



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) M.L. 2011 Work Plan FINAL REPORT

M.L. 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 03n

### Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2014

**PROJECT TITLE:** Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning  
**PROJECT MANAGER:** Dennis J. Fuchs  
**AFFILIATION:** Stearns County SWCD  
**MAILING ADDRESS:** 110 2nd St. S., Suite 128  
**CITY/STATE/ZIP:** Waite Park, MN 56387  
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**WEBSITE:** <http://www.stearnscountyswcd.net/>  
**FUNDING SOURCE:** Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund)  
**LEGAL CITATION:** M.L. 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 03n

**APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$175,000 (spent \$108,447.01, remaining \$66,552.99)**

### Overall Project Outcome and Results

From its Headwaters to the Twin Cities, the Mississippi River has benefited from coordinated management plans and community efforts to protect its water quality and shoreland habitat--except for 26-mile stretch in Central Minnesota. Starting in St. Cloud and stretching north through Stearns and Benton counties, this stretch is governed by 11 different jurisdictions (four cities, five townships and two counties). These communities presently have no uniform land use controls to protect the magnificent river they share. Significant population growth and development pressure and contributing upland pollution could significantly damage the health of the Mississippi River.

This project's goal was to restore and protect the natural resources of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, and reduce habitat fragmentation along its banks in central Minnesota. The project coordinated with local units of government to develop and implement specific river protection policies with limited success. Individual landowners were contacted to implement sound shoreland and upland management practices. Also, in conjunction with this project a portion of the Sauk watershed was selected as part of the USDA NRCS Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) to reduce pollution entering the river and reducing downstream impacts. Over 50,000 acres had conservation practices planned or applied.

Local units of government were offered workshops and technical assistance to implement policies, such as adopting a Natural Resource Overlay District along the river. The City of Sartell was key receiver of this assistance. Also, a major Take a Day OFF (Outdoor Family Fun) event was held to increase the publics' awareness of this wonderful natural resource in their backyard. Over 1000 people attend this event annually.

The public policies and landowner practices implemented has resulted in a healthier Mississippi River today and for decades to come.

### Project Results Use and Dissemination

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District website ([www.stearnscountyswcd.net](http://www.stearnscountyswcd.net)) was used to disseminate information. Other media forms included radio, newspaper, and Facebook were used to increase awareness of activities pertaining to this project.



**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)  
M.L. 2011 Work Plan  
FINAL REPORT**

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**Date of Report:** 12/1/2013 (Final Report)

**Date of Work Plan Approval:** 8/11/2011

**Project Completion Date:** 6/30/2014

**Is this an amendment request? Yes**

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**Project Title:** Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning

**Project Manager:** Dennis Fuchs

**Affiliation:** Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District

**Address:** Marketplace Mall, 110 2nd Street S, Ste 128

**City:** Waite Park **State:** MN **Zipcode:** 56387

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**Web Address:** <http://www.stearnscountyswcd.net/>

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**Location:**

**Counties Impacted:** Benton, Stearns

**Ecological Section Impacted:** Minnesota and Northeast Iowa Morainal (222M), Western Superior Uplands (212K)

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<b>Total ENRTF Project Budget:</b>	<b>ENRTF Appropriation \$:</b>	175,000.00
	<b>Amount Spent \$:</b>	<u>108,447.01</u>
	<b>Balance \$:</b>	66,552.99

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**Legal Citation:** M.L. 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 03n

**Appropriation Language:**

\$87,000 the first year and \$88,000 the second year are from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District to develop and adopt river protection strategies in cooperation with local jurisdictions in the communities of the 26 miles of the Mississippi River between Benton and Stearns Counties. This appropriation must be matched by \$175,000 of nonstate cash or qualifying in-kind funds.

## **II. FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY:**

From its Headwaters to the Twin Cities, the Mississippi River has benefited from coordinated management plans and community efforts to protect its water quality and shoreland habitat--except for 26-mile stretch in Central Minnesota. Starting in St. Cloud and stretching north through Stearns and Benton counties, this stretch is governed by 11 different jurisdictions (four cities, five townships and two counties). These communities presently have no uniform land use controls to protect the magnificent river they share. Significant population growth and development pressure and contributing upland pollution could significantly damage the health of the Mississippi River.

This project's goal was to restore and protect the natural resources of the Mississippi River and its tributaries, and reduce habitat fragmentation along its banks in central Minnesota. The project coordinated with local units of government to develop and implement specific river protection policies with limited success. Individual landowners were contacted to implement sound shoreland and upland management practices. Also, in conjunction with this project a portion of the Sauk watershed was selected as part of the USDA NRCS Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative to reduce pollution entering the river and reducing downstream impacts. Over 50,000 acres of conservation practices are planned or applied.

