

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2010 Work Program

Date of Report: November 28, 2011
Date of Next Progress Report: June 1, 2012
Date of Work Program Approval: June 16, 2010
Project Completion Date: June 30, 2013

I. PROJECT TITLE: Minnesota Conservation Apprenticeship Academy

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Location: Statewide applicability

Total ENRTF Project Budget:	ENRTF Appropriation	\$ 368,000
	Minus Amount Spent:	\$ 139,193
	Equal Balance:	\$ 228,807

Legal Citation: M.L. 2010, Chap. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 8a

Appropriation Language:

\$368,000 is from the trust fund to the Board of Water and Soil Resources in cooperation with the Minnesota Conservation Corps or its successor to train and mentor future conservation professionals by providing apprenticeship service opportunities to soil and water conservation districts. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2013, by which time the project must be completed and the final products delivered.

II. PROJECT SUMMARY AND RESULTS:

Familiarizing future conservation leaders with Minnesota's various land-use practices, water and soil resources, plant and animal habitats, and landowner concerns is needed to maintain the capacity of local organizations to deliver conservation on the ground. Many of the conservation districts' most experienced conservation professionals and practitioners are nearing retirement age but due to budget constraints will not be replaced until they have left employment. Consequently, Minnesota is missing a great opportunity to transfer knowledge and experience to the next generation responsible for Minnesota's conservation.

While college graduates with conservation-related degrees are knowledgeable in technology, theory, and research methods, their practical, on-the-ground skills need development. Communicating with landowners and adjusting designs for field nuances are vital to the success of conservation projects and best learned from seasoned

professionals. In turn, apprentices will bring knowledge of emerging technologies and other innovations to improve the quality and productivity of current conservation efforts. This allows for a cross-pollination of ideas and solutions for natural resource challenges.

This program will approach environmental-related departments at several universities beginning in the fall of 2010 to recruit current students for apprenticeship positions during the summers of 2011 and 2012. The Minnesota Conservation Corps (MCC) will be the employer of record, however 30 Soil and Water Conservation Districts will provide a workplace, mentor, and daily supervision. MCC will recruit candidates, pay a monthly stipend, and provide for AmeriCorps service credits and educational rewards.

III. PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF: October 30, 2011

SERVICE WORK PERFORMED

The diversity of project work done by 30 apprentices represented the variety of projects specific to each region and district participating in the program. Apprentices conducted water quality monitoring, installed conservation practices, conducted site inspections, recruited landowners for conservation programs, assisted landowners and SWCD staff with management plans, and much more.

Sample of work accomplished: During the three month service term, 30 apprentices planted 22,632 trees, forbs, and grasses; took 2,482 samples to monitor water quality; provided environmental education to 550 people; conducted 1372 surveys; and restored 525 acres of habitat through invasive species removal, rain garden planting and maintenance, native seeding, and erosion control practices.

When asked how projects would have been completed without an apprentice, Ryan Holzer of Scott County SWCD stated, "Some of the projects would not have been completed. Other staff would have completed some of the projects. However, the corpsmember allowed our staff to focus on implementing more conservation through the summer".

PROGRAM COORDINATION

100% of SWCDs were satisfied with their apprentice's performance on projects. ¹

92% of SWCDs believed the apprentice applicants provided for initial review in the selection process met the needs outlined in their project proposal. ¹

96% of SWCDs were satisfied with the skills and qualities of the apprentice placed at their site. ¹

100% of SWCD partners believed they received adequate support from the Conservation Corps to mentor their apprentice and said they would partner with the Corps again. ¹

"Our apprentice was a perfect fit for his skills and personality. It is definitely a time commitment on our part to have additional staff to coordinate and orient, but I feel it is well worth the effort. I think this program is a great way to give college students an opportunity to experience hands on training and learning. The Corps work plan template, supervisor orientation and handbook were very useful in the apprentice process. Hope we have the opportunity to place another apprentice the future."

