

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
The State of Minnesota

State Office Building, Room G85 100 Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

September 25, 2010

Mr. Mark Holsten, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Holsten,

The Conservation Partners Grants Committee of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council wanted to share some thoughts about the projects submitted and funded in the partners grants process. The process required to apply will also be addressed.

Success of the Conservation Partners Grants Program, financed with the Outdoor Heritage Fund, is an important part of the overall success of dedicated funding. We believe that this part of the overall funding process is critical in the Council's efforts to engage as many different and diverse groups as possible in doing on the ground conservation work in all areas of the state. It is the Conservation Partners Grants Subcommittee's intent to aggressively work towards this goal. The overall success of the dedicated funding amendment and the citizens of this great state's satisfaction with it will, in part, be a result of how the Conservation Partner Grants are handled.

The Subcommittee's concern is that while all projects funded in the past meet the constitutional mandate, many do not follow the intent of the Conservation Partners Grants law developed by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and expressed in Laws of Minnesota 2010, Chapter 361, Article 1, Section 2, Subdivision 5(i).

Please consider the following points.

The Subcommittee originally intended the Conservation Partner Grant Program to enable small conservation organizations lacking the finesse and skill required to successfully write a large grant

application to apply and receive funding. These groups are the bedrock of conservation. They are vital groups such as lake associations, sportsman's clubs, and fishing clubs. They number in the hundreds across the state.

These groups would most likely not be competing for the larger grants that are recommended by the council. For the most part, they should not have to compete with organizations that do come to the Council.

It was never intended to funnel substantial sums of Conservation Partner Grants dollars into projects larger than the grant limit of \$400,000 plus required match. For example, in fiscal year 10, \$400,000 was allocated to a multi-million dollar project that would have surely been completed without the help of the Conservation Partners Grants program. This used up 10% of the grants funds on a project that in total was not considered by any means small.

Although local units of governments are eligible to apply, their success should not come at the expense of smaller foundational conservation groups. Government units have far greater staff resources and grant application savvy. How can a sportsman's group treasurer compete with a full time government employee, with the sole or primary responsibility of writing and applying for grants? Your process should take this unfair advantage into account and level the playing field by leaning in favor of the smaller conservation organizations.

The Conservation Partners grants program was never intended to be a park and trails fund. Although good quality habitat can and does exist in these areas, there is a separate park and trails fund expressly designed to cover needed and necessary park issues. When deciding which projects to fund, projects with the potential to improve overall wildlife populations, not just habitat, need to be given priority. Just how much game fish and wildlife can be created in areas with large amounts of human interruption and interference? Habitat projects should be selected in areas with very limited human disturbance of wildlife. Areas next to bike paths and other high traffic areas should not be considered.

The last point addresses the application process. It was the vision of the Council that for grants under a certain dollar amount, that the application process could have been as simple as a single page form. Although state granting rules apply it is the hope of the council that you would think "out of the box" in simplifying the application process. Working within the confines of current regulation, we would ask that you and your staff find a way and work aggressive toward the goal of simplifying the application process for small sums of money, to encourage more application from small groups.

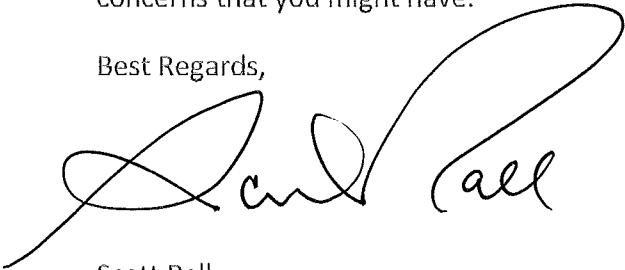
Please accept these recommendations in the spirit of jointly developing a fledgling program. Our intent is to make the Conservation Partners Grants program the very best that it can be. The Council

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will monitor the application and selection process to see if it encourages and facilitates use of the programs by small conservation groups. Please keep administrative costs contained and deliver the best possible product. By doing so, it will best serve the citizens of Minnesota, the Outdoor Heritage Fund and the Department of Natural Resources.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions regarding the Council's desires or other concerns that you might have.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Rall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Scott Rall
Conservation Partners Grants Committee Chair
Lessard/Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

- C: Members of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
 Ms. Laurie Martinson, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota DNR
 Mr. Dave Schad, Director of Fish and Wildlife, Minnesota DNR
 Mr. Dennis Simon, Supervisor, Section of Wildlife, Minnesota DNR
 Ms. Leslie Tannahill, Supervisor, Conservation Partners Grant Program