Local units of government were offered workshops and technical assistance to implement policies, such as adopting a Natural Resource Overlay District along the river. The City of Sartell was key receiver of this assistance. Also, a major Take a Day OFF (Outdoor Family Fun) event was held to increase the public's awareness of this wonderful natural resource in their backyard. Over 1000 people attend this event annually.

The public policies and landowner practices implemented has resulted in a healthier Mississippi River today and for decades to come.

## **III. PROGRESS SUMMARY**

### **Project Status as of ~~January 31~~, February 29, 2012:**

The Mississippi River Renaissance (MRR) project continues to work towards public policies and landowner stewardship to maintain and improve the health of the Mississippi River in Central MN. For the past six months MRR has been working to build relationships with local government entities to strengthen existing or adopt new policies to increase protection of the River. While MRR plays a strong role in Mississippi Partners, a standing committee under the St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Board, other relationships have not flourished as hoped. Several factors contribute to the relative lack of success in this part of our project:

- Due to the state shut-down leading to delays in work plan approval/ funding from ENRTF, resulted in a break in project momentum, during important summer months which hindered relationship-building,
- This delay shortened the timeframe for planning and promoting an important late summer stormwater workshop,
- Local elections that occurred between submission of the ENRTF application and approval dramatically changed the leadership in many local communities. The new leadership is decidedly less receptive to the idea of protecting the river through improved policies.

In light of these challenges, effort was instead focused on the second part of this project plan, which is developing a landowner registry in order to improve shoreland management practices on private property along the river. Due to Federal Farm Bill programming deadlines, focus was on agricultural land owners and producers during this period.

**PROJECT TITLE:** *Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning*

**Project Status as of July 15-31, 2012:**

In light of the challenges that occurred during the first period of the project, MRR continues to strive to meet the goals as identified within the work plan. Majority of MRR work during this period focused on working with communities on long term protection strategies, utilizing current planning documents, community comprehensive plans and County water plans as a means to work towards water quality improvements of the Mississippi River.

MRR is an active and vigilant member of Mississippi Partners (Active committee under the St. Cloud Area Joint Planning District Board), whose role is to advocate for implementation of the St. Cloud Urban Area Corridor Mississippi River Plan. MRR has the ability to influence and lead discussions and priorities and is active in several working subcommittees. As projects move towards implementation MRR has taken a very proactive role on assuring that implementation projects adhere to the plans Ecosystem Protection and Restoration overarching goals and objectives and that the natural environment is not adversely impacted.

MRR has helped bring awareness to community leaders in Sartell of the lack of shoreland protections within their community and the communities desires as identified in their Comprehensive Plan for these very protections. MRR has worked to bring information to both the City of Sartell staff, Council and Planning Commission as they begin to look for opportunities to improve their public water protections.

After staff changes in Benton County, MRR continues to meet and advocate for water quality improvements and has looked to the County Water Plan and the Water Resource Advisory Committee as an opportunity to expand the land-owner registry and move forward with the goals as identified in the plan.

Successes have occurred with several agricultural producers within the MRR corridor and contributing areas. As a direct result of the work of MRR, three landowners have applied and been accepted to the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program. A program designed to reward agricultural producers for implementing conservation practices that go above and beyond their standard practices.

**Project Status as of January 30, 2013:** (250 words or less)

MRR continues to be an active and vigilant member of Mississippi Partners. Mississippi Partners has been extremely successful via partnerships with the Initiative Foundation and Central MN Community Foundation to kick start a Mississippi Partners branding campaign which includes civic group presentations, an on-water workshop, Mississippi River website development, and "I'm a Mississippi Partner..." ad campaign. In addition, as projects move towards implementation MRR has taken a very strong and vocal role on assuring that implementation projects adhere to the St. Cloud Urban Area Mississippi River Corridor Plans overarching goals of ecosystem protection and restoration so that the river is not adversely impacted.

MRR continues to be actively involved in the development of shoreland standards within the City of Sartell. Under the support of ENRTF MRR was able to hire a land use consultant to kick start a four month process which resulted in an initial draft of a standalone shoreland management ordinance for the City of Sartell. MRR is currently working with policy leaders to assure this initial draft meets their community's needs and desires as they move forward with consideration of adoption.