- Douglas Bos, Rock County SWCD

“The Corps did an excellent job of matching our office with an outstanding candidate. We are looking forward to doing this again if the program were available.”

- Karen Flom, Renville County SWCD

Site visits: Conservation Corps conducted site visits throughout August, one site visit per placement site to ensure successful progress was made in the apprentice work plan. Conservation Corps staff met with the apprentice and SWCD supervisor, together and separately, to assess successes and challenges. Corps staff also visited a representative project in which the apprentice participated

APPRENTICE DEMOGRAPHICS

Apprentices are currently pursuing degrees or recently completed degrees from the following colleges and universities in the following areas of study:

Schools represented: Saint Cloud State University, Saint Mary's, University of Winona, College of Saint Benedict-Saint John's University, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, University Wisconsin La Crosse, Gustavus Adolphus College, University of Minnesota Duluth, University of Minnesota Crookston, University of Minnesota Morris, South Dakota State University, University of St. Thomas, Augsburg College, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, Bemidji State University, Minnesota State University Moorhead, University of Wisconsin River Falls

Areas of study represented: Environmental Studies, Natural Resource Management, Environmental Science/Policy/Management, Conservation, Technical Communication, Biology, Environmental/Civil Engineering, Agricultural Economics, Electronic Publishing, Water Resources, Environmental Chemistry, Agronomy, and Geography

