

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council
-- Strategy and Process for Developing 2009 Funding Recommendations --

Adopted, January 12, 2009

BACKGROUND

This document is intended to serve as a descriptive guide for the process through which the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LOHC) will develop its recommendations to the 2009 Minnesota Legislature for appropriations from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF). By law, these initial funding recommendations will be submitted to the Legislature no later than April 1, 2009. The process used by the LOHC to develop its 2009 legislative recommendations will rely extensively on individual and stakeholder input to identify priority conservation investment opportunities. The process used by the LOHC for developing its 2009 legislative recommendations will rely extensively on individual and stakeholder input to identify priority conservation investment opportunities. The LOHC will refine this framework and process, including the development of a strategic plan, for guiding the expenditure of future OHF appropriation recommendations.

Goal: To make recommendations to the legislature by April 1, 2009 on appropriations of money from the OHF that are consistent with the Minnesota Constitution and state law, and supported by the Legislature, Governor and the public.

PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING 2009 FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

The LOHC's process for developing its initial recommendations will consist of the following tasks:

1. Obtain background information on existing conservation plans and delivery systems.

The LOHC will receive background information on existing: 1) statewide, strategic conservation plans, including, but limited to, the Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan, Conservation Legacy Plan, and A Fifty-Year Vision; Conservation for Minnesota's Future; 2) resource-specific plans (e.g., wetland restoration), asset-specific plans (e.g., wildlife management area acquisition plan), and species-specific plans (e.g., pheasant long-range plan); and 3) existing conservation delivery system descriptions and grant programs. This information will be made available to LOHC members in the form of written summaries, electronic access to existing plans, and formal presentations.

2. Establish the framework for identifying priority conservation funding recommendations from the OHF.

Principles to Guide LOHC Process

In developing its recommendations to the Legislature for appropriations from the OHF, the LOHC will employ a process that:

- is timely, transparent to and accessible by the public.
- protects and advances the public interest.
- provides opportunities for and considers public input.
- takes into account existing conservation planning efforts and delivery systems.
- encourages efficient and effective conservation solutions.

- is understandable by the public and stakeholders.
- ensures conservation benefits are broadly distributed around the state, consistent with conservation principles and the need to focus on priorities and strategic plans.

Minimum Criteria For Funding Requests

In developing its recommendations to the Legislature for appropriations from the OHF, the LOHC will only consider funding requests that:

- are consistent with the uses of the OHF as specified in Article XI of the Minnesota Constitution and Minnesota Statutes 97A.056,
- show the ability to produce significant, measurable, and enduring resource and/or habitat outcomes.
- clearly identify specific resource and/or habitat outcomes, performance measures, and a plan for measuring, evaluating and publicly reporting these outcomes over time.
- reflect the best available science regarding resource and/or habitat enhancement, restoration, and protection.
- where possible and appropriate uses native plant material.
- restore or enhance resources only on property under permanent protection of fee ownership or conservation easement.
- have a plan to sustain the resource and/or habitat outcomes specified, including a plan to finance the necessary activities.
- identify funding necessary to fully implement the project/programs(s).
- limit the state's exposure for additional funding for the project.
- have a process for ensuring transparency and accessibility in all stages of project/program implementation.
- seek funding to supplement (not replace) customary or usual funding sources.
- only acquire permanent easements, if proposing less than fee simple acquisition in real property.
- ensure that land acquired by fee with money from the OHF is open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season unless otherwise provided by law.
- commit to erect and maintain signage, to a standard to be adopted by the LOHC, crediting the OHF with support for protected, restored, or improved sites.
- commit to replace OHF protected resources converted to a use other than that intended in the OHF appropriation on a ten replacement acres for one converted acre basis.
- agree to not transfer the public interest in OHF fee and/or easement protected land without the written approval of the appropriate state of Minnesota authority.

Criteria To Be Met By Requesting Organizations

In developing its recommendations to the Legislature for expenditures from the OHF, the LOHC will only consider requests from organization(s) that:

- have a record of successful management and implementation of project/program(s) similar in scale, scope, and complexity to the project/program(s) being requested.
- have demonstrated the ability to identify and establish the financial and managerial controls needed to successfully and fully implement the proposed project/program.

- have an up-to-date external financial audit with no serious negative findings.

Criteria For Identifying Conservation Priorities

In developing its recommendations to the Legislature for appropriations from the OHF, the LOHC will give priority consideration to requests that:

- produce multiple conservation benefits.
- produce conservation benefits across a large geographic area.
- are collaboratively developed by multiple stakeholders and interests.
- are able to leverage funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- identify the status of public access in the case of easement acquisition.
- address one-time conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately funded.