MRR continues to build relationships with the new Benton County Development Director. The direction at this time is to not move forward with new policies but work with local landowners on education and site specific best management practices, this is also direction of the leadership of the Benton County Water Resource Advisory Committee and the goals, and priorities as identified in this work plan. MRR

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in partnership with the Benton SWCD and Benton County Department of Development are working on expanding the land-owner registry for spring of 2013.

**FINAL Project Status as of December 1, 2013 - FINAL:** (250 words or less)

**Amendment request (12/01/2013)**

Transfer of \$2788.10 from Activity 2 (increase the implementation of river conservation) personnel to Activity 1 (adopt local and/or regional policies) personnel. There was additional staff time required for Activity 1.

Significant progress was making landowner contacts with the landowners in the Mississippi River buffer area and contributing watersheds. Another supporting conservation project to improve the water quality entering the Mississippi River project area was the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI). MRBI aims to improve water quality, and restore wetland and wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity in the Mississippi River Basin. MRBI projects employ activities that avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrient runoff from agricultural lands. MRBI is essentially a "suite of conservation practices" that are supported via farm bill conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The Sauk River and its contributing watershed enter the Mississippi River project area and is a major contributor of nutrients and bacteria into the Mississippi River. The City of St. Clouds public water supply intake is located downstream of where the Sauk River enters the Mississippi River. The Sauk-MRBI watershed resulted in additional conservation being implemented on over 50,000 acres, reducing the load of nutrients and bacteria entering the Mississippi River.

Take a Day OFF (Outdoor Family Fun) event was held on Saturday, August 10, 2013 with over 1000 people in attendance. This event required many staff and volunteers to make successful. The article below from WJON sums up the activity (<http://wjon.com/county-parks-showcase-what-they-offer-with-take-a-day-off-event-video/>)

RICE (By [Alex Svejovsky](#) August 10, 2013 6:05 PM ) — For five consecutive years one of the premiere outdoor events is coming to central Minnesota.

**Take a Day Off**, held at Mississippi River Park, allows people in the Benton and Stearns County area see what the local parks have to offer.

Kimberly Thielen-Cremers is the Central Minnesota Mississippi River Renaissance Coordinator. She says this event helps people get hands-on outdoor experience.

"Our goal is to offer families, youth, an opportunity to come on out and experience a lot of great outdoor recreational activities."

Many events like: canoeing, fishing, nature hikes, river tours and archery gives people a chance to see what their county parks can offer.

They also had a historical site tour, native prairie tours and special canoe trips down the Mississippi River.

However, there was another special event held today, The Minnesota State Water Trails celebrated its 50th Anniversary.

Mark Hauck is the Community Assistance Specialist for the Minnesota DNR. He tells us how the program got started, "It started in 1963, and was a vision of a few people, that really convinced the Governor at that time, to designate some of the routes for canoeing, kayaking and recreation."

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Take a Day Off focuses on the fact that people don't have to travel miles to find a good park. People just need to see what is in their own back yard.

"There are so many people that don't realize the wonderful county parks that we have here locally," says Thielen-Cremers. "You don't need to drive 50 miles to go to a park system, we have them right here in Stearns and Benton County."

Unfortunately, the Take a Day OFF event was Kimberly Thielen Cremers last day as MRR coordinator, because she started a new job with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. The timing of her departure forced us to terminate the Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning project early. With the small remaining balance for personnel a new MRR Coordinator could not be pursued.

The positive impact from this project can be seen in many forms, resulting in increased awareness of this special section of the Mississippi River. I

- St. Cloud Convention Center has been renamed the "Rivers Edge Convention Center".
- Mississippi Partners received one of three "Rock On" Awards at this years' St. Cloud Granite City Day's. The award recognizes St. Cloud individuals, organizations and businesses who have demonstrated outstanding civic participation, leadership or achievements. Kimberly was the vice-chair of Mississippi Partners and the chair of the Ecosystem Subcommittee. She was present to accept the award.
- The Mississippi River was the cover page of the 2013 St. Cloud Visitor Guide (<http://issuu.com/stcloud/docs/stcloud2013/1> )
- Landowners implemented numerous conservation projects

All of these activities will help us gain additional political support to create new and unique special protections for this section of the Mississippi River in the future.

**IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:**

**ACTIVITY 1:** Adopt local and/or regional policies that increase river protection and restoration

**Description:** A Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District will be developed by and for local units of government and citizens. Technical assistance will be given to communities to fully implement river protection vision and goals found in their comprehensive or county water plans, through education, prioritization and adoption.

**Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:**

**ENRTF Budget: \$ 88,600.00  
\$91,388.81**

**Amount Spent: \$ 50,242.31**

**Balance: \$41,146.50**

**Activity Completion Date: Project terminated December 2013**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>
<b>1.</b> <i>In preparation for adoption of Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District, deliver three (3) workshops to local units of government each year (six total over length of project), delivered</i>	June 30, 2012	\$8,650.00 (MRR \$6,750 & \$1,900	\$50,242.31

**PROJECT TITLE: Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning**

by subject experts which may include the following topics: Overlay districts, shoreland ordinances, incentives, low impact development standards, conservation design standards, long term land stewardship, economics of open space preservation, etc.		Tech experts)	
2. In preparation for adoption of Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District, deliver three (3) workshops to local units of government each year, delivered by subject experts which may include the following topics: Overlay districts, shoreland ordinances, incentives, low impact development standards, conservation design standards, long term land stewardship, economics of open space preservation, etc.	June 30, 2013	\$8,450.00 (MRR \$6,750 & \$1,700 Tech experts)	
3. Work individually with each community to identify a commonality across jurisdictions. Develop outreach materials and post resource materials on project web site. (Year one funds)	2011-2013	\$15,750.00 (MRR)	
4. Through adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding between land use authorities, or by coordination through the St. Cloud Area Joint Planning Board, or by other means, adopt a Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District.	June 30, 2013	\$55,750.00 (\$15,750 MRR, \$40,000 Consultant)	

**Activity Status as of ~~January 31~~, February 29, 2012:**

To help local governments envision and move towards better river protection policies, and to transition from the project goals previously funded by the McKnight Foundation, MRR designed and offered a workshop to increase local leader knowledge of urban stormwater runoff impacts, management and best management practices. Urban stormwater management was identified, at previous MRR strategic planning meetings, as a focus area for local communities. Past MRR workshops had been very successful with great response and attendance.

MRR planned and promoted a Stormwater Practices for clean water workshop for September 22, 2011, for local elected and appointed officials and community leaders. The workshop featured unique site visits to four innovative community stormwater sites but due to surprisingly few registrations, the workshop needed to be canceled.

Although it is hard to completely understand the reason for the decrease in number of registrations a few factors that could have contributed to this decline are the following: Limited MRR activity occurred between Dec 2010 and August 2011, due to a nine month gaps in funding between the McKnight Foundation and ENRTF work plan approval. Secondly, due to delays in the Legislative session to approve ENRTF projects work was not started until after the official work plan was approved on August 11, 2011, which offered the project a very compressed timeline on which to get invites out to local leaders prior to the change in summer vegetation, In addition, new leaders with minimal exposure to the MRR work were elected into office.

In order to continue to build relationships with local governments to encourage river protection policies, MRR continues to be an active member in the Benton County Water Resource Advisory Committee, the St. Cloud Urban Area Mississippi Partners Committee, and other community initiatives that relate to the Mississippi River. The Benton County Water Resource Advisory Committee recently approved a landowner registry incentive program to be coordinated with MRR and County staff. MRR continues to be a very active member in the St. Cloud Joint Planning Board's Mississippi Partners' Committee by being a participant on the committee and chairing the Ecosystem subcommittee. This Ecosystem subcommittee makes recommendations to the Board and local jurisdictions on protection, restoration and enhancement of the Mississippi River within the St. Cloud urban center. MRR continues to meeting with staff from MRR partnering agencies to move the goals of the work plan forward.

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To increase MRR outreach, news articles have been submitted to all Township governments within the Mississippi River Corridor for consideration in their annual mailings to residents. A Mississippi River Renaissance brochure has been developed to encourage landowner partnerships with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts for natural resource best management practices and has been included in a mailing to over 150 agricultural producers within the targeted area.

**Activity Status as of July 15 31, 2012:**

MRR focused a great deal effort during this period on building relationships with local governments.

As MRR continues to strive to meet the goals and objectives of the project proposal, new challenges were confronted in December of 2011 when the strong partnership between Benton County Department Development staff came to a standstill with the departure of their long term Development Director, Chelle Benson. That position remained vacant for five months while the county conducted an extensive search to fill the position. In late May a new Director was hired. New discussions have begun with the new Director with the hopes of continuing the progress that has occurred leading up to Dec. 2011. There is interest in moving forward with the original goals established within the grant.

As old partners stand still new partnerships are forming. Through the work of MRR City of Sartell community leaders realized that their community lacked a shoreland ordinance and they were concerned that some of their valued resources may be at risk. Over the past several months many discussion have occurred between MRR, the Mayor, several City Council Member and a cautious city staff.