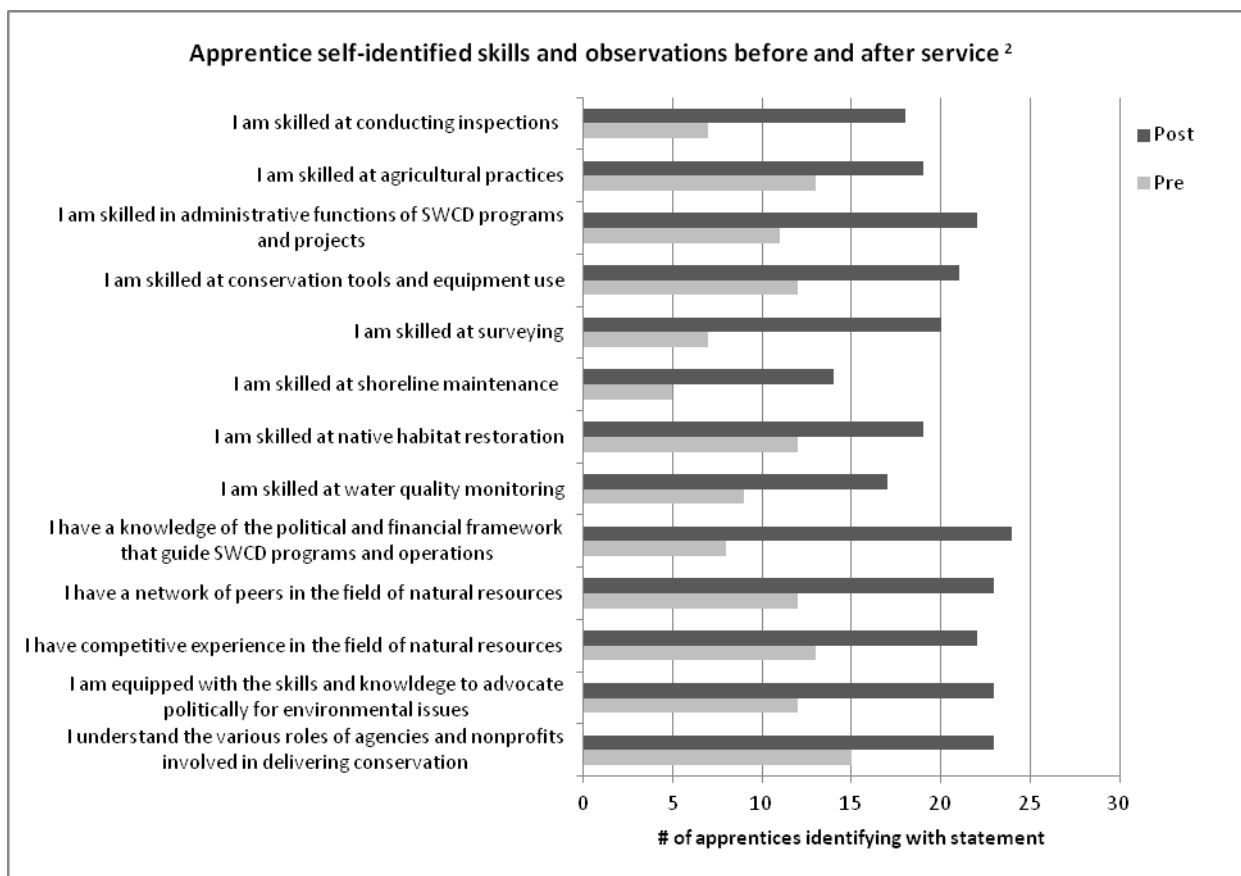
APPRENTICE GAINS

100% of apprentices believe this hands-on experience increased their academic knowledge and will enhance their future academic studies.²

100% of apprentices believe they now have increased technical conservation skills and are more prepared for a future career in conservation.²

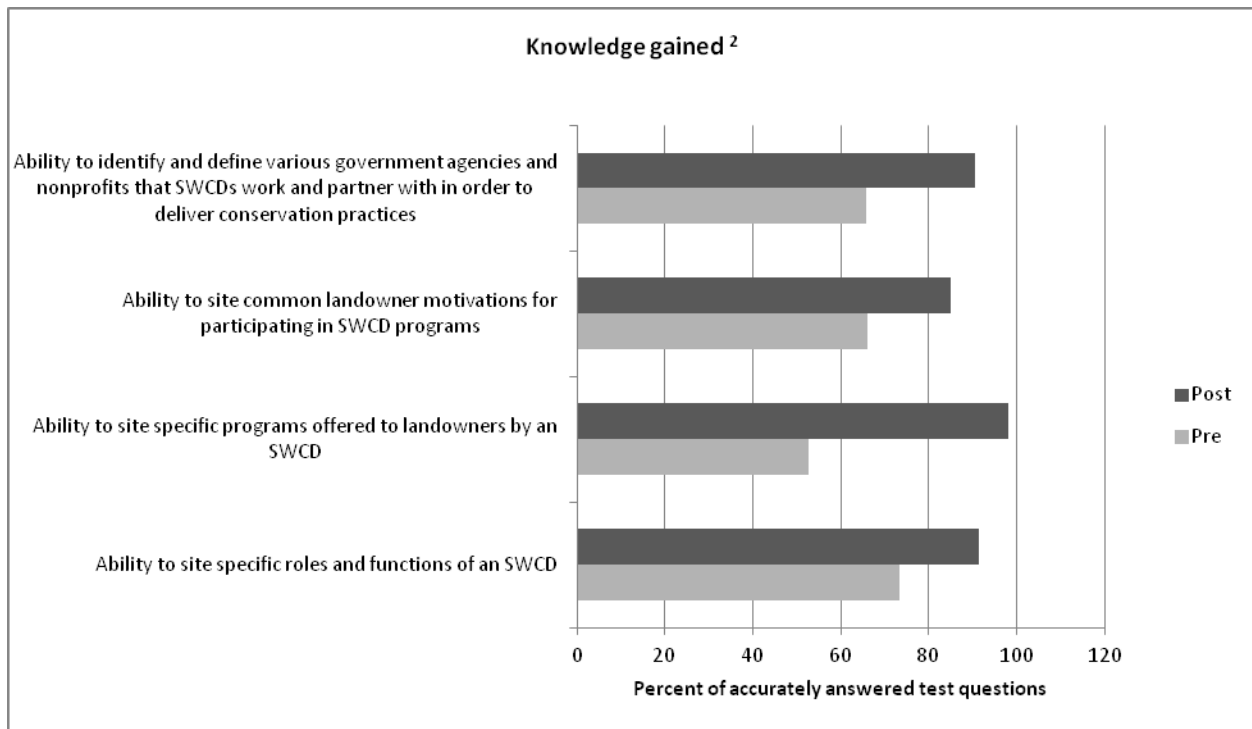
“The Conservation Apprenticeship Academy has meant more to me than I thought it would. It has been the best work experience I have ever had. I feel much more confident about my future career opportunities and I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the program.”

