new plots would be incorporated into the County's current natural resource management program, which includes periodic controlled burns. Success will be measured by the species diversity, absence of non-native species, and acreages restored. The project would create 168 acres of interconnected native upland and wetland landscape.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met:

Once the areas have been restored, the County would manage the areas in perpetuity through the natural resources management program. The program includes periodic controlled burning, spot spraying of invasive species, and habitat enhancements as necessary. Long-term costs would be minimized because the County has trained staff and necessary equipment to manage the areas.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant:

Washington County has an exceptional relationship with local units of government and would include all associate partners in the planning, implementation, and on-going management of the restored area.

Other considerations:

The 12 wetland basins represent a diversity of wetland types including shallow open water, seasonally flooded, and permanently saturated. Each of these wetland types provide critical habitat for waterfowl, reptiles and amphibians, and songbirds, while also performing water cleansing activities within the larger watershed.

Public land wetland restoration & enhancement

Your name: Matt Holland
Your organization: Pheasants Forever, Inc.
Mailing address: 679 West River Drive, New London, MN 56273
Phone/fax number: 320-354-4377
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Short narrative of program/project: delivery system, partnerships, timeline for completion and measures of success (200 words or less): Wetland and associate upland restoration/enhancement on public lands will occur in partnership with the Minnesota DNR, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever, and private contractors. All properties that are being restored or enhanced are open to public hunting. Restoration of 102 acres of wetland, 100 acres of grassland, and enhancement of a 30-acre wetland will occur on two Waterfowl Production Areas (one in Pope, one in Sibley Counties). Seventy-six acres of wetlands will be restored on one Wildlife Management Area (Dakota County). Work on these projects would commence in the Fall of 2009 and be completed by June 30, 2011. In total, PF requests \$163,000 in LOHC funding and will bring \$46,000 of non-state funds to complete the projects. All work will be done to agency land manager's specifications.

Describe how long-term costs for sustaining project, monitoring and/or addressing property tax implications will be met: Long term management lies with the agency in ownership. For WMA's, DNR is the long-term land steward, for WPA's, the USFWS is the long-term land steward.

Describe how local governments will be involved/informed, if relevant: NA, other than all relevant and required permits will be acquired.

Other considerations: Wetlands provide habitat for hundreds of species as well as providing import water quality, and flood storage benefits. PF is pleased to be a partner in wetland habitat restoration and enhancement efforts as they also provide key winter habitat for ring-necked pheasants.

VI. Process and criteria to identify high priority projects

Perhaps the most important issue discussed at the stakeholder group meeting was the prioritization criteria. The groups agreed that the proposal would include the full inventory of proposed projects/programs with the understanding that all had to meet the minimum eligibility criteria established by the LOHC. It was important for meeting participants that “lower” priority projects would also be made available for LOHC review and consideration.

Consensus was reached at the stakeholder group meeting to prioritize those projects for which opportunities would be lost if action was not taken within one year. The meeting participants could not agree on whether and how to incorporate a geographic criteria; however, the groups did agree to at least identify the geographic scale and appropriate Joint Venture program.

Upon receiving and reviewing the individual proposals, it became apparent that each partner was able to identify compelling reasons that justify a high priority status and additional criteria and subsequent discussion by the stakeholders would be needed. Thus, the list of programs/projects shown in Appendix E represent the highest priority that all fit the definition of “shovel-ready” as well as contain individual reasons why there is urgency if not funded during the 2009 grant cycle.

Due to the compressed timeline between the planning meeting and presentation to LOHC, a second Wetland Collaborative face-to-face meeting was not able to be schedule to further discuss and refine the list. If desired by the LOHC, the Wetland Collaborative would be willing to convene another planning meeting for the sole purpose of further refining the project/program list and resubmitting a revised priority list for additional consideration.