Through City Council and Mayor inquires and request, the staff have begun work on a potential shoreland overlay district and/or modification to existing ordinances, particularly their Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) Ordinance to increase the protections they have surrounding their public waters.

Although it is in state statute for all communities across MN to adopt minimal state shoreland standards many communities have yet to adopt, including the city of Sartell. The statutory procedure for community adoption of the state minimum shoreland standards must occur after communities receive notice from the Commissioner of the MN DNR to do so, however due to the City of Sartell's size at the time of the 1989 ruling and funding, staff shortages and reasons beyond understanding, since that time the city of Sartell and many other communities of similar size never received notice to adopt, thus the city of Sartell staff do not feel they are required to meet these state standards.

MRR has been instrumental in offering information to City leaders to assure that they are able to move forward with informed decisions as they relate to shoreland. In June of 2012, a planning consultant was hired through ENRTF to conduct a thorough review of the City of Sartell's current ordinances and the protections they offer shoreland areas, as well as comparing their current ordinances to MN DNR rules and the newly updated proposed DNR rules. In addition, the report would offer recommendations for increased protections, were necessary. A joint workshop between MRR, the City of Sartell, staff, Council, and Planning Commission was scheduled for early July to go over the results.

MRR continues to a very strong and active Mississippi Partners Committee member, by taking an active role in both the Marketing/Branding and Ecosystem subcommittee. These subcommittees were formed to assist in implementation of the St. Cloud Urban Area Mississippi River Corridor plan. The Marketing/Branding subcommittee was instrumental in securing a grant of \$7,500 from the Initiative Foundation/Central MN Community Foundation to implement a branding and marketing campaign for "Mississippi Partners". This committee is working with a local marketing firm, Thelen Advertising to implement the campaign and raise additional local match dollars to increase the awareness of the Mississippi River and the ideas within the locally adopted plan. We have been successful at securing media in-kind sponsors from St. Cloud Times, Townsquare Media, Lamar Outdoor and Continental

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Press in the amount of \$18,182. Currently we have secured, St. Cloud State University, one of our four targeted community leader pacesetters with a cash contribution of \$5,000 to kick start the campaign in spring of 2013.

The Ecosystem protection and restoration subcommittee have worked to identify annual short and long term priorities. Special planning meeting were conducted with local community staff to showcase and offer assistance in moving forward these priorities. Additional work will be conducted in the coming months. Some items that are being worked on are a drawdown of the Mississippi pool between the Sartell and St. Cloud dam to increase near shore habitat, shoreland restoration projects within each of the three communities public parks, a regional expansion of the City of St. Cloud's stormdrain stenciling program, letters to all residents along the Mississippi River assuring knowledge and understanding of their communities shoreland regulations and encourage best management practices.

**Activity Status as of January 30, 2013:**

MRR again focused a great deal effort during this period on building relationships with local governments.

Old partnerships have been rekindled. After the departure of the long term Benton County Development Director, MRR continues to build relationships with the new Director and have discussed several options for new natural resource policies. However, the direction at this time, mainly due to the current economic situation, complicated with the status of the state shoreland standards at the state level, is to not move forward with new policies but work with local landowners on education and site specific best management practices.

Despite challenges, MRR continues to strive to meet the goals and objectives of the project proposal. In January 2012 the Sartell City Council identified the need to develop shoreland management standards as one of their top priorities in 2012. MRR, with ENRTF was able to kick start this process by securing a planning consultant to conduct a thorough review of the City of Sartell's current ordinances and the protections they offer shoreland areas, as well as comparing their current ordinances to MN DNR rules and the newly updated proposed DNR rules. In July, a joint workshop between MRR, the City of Sartell, staff, Council, and Planning Commission was conducted to go over the results. This workshop was the beginning of a four-month process that has resulted in an initial draft ordinance developed internally by the city of Sartell staff and presented to their Planning Commission and City Council at their November meetings. Despite any formal invitations or requests for additional assistance and/or input following the July workshops, MRR and MN DNR staff continued to be a strong advocate to the process by attending City council and/or Planning Commission meeting in which shoreland was to be discussed. During these meetings both council and commission members inquired with both MN DNR staff and MRR on questions surrounding the need and implantation of a shoreland management ordinance and the impacts it would have to their citizens.

In reviewing the current Sartell draft shoreland management ordinance both the MN DNR and MRR had significant concerns on the limited protections it offered to protect our public waters. The City Planning Director has stated in correspondence with MRR that the city does not have a desire to adopt the model ordinance (statewide minimal standards). MRR and MN DNR staff have put together documentation related to the concerns (see attached) of not meeting these standards. MRR has and is in the process of meeting with City Council Members on an individual basis to share these concerns and offer further information so that informed decisions can be made as they proceed with adoption of their cities Shoreland Management Ordinance.