- Frances Gerde, Sherburne SWCD Apprentice



In addition to hands-on skills in conservation, the Corps and BWSR determined a core objective of the apprentice experience should be to demonstrate an increased understanding of how an SWCD works with landowners on the local level to deliver conservation practices through relationships with numerous government agencies and nonprofits.

In a knowledge survey administered to apprentices before and after their term of service, apprentices demonstrated the following knowledge increases attributed to their experience in the program.



APPRENTICE ACADEMY SERVICE LEARNING FORUM

A customized social networking platform, Ning.com, was utilized to foster an online community and enhance learning through monthly critical discussion. Below are the three forum topics discussed with several representative insights from apprentices.

Apprentices initial impressions of working in an SWCD

“What I wasn’t expecting was the role my supervisors play in local meetings and the decision making process of conservation in the district. They are routinely dealing with not only local budget issues (aside from state funds), but largely dealing with people in the community who are concerned with the quality of the environment around them.”

“The one thing I did not completely consider coming into this was how important the relationships that the staff holds with community members actually are. This networking is what really allows the SWCD to provide these resources.”

Discussing landowner motivations to participate in conservation practices

“They want other reasons, practical reasons like financial incentives and aesthetic incentives, and to know that their neighbors are doing it too, and that it won’t be hard to maintain, and other things that might have nothing to do with the main reason you want them to install it, for the environmental benefits. I think the best thing to do is to just keep trying and to work with the people of the county as much as possible so you get a feel for how they really think.”

“I have found that agricultural land owners seem to be more easily enticed to do conservation projects if there are economic incentives.... Yet, this phenomenon should not be looked at simply as farmers not being concerned about the environment, but instead looked at from a point of view that this is their livelihood and profession. By using land for conservation practices one is essentially taking money out of their pocket.”

What it means to be a successful SWCD

“Each SWCD is successful on a different scale because each has a different set of goals. Sure there is the shared objective of conservation, but how this is achieved and what stakeholders are deemed to be the most important is different from district to district. Thus, a district that puts the farmer first will be successful when they are able to put just a 2 acre section of a wet field into CRP while a district that cares first and foremost about conservation will be successful when the entire wet field is put into the program.”

“I really think working relationships are the best indicators of success. Because relationships can make things happen that money cannot. The exchange rate from dollars into social currency can be dismal. Yes, you may build a few prestigious large projects but you will not win hearts and minds. And if we are "performing service for the future of humanity", as mentioned earlier, our work has to be about how people work together to conserve soil and water.”

APPRENTICE SNAPSHOTS



Kristen Kieta, of St. Paul, MN recently graduated from St. Thomas University in St. Paul, MN with a degree in Environmental Policy. She was placed at Renville County SWCD. During her summer with Renville, Kristen helped oversee the construction of a wetland restoration on a WRP site, conducted inspections of conservation easement and CRP sites, promoted RIM and CRP programs to landowners, and worked directly with landowners on management issues. Kristen had this to say about her experience:

“The Conservation Apprenticeship Academy did far more than I expected to build on my formal education because it gave me practical experience in so many different conservation practices. Additionally, the Academy forces you to look at conservation from a practical perspective rather than the academic and intellectual perspective you get in university courses. Rather than talk idealistically (which has its benefits), you are forced to learn to work within financial means and within the mindset of people that don't necessarily see the world from the same perspective.”