Appendix A

Wetland planning meeting announcement in Pioneer Press
January 18, 2009



Appendix B

Attendees at Wetland Collaborative planning meeting on January 21, 2009

AGENCY/ORGANIZATION/ENTITY	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Jim Leach	Sheldon Myerchin	Mike Malling
Natural Resources Conservation Service	Tim Koehler		
Department of Natural Resources	Kathy DonCarlos	Ray Norrgard	
Board of Water and Soil Resources	Kevin Lines	John Jaschke	Kristie Mack
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Districts	Sheila Vanney		
Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District	Brian Nyborg		
Delta Waterfowl	Matt Chouinard		
Minnesota Waterfowl Association	Brad Nylin	Tony Rondeau	
Cook Waterfowl Foundation	Rod Ustipak		
Ducks Unlimited	Ryan Heiniger	Jon Schneider	
Pheasants Forever	Matt Holland		
Audubon Minnesota	Mark Peterson		
MN Valley Refuge Trust	Deb Loon		
Minnesota Land Trust	Jane Prohaska		
Sportsmen for Change	Garry Leaf		
Bonestroo	Paul Bockenstedt		
Great River Greening	Deborah Karasov		
Minnesota Ornithologists Union	Bill George		
Minnesota Deer Hunter Association	Kevin Auslund		
Minnesota Native Landscapes	Jim Eckberg	Joe Schaffer	
Natural Resources Research Institute (UMN-Duluth)	Lucinda Johnson		
Green Corridor Consulting Inc.	Brad Cobb		
Fish and Wildlife Legislative Alliance	Lance Ness		
Minnesota Rural Counties	Dan Larson		
Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council	Bill Becker	Darby Nelson	
Friends of the Minnesota Valley	Joe Pavelko		
Trust for Public Land	Bob McGillivray		
Minnesota Conservation Corps	Len Price		
Northerns, Inc.	Rob Carper		
Nicollet Conservation Club	Matt Hoffman		
Capable Partners	Allen Buss		
Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation	Harvey Nelson		
Star Tribune	Doug Smith	Dennis Anderson	
Pioneer Press	Chris Niskanen		
Outdoor News	Joe Albert		

Appendix C

List of strategic plans considered in development of Wetland Collaborative Proposal

- 1) Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- 2) Conservation Agenda
- 3) Managing MN's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife
- 4) MN Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan
- 5) Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Implementation Plan
- 6) Upper Mississippi Joint Venture Implementation Plan
- 7) 50 Year Plan for Wildlife Management Area Acquisitions
- 8) Campaign for Conservation - 50 Year Vision
- 9) Wetland Restoration Strategy
- 10) County Comprehensive Plans including water plans
- 11) 2008 Legislative Report on Wild Rice
- 12) Wellhead Protection Plans-Health Department
- 13) Local surface Water Management Plans-Municipality Level
- 14) Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare - State Wildlife Plan

Appendix D

Map of Joint Venture boundaries in Minnesota



Appendix E

Wetland Collaborative Proposal Budget

Program/Project Name	Sponsoring Partner	Restore		Enhance		Protect		Outdoor Heritage Fund Request	Other Leveraged Funds
		Upland	Wetland	Upland	Wetland	Upland	Wetland		
Cooperative Wetlands Protection Initiative 2010	Trust for Public Land					490	180	\$6,500,000	\$1,500,000
Private Wetlands Protection Initiative	Minnesota Land Trust					300	300	\$750,000	\$1,000,000
Reinvest in Minnesota/Wetlands Reserve Program Leveraging Project	Board of Water and Soil Resources					9,000	3,000	\$23,000,000	\$33,000,000
Wetland Reserve Program Focused Acceleration Project	Minnesota Waterfowl Association	1,500	500					\$100,000	\$100,000
Wildlife Management Area Restorations and Enhancements	Minnesota Waterfowl Association	124	66		6,000			\$328,500	\$20,000
Wildlife Management Area Roundouts	Minnesota Waterfowl Association					305	250	\$1,456,875	\$40,000
Wildlife Management Area Acquisitions	Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources					2,400	600	\$8,060,000	
Wild Rice Accelerated Management	Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources				3,000			\$41,000	
Wetlands and Shallow Lake Assessment and Management	Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources				700			\$1,450,000	
Accelerated Shallow Lake Enhancements	Ducks Unlimited, Inc.				12,728			\$5,800,000	\$924,000
Shallow Lake Critical Shoreland Easements	Ducks Unlimited, Inc.					460	40	\$1,600,000	\$260,000
Shallow Lake Shoreland Acquisitions	Ducks Unlimited, Inc.					150	40	\$900,000	
Acquisition and Restoration of Waterfowl Production Areas for Minnesota Valley WMD	Minnesota Valley Trust	840	215		49	60	20	\$670,000	\$2,806,289
Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District Restoration and Enhancement Project	Friends of Minnesota Valley	270	92		305			\$414,000	\$61,000
Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program in Minnesota - Protecting our Investment	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	800	400			800	400	\$5,600,000	\$5,400,000
Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Private Lands Habitat Restoration Program	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	257	904	500	100			\$199,000	\$132,000
Preservation of Stanley Creek (Knife River) Wetlands	Duluth Township					5	5	\$46,000	
Revolving Acquisition Fund	Cook Waterfowl Foundation					5,000	1,000	\$750,000	
Redpath Project (pools 1-4)	Bois de Sioux Watershed District					770	730	\$4,000,000	\$1,000,000
North Ottawa Impoundment project	Bois de Sioux Watershed District	412	1,670					\$3,000,000	\$1,000,000
Washington County Wetland Restorations	Washington County	40	18					\$332,000	
Public Land Wetland Restoration and Enhancement	Pheasants Forever	100	188		30			\$163,000	\$46,000
		4,343	4,053	500	22,912	19,740	6,565	\$65,160,375	\$47,289,289

Total Acres Conserved 58,113

Sub-Total Wetland Acres 33,530

Sub-Total Upland Acres 24,583

Total Wetland Collaborative Cost:

\$112,449,664