MRR continues to be the voice for the river by publicly stating environmental concerns related to the controversial construction of a pedestrian trail along the banks of the Mississippi In downtown St.

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Cloud. To continue to educate communities on environmentally friendly approaches and options, in November 2012, MRR public testified against the City of St. Clouds request to their Board of Adjustments for the granting of two variances to their Shoreland Management Ordinances to construct a trail system along the extremely steep bank and within the waters of the Mississippi River. Although the variance was granted, MRR continues to advocate for a more environmentally friendly option.

MRR continues to be a very strong and active Mississippi Partners Committee member, by taking an active role in both the Marketing/Branding and Ecosystem subcommittee. These subcommittees were formed to assist in implementation of the St. Cloud Urban Area Mississippi River Corridor plan.

In September, Mississippi Partners under the leadership of MRR coordinated a on water workshop inviting key influential St. Cloud leaders to attend. The goal was to bring awareness of the goals and strategies identified within the urban area plan and to highlight the significance and value of the natural amenities of the Mississippi River within the urban core. A direct result of the workshop was the St. Cloud Conventions and Visitor's Bureau including the mention of the Mississippi River on over 20 pages within the Greater St. Cloud Area Visitor's Guide, including a front cover picture.

The Marketing/Branding subcommittee continues to work with Thelen Advertising to implement the "I'm a Mississippi Partner" campaign to increase the awareness of the Mississippi River and the ideas within the locally adopted urban plan. This campaign will include billboard, print media, and radio ads in the spring of 2013. In February of 2013, Mississippi Partners will launch a new website devoted to Mississippi River related issues within the St. Cloud Urban area ([www.MississippiPartners.org](http://www.MississippiPartners.org)). In addition, to bring more awareness and secure additional partners, MRR is coordinating a speaker's bureau to offer presentation about the Mississippi River and the Partnership to local service groups throughout the St. Cloud area.

In 2012 the Ecosystem protection and restoration subcommittee have worked to identify short and long term priorities. Special planning meeting were conducted with local community staff to showcase and offer assistance in moving forward these priorities. Additional work will be conducted in the coming months. Some items that are being worked on are a drawdown of the Mississippi pool between the Sartell and St. Cloud dam to increase near shore habitat, shoreland restoration projects within each of the three communities public parks, a regional expansion of the City of St. Cloud's storm drain stenciling program, and letters to all residents along the Mississippi River assuring knowledge and understanding of their communities shoreland regulations and encourage best management practices. It was through the work of Mississippi Partners (and MRR) that the Mississippi River was identified at one of the top 10 community priorities in 2012. Visit t [www.communitygiving.org](http://www.communitygiving.org) for more information.

**Final Report Summary, October 31, 2013:**

The project did not develop the Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District for this section of the Mississippi River, because the lack of political support. However, the foundation for a potential Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District in the future was greatly enhanced because of this projects efforts summarized above. Also the City of Sartell modified its shoreland ordinance to better protect our natural resources.

**ACTIVITY 2:** Increase the implementation of river conservation practices among shoreland property owners.

**Description:** The Mississippi River Renaissance Coordinator will work with landowners on an individual basis to identify their conservation needs, seek assistance on implementation of best management practices and discuss long term protection options. Riparian landowners will be prioritized

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utilizing the already completed natural resource inventory (NRI) to identify large parcels and high value natural resources areas.