Kyle Henning, of Luverne, MN is currently pursuing his degree in Environmental Science from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Kyle was placed at Rock County SWCD. Kyle assisted with calibration of solid manure spreaders of feedlot operations, site surveys and construction inspection on various projects, rain garden installation, stream bank stabilization, and tree planting. Kyle also collected GPS points and collected water samples throughout the county. Kyle had this to say about his experience:

“I feel I was a part of a bigger group that all wanted the same thing; to learn about conserving the land and water of my SWCD. It was beyond a great idea to join.”

In Kyle's end of term evaluation, when asked what his future career plans were, Kyle replied, “Working in Minnesota for a SWCD, the DNR or NRCS”.



Matias Valero of Minneapolis, MN returned to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities this fall to complete his degree in Environmental/Ecological Engineering. This summer, he was placed at South St. Louis SWCD. Matias worked extensively with the regional

TSA based out of Duluth to apply his engineering training. He assisted with surveying and fieldwork for engineering projects under the close guidance of the Northeast TSA's Conservation Engineer. Matias had this to say about his apprenticeship:

"I was able to learn first-hand from a wide variety of natural resource professionals including engineers, technicians, specialists from the NRCS, DNR, MPCA, and more: A million times better than a textbook or a lecture hall. And, I got to tangibly help them all too! I learned more in my summer there than in a year or two of environmental engineering class."

PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF: June 1, 2011

MCC developed an RFP for Mentor (host) site selection with MASWCD and BWSR which was distributed to Minnesota SWCDs and TSAs on November 1, 2010. Conservation Corps attended MASWCD Convention on December 8, 2010 to promote Academy and answer questions prior to the proposal deadline of December 31. MCC received 32 proposals and placed 30 apprentices in 26 hosts: Anoka, Carlton, Cass, Cook, Cottonwood/Jackson, Crow Wing, Dakota, East Ottertail, Hubbard, Itasca, Lac qui Parle, Lake of the Woods, Martin, Pennington, Pipestone, Pope, Redwood, Renville, Rock, Scott, Sherburne, South St. Louis, Washington, West Ottertail, Yellow Medicine (Map attached) There is wide distribution of the positions, although the southeast portion of the state presumably did not show as much interest due to ongoing flood response activities that were keeping their staff in the field.

Apprentice recruitment was accomplished through postings to online job boards serving 80 state and private universities; Minnesota Council of Nonprofits; Student Conservation Association; AmeriCorps web-site. Newspaper ads ran in areas where hosts were located. MCC also attended three career fairs and reached out to 2,500 Corps alumni, multiple social media outlets, and professors in natural resource programs. The University of Minnesota's Job & Internship Fair (attendance of over 3,000 students from the Twin Cities, Crookston, Morris and Duluth branches) was also a major outreach opportunity.

Selection began after the application deadline of March 25th. MCC interviewed applicants and selected apprentices based on region preference, area of interest, skills and qualifications with feedback on final candidates from the SWCD. BWSR staff worked with MCC staff to establish before and after testing of apprentices to be able to measure the effectiveness of the summer session. Additionally, the apprentices will be tracked for several years after the session to ascertain the long-term ability of the program to help apprentices their career paths. A tabulation of the participants schools and hometown s will be included in the next update.

Conservation Corps and host SWCD staff developed a schedule of project and training activities for the apprentice to complete throughout the term. Supervisor training conference calls took place in mid-April addressing responsibilities, expectations, Corps policies and procedures.

Apprentice general orientation was just completed May 23rd-25th at St. Croix State Park. Training includes Conservation Corps policies and procedures, national service guidelines, safety, risk management, First Aid/CPR, teamwork and communication. BWSR and MASWCD staff were on hand to provide overviews of MN natural resource distribution, local government forms, and examples of how public decision making bodies utilize technical information to make policy decisions that may be different than the staff themselves would select.