The above criteria for funding requests, the requesting organizations, and for identifying conservation priorities, do not necessarily apply to requests for funding through the Conservation Partners Program specified under Minnesota Statutes 2008, Chapter 97A.56, Subdivision 3(b).

Evaluation of applications to LOHC recommended grant programs operated by a recipient of OHF funds will be guided by criteria specified by the LOHC in consultation with the entity operating the grant program. These criteria, where appropriate, will conform to the Minnesota Department of Administration Office of Grants Management State Grant Policies.

3. Obtain public input on priority conservation needs.

The LOHC values timely and meaningful public involvement and input. To achieve this, the LOHC will encourage stakeholders to conduct public listening sessions in January 2009, summarize the public input received in writing, and provide these summaries to the LOHC by February 2009. In addition, public input opportunities will be provided at each LOHC meeting. Staff will develop a written summary of this input and provide this summary to LOHC members. The LOHC will also establish a website where public input on conservation funding priorities and strategies can be provided.

4. Request stakeholders to identify 2009 conservation funding priorities.

The LOHC will ask the Minnesotans to organize and convene open, inclusive, public and collaborative processes to identify the highest priority conservation project/program(s) and associated funding requirements. These processes will be organized around the following resource systems: 1) wetlands; 2) prairies; 3) forests; and 4) fish and wildlife habitat.

For each process associated with the four above-referenced resource systems the LOHC requests a brief report describing the:

- participants involved and a summary of the process employed.
- long-term resource system goals.
- important statewide/regional conservation issues.
- existing conservation partners and partnerships.
- existing initiatives, delivery systems, and funding levels addressing the conservation issues.
- highest priority conservation project/program(s):
 - short- and long-term funding requirements.

- anticipated habitat outcomes and associated timelines.
- measures of success and plans to monitor outcomes.
- level of local government support.
- recommended delivery system(s).
- process and criteria used to identify the highest priority conservation project/program(s).

Organizers will be requested to present their investment proposals to the LOHC in February 2009.

5. Develop recommendations to the Legislature for appropriations from the OHF.

Based on the proposals and public input received, the LOHC will finalize recommendations to the 2009 Legislature for appropriations from the OHF to protect, enhance, and restore each of the following: 1) wetlands; 2) prairies; 3) forests; and 4) fish and wildlife habitat.

The LOHC will also recommend an appropriation from the OHF for a Conservation Partners Program and an Emerging Issues Account to address one-time habitat enhancement, restoration, or protection opportunities that would otherwise be lost if funds are not immediately appropriated, and a Cash Flow Reserve Account to finance LOHC conservation and habitat commitments in the event actual sales tax receipts to the OHF are less than anticipated receipts.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS OF THE LOHC RECOMMENDATIONS

Minnesota has geographically diverse resources. Yet, within the state there are distinct ecologically-based regions defined by distinct natural resource characteristics. These regions have unique conservation and habitat issues that may be best addressed with regionally-tailored protection, restoration, and enhancement strategies. To the extent practical, these regions will be considered by the LOHC in recommending OHF appropriations to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife. Beginning in 2010, LOHC recommendations for appropriations from the OHF will be based on a strategic plan drawn around distinct ecologically-based regions.

DEFINITIONS:

Restore: action to bring a habitat back to a former state of sustaining fish, game or wildlife, with an ultimate goal of restoring habitat to a desired conservation condition.

Protect: action to maintain the ability of habitat and related natural systems to sustain fish, game or wildlife through acquisition of fee title or conservation easements.

Enhance: action to increase the ability of habitat and related natural systems to sustain and improve fish, game or wildlife in an ecologically sound manner.

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council Proposed Plan of Work
January – March 2009
*****DRAFT*****

Monday, January 12th

- Election of interim LOHC officers
- Agreement on strategy LOHC will use to develop its 2009 OHF recommendations
- Presentations:
 - existing statewide, strategic conservation plans
 - Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan
 - Conservation Legacy Council Plan
 - A Fifty-Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota's Future
 - summary of regional BWSR-led listening sessions
 - summary of January 8th conservation stakeholder meeting:
- Request to conservation stakeholders to convene process for identifying conservation and habitat investment priorities.

Monday, January 26th

- Presentations:
 - existing resource and conservation plans
 - Minnesota conservation delivery strategies:
 - management (e.g., wetland restoration)
 - acquisition (e.g., fee and less-than-fee rights)
 - local conservation matching grant programs:
- Conservation Partners Program framework development

Monday, February 9th

- Stakeholder presentation of Prairie Resource funding priorities
- Stakeholder presentation of Wetland Resource funding priorities

Monday, February 23rd

- Stakeholder presentation of Forest Resource funding priorities
- Stakeholder presentation of Fish Habitat funding priorities

Monday, March 9th

- Finalize funding recommendations

Monday, March 23rd

- Finalize funding recommendations