**Summary Budget Information for Activity 2:**

**ENRTF Budget:** ~~\$86,400.00~~  
\$83,611.19

**Amount Spent:** \$57,920.50

**Balance:** \$25,406.49

**Activity Completion Date: project terminated December 2013.**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>
<b>1.</b> <i>Complete a Landowner Registry data base of landowners along the river corridor. Utilize the already complete Natural Resource Inventory along with parcel size to prioritize 100 Mississippi corridor properties with the highest natural resource value. The data gathered through personal conversations with river landowners would include: landowner name and contact information, past landowner activities that have supported river health, the landowner's immediate conservation goals and needs, barriers to implementing conservation measures and potential actions that they could take to protect or improve the health of the river.</i>	50 landowners, FY 2011-2012 (June 30,2012),  50 landowners FY 2012-2013 (June 30, 2013)	\$38,400  \$35,700	\$57,920.50
<b>2.</b> <i>Identify conservation implementation opportunities based upon the landowner registry and coordinate the delivery of technical and financial resources to implement the conservation measures. The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District and partners will leverage existing cost share opportunities provided by BWSR grants and USDA Farm Bill programs that could result in shoreland restoration, bio-retention practices, and prairie restoration. To implement identified conservation needs for which no programs presently exist, seek additional financial and / or technical support from other sources.</i>	Throughout project, 2011-2013. This is linked to Outcome #1	\$6,120	
<b>3.</b> <i>Communicate results of landowner registry to conservation organizations or groups that increase effectiveness of conservation efforts on the Mississippi and other lakes and rivers.</i>	Every six months; (Jan 15 & July 15, 2012; Jan 15 & Jun 30, 2013	\$6,210	

**Activity Status as of ~~January 31~~, February 29, 2012:**

In preparation for a landowner registry much of the first three months of the project were devoted to GIS data layer development and database considerations. Stearns SWCD staff worked with local partners; Benton County, Stearns County, MN DNR, Benton SWCD, USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency to secure licensing and database access to property holder and agricultural farm producer/owner information. Due to timelines associated with federal USDA Farm Bill Programs agricultural landowner/producers were targeted during this first phase.

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Agricultural producers with acres greater than 40 acres in size were targeted for a specialized mailing which highlighted the USDA NRCS Farm Bill Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and BSWR cost share opportunities. Over 150 letters were mailed and 120 personal follow-up contacts were made through phone messages/conversations. Majority of these contacts were with Stearns County producers. Four site visits were requested and conducted, one EQIP applications was submitted, and several CRP inquires were made.

In addition, to conservation programs offered through USDA several inquires and applications were made to the Stearns County Assessor's office related to the Managed Forest Land's Property Tax program. This tax program requires a registered DNR forest stewardship plan be developed for the property in question. Although the exact impact of these individual contacts to producers cannot be quantified completely at this time it is expected that continuous follow-up will occur and that several will consider implementing conservation practices on their lands in the upcoming years.

**Activity Status as of July 31, 2012:**

In response to MRR inquires with landowners in early 2012, several agricultural producers worked with SWCD and NRCS staff to submit EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) applications for assistance in conducting conservation improvements on their land. Of those submitted three producers received contracts, offering incentive payments for implementing conservation practices above and beyond their standard farm practices. These contracts will total over \$40,000 in payments each year for the next five years for these three producers. First payment to the producers will occur in the fall of 2012.

Five addition site visits were conducted with landowners along the Mississippi River that have erosion and resource concerns. MRR staff along with Benton and Stearns County SWCD staff were able to offer technical assistance and recommendation for site improvements. Additional site visits are schedule for August and September. In addition, DNR's model program "score your shore" will be conducted of all the properties within the St. Cloud Pool later this summer into early fall. This was targeted to be complete in June but high water levels made it not feasible.

MRR continues to be an important lead coordinator in the "Take a Day \*OFF (Outdoor Family Fun) on the Mississippi River". This event is a partnership between DNR, Stearns County Parks, Benton County, SCSU and many local sportsmen's and civic clubs. The fourth annual event is scheduled for Aug 11, 2012. Last year 1,300 participants took part in a day of outdoor learning and local awareness to the Mississippi River. The event takes place at Stearns County Mississippi Park located within the MRR target area. Many local landowners and community leaders take part in the day's activities. The goal is to increase awareness of the Mississippi River locally and increase their personal connections so that they in return become stewards of the River.

**Activity Status as of January 31, 2013:**

After targeting agricultural landowners in 2012, planning is underway to focus greater attention on urban and rural non-ag landowners in 2013. MRR in partnership with the Benton SWCD and Benton County Department of Development are working on prioritizing areas along the 27 mile stretch of the Mississippi to conduct an intense landowner outreach campaign in the spring of 2013. The goal will be to identify site specific best management practices that individual landowners can implement for overall Mississippi River health.

In fall of 2012, as a direct result of MRR's agricultural landowner inquires earlier that year, three landowners received CSP incentive payments in the amount of \$46,771 for implementing conservation practices on their farms. There were a handful of landowners that inquired about assistance through

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the SWCD office however; no formal EQIP contracts were approved. MRR will follow up with the 150 targeted ag landowners as time allows.

In the spring of 2012, Mississippi Partners ecosystem protection and restoration subcommittee, in which MRR chairs, identified the need to conduct a shoreland survey within the St Cloud urban Mississippi River Corridor. The goal of the survey was to identify and prioritize urban shorelines of natural resource concern. In Oct, using the MN DNR Score Your Shore model as a template MRR steer headed an effort collecting 1,300 on-water geo-referenced images. These images will be helpful in identifying areas in which to target best management practices and/or opportunities to educate landowners of shoreland rules.