Program resources created-to-date

- Contract between BWSR and Conservation Corps
- Project plan and detailed timeline
- Request for Proposals
- Application for SWCDs

Frequently Asked Questions for SWCD staff
 SWCD and Conservation Corps site agreements
 Work/Training plan
 Recruitment Flyer for Apprentices
 Online application for apprentices
 SWCD supervisor handbook
 Apprentice agreement and enrollment forms
 Apprentice handbook
 Training schedule (draft form)

IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

RESULT/ACTIVITY 1: develop academy structure, recruit participating SWCDs, and develop 30 employment agreements

Description: The intent is to create a solid foundation for running an apprentice program for multiple years. Result one is administratively focused as the details of the employment arrangements are critical for all parties—MCC, SWCDs, and the prospective apprentice.

MCC will contact SWCDs about interest in the program and solicit some notion of the quality of the experience they can provide the apprentices. The same needs are there for finding the students at institutions. We need to develop contacts at schools, evaluating the programs in which the candidates are enrolled so they have the background necessary to take advantage of the placement, and create selection criteria. The screening and selecting of individuals for the program will be carried out by MCC as well.

MCC staff will administer the AmeriCorps enrollment requirements etc. for those selected. For example, an initial training session is necessary prior to placement to orient the participants similar to other MCC corps members. BWSR will seek a contracting party to assist in providing additional training beyond core MCC training.

Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$52,600
Amount Spent: \$31,277
Balance: \$21,323

Deliverable/Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. executed contract between BWSR and MCC	August 30, 2010	\$ 2,000
2. employment agreement format and program documentation describing schedule and duties; employment agreements and mgmt	October 15, 2010	24,000
3. list of interested SWCDs (incl. primary mentor)	November 30, 2010	3,000
4. year two employment agreements & mgmt	May 1, 2012	21,600
5. year two interested SWCDs list	November 30, 2011	2,000

Result Completion Date: June 1, 2012

Result Status as of June 1, 2011: Deliverables 1, 2, and 3 all accomplished. Year one participants have employment agreements mentioned in deliverable 4.

Result Status as of October 30, 2011: Unchanged. Year two activities for deliverables 3, 4, and 5 commencing before year end.

Result Status as of June 1, 2012:

Final Report Summary: June 30, 2013

RESULT/ACTIVITY 2: Recruit, select, and train academy participants; and repeat for year two

Description: BWSR and MCC will approach University of Minnesota, MnSCU, and other local university environmental programs for assistance in recruiting candidates. MCC will work to match potential participants with willing SWCDs and Technical Service Areas (TSA – a joint powers entity of SWCDs). Both the SWCD and the apprentices will be provided training to clarify expectations and requirements for the successful participation in the program. MCC will serve as the employer of record and handle all payroll and personnel related issues (e.g. AmeriCorps credits) until conclusion of summer employment.

Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 2:

ENRTF Budget:	\$315,400
Amount Spent:	\$107,916
Balance:	\$207,484

Deliverable/Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. recruiting time and materials for use at educational institutions	October 15, 2010	\$ 5,000
2. match candidates with interested SWCDs	January 31, 2010	3,000
3. employ 30 apprentices in year one	October 15, 2011	134,400
4. close out year one and evaluate	December 31, 2011	3,000
5. employ 34 apprentices in year two	October 15, 2012	167,000
6. close out and evaluate	November 30, 2012	3,000

Result Completion Date: December 31, 2012

Result Status as of June 1, 2011: Deliverable 1, 2, and 3 are all accomplished. Evaluation forms for tasks are completed.

Result Status as of October 30, 2011: Deliverable 3 disrupted by government shutdown and suspension of state grant for approximately three weeks. MCC kept program going for a short time before exhausting their available grant in-eligible dollars. (No reimbursement is being sought for funds spent during the shutdown.) Some apprentices continued working for “free” in order to accumulate AmeriCorps service credit, and some were able to extend their employment deeper into the summer. Evaluation results summarized previously in Section II of this document.

Result Status as of June 1, 2012:

Result Status as of December 31, 2012

Final Report Summary: June 30, 2013

V. TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET:

Personnel: \$ 5,000

Contracts : \$ 363,000

Staff Salaries: \$ 68,889 (Program Manager and Recruiter)

Apprentice Stipends: \$ 255,000

Apprentice Orientation and Training: \$ 16,560

Apprentice Recruitment: \$ 6,000

Travel: \$ 16,551 (within contract; state employee travel will be in-kind)

TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET: \$368,000

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500: NA

Amendment Request (November 28, 2011)

The state government shutdown had a profound effect on the workplan and budget. The three week shutdown and concurrent suspension of the grant agreement resulted in a significant sum of unused apprentice stipends. I propose increasing the number of year two positions from 30 to 34 and an increase supporting costs for Conservation Corps of MN and IA (CCMI).

The amendment I am requesting is tabulated in the revised Attachment A. It shows my requested budget amounts and the costs through the last reimbursement request received from CCMI.

- Increase to CCMI staff time due to a better grip on annual start up costs and proposed addition of four apprentices to the summer 2012 program.
- A slight decrease to stipend amounts since funds will still be used for additional apprentices in year two. There are increased costs to the other categories because of the extra four positions.
- Increase recruiting costs and background checks due largely to enhanced background check requirements of AmeriCorps program.
- Increase to travel costs associated with managers traveling more and to more locations.

Amendment Approved: 11/28/11

VI. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners: MCC via contract, MN Association of SWCDs, individuals SWCDs, University and State College systems

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy: Effort provides immediate technical assistance to accelerate conservation delivery utilizing typical funding sources such as RIM, WRP, CRP, EQIP, flood recovery, cost-share, and the constitutional funds for habitat and clean water. In the long-term we expect the participants will enlighten the each other—the interns gain experience, the SWCDs gain emerging technologies. Our hope is that, following the completion of LCCMR participation, that the program can

ultimately utilize the new Clean Water Fund as it is not a program which previously existed and is therefore not supplanting of existing efforts.

C. Other Funds Proposed to be Spent during the Project Period: In-kind staff hours of the SWCDs and BWSR staff will be the largest direct money. (Indirect funds described in “Project Impact” are very large but more realistically associated with the design and construction of projects more so than the apprentices.)

D. Spending History: There have not been previous LCMR or LCCMR appropriations

VII. DISSEMINATION: The MCC will be the primary disseminator and provide a link on their website (www.conservationcorps.org) describing the program. BWSR and MASWCD will also offer a brief description of the program and a link to the MCC site. MASWCD has already been spreading this idea nationally through the National Association of Conservation Districts.

October 30, 2011 update: Survey results are being tabulated and distributed in a progress report format to the participants. MCC appeared at BWSR Academy in October to meet with SWCDs, relay results, and generate interest for next year. Len Price will be presenting first year summary to full BWSR Board this winter. Marketing are being updated for use in recruiting at Universities this fall.

June 1, 2011 update: Many outreach activities included in section iii above. The RFP was released on 11/1/10. Conservation Corps attended MASWCD Convention on 12/8/2010 to promote Conservation Corps Academy. The primary mailing to universities and professors went out 3/8/11 with fliers and position descriptions. Online application was available for apprentice applicants on February 18th via Conservation Corps website and closed March 25th.

VIII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted not later than June 1, 2011, October 30, 2011, June 1, 2012, and November 30, 2012. A final work program report and associated products **cannot** be submitted between June 30 and August 1, 2012 as requested by the LCCMR due to the need for the summer internships to run into September. Final end date is therefore June 30, 2013.

IX. RESEARCH PROJECTS: NA