Under the leadership of MRR and in partnership with the MN DNR, Stearns County Parks Department, Benton County and St. Cloud State University the fourth annual "Take a Day \*OFF (Outdoor Family Fun) on the Mississippi River" event was held on August 11. Over 1,300 participants took part in a day of outdoor learning and local awareness of the Mississippi River. The event included the organization of over 130 local volunteers and took place at Stearns County Mississippi Park located within the MRR target area. Many local landowners and community leaders took part in the day's activities. Due to the events overwhelming success at increasing awareness of the Mississippi River locally planning is underway to host the fifth annual event on Saturday, Aug 10, 2013.

**Final Report Summary, October 31, 2013:**

Good progress was made working with landowners in the Mississippi Buffer. The one-on-one site visits have the greatest impact of landowners implementing voluntary conservation projects on their property. A significant supporting project that was not identified earlier in the progress reports was the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative ([MRBI](#)). MRBI aims to improve water quality, and restore wetland and wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity in the Mississippi River Basin. MRBI projects employ activities that avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrient runoff from agricultural lands. MRBI is essentially a "suite of conservation practices" that are supported via farm bill conservation programs including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The Sauk River and its contributing watershed enter the Mississippi River project area and is a major contributor of nutrients and bacteria into the Mississippi River. The City of St. Clouds public water supply intake is located downstream of where the Sauk River enters the Mississippi River. The MRBI project resulted in additional 50,000 acres of conservation practices are planned or applied, reducing the load of nutrients and bacteria entering the Mississippi River..

**V. DISSEMINATION:**

**Description:** The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District website ([www.stearnscountyswcd.net](http://www.stearnscountyswcd.net)) will be utilized as a tool for data dissemination. Post-workshop materials, identified in Activity #1, will be posted to the website. In addition, quarterly project partner meetings will be convened to share information collected through the Landowner Registry and to coordinate the implementation of best management practices.

**Status as of ~~January 31~~, February 29, 2012:**

As of the date of this status report no workshops have been conducted. Two separate project partner meetings were conducted in fall of 2011. Monthly meetings have occurred with MRR steering committee members.

**Status as of July 15 31, 2012:**

As of June 30, no workshops have been conducted. One shoreland workshop was conducted in early July and will be reported on the next progress report. Stearns County SWCD website has been

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updated with “Take a Day OFF on the Mississippi River” event materials. Several meetings have been conducted between city and county planning and maintenance staff to identify common goals and options for public property improvements that have a direct connection to the Mississippi River. Monthly meetings have occurred with MRR steering committee members.

**Status as of January 31, 2013:**

Several meetings have been conducted between city and county planning and maintenance staff to identify common goals and options for public property improvements that have a direct connection to the Mississippi River. Monthly meetings have occurred with MRR steering committee members. Stearns County SWCD website has been updated with “Take a Day OFF on the Mississippi River” event materials. All participants at the July 18<sup>th</sup> Sartell joint planning meeting received written documentation of the results of the consultant review. In addition, participants of the Sept 12 on-water workshop were given a packet of information surrounding the subject matters discussed on the tour.

**Final Report Summary:**

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District website ([www.stearnscountyswcd.net](http://www.stearnscountyswcd.net)) is the tool for data dissemination.

**VI. PROJECT BUDGET SUMMARY:**

**A. ENRTF Budget:**

Budget Category	Proposed Amount (\$)	Actual Amount (Used) (\$)	Explanation
Personnel:	128,400	105,709.31	One .69 FTE over two years (70% salary, 30% benefits)
Professional/Technical Contracts:	40,000	0.00	Land use consultant/project manager to work with MRR communities to develop a Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District or similar.
Service Contracts	3,600	2453.50	Subject experts/consultants to offer 6 training sessions (3 per FY).
Travel Expenses in MN:	3,000	284.20	Mileage for conducting landowner site visits to develop landowner registry.
<b>TOTAL ENRTF BUDGET:</b>	<b>175,000</b>	<b>108,447.01</b>	

**Explanation of Use of Classified Staff:** N/A

**Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500:** N/A

**Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) funded with this ENRTF appropriation:** .69 FTE (2,854 hours over two years)

**B. Other “Cash” Funds:**

Source of Funds	Amount Proposed (\$)	Amount Spent/In-Kind (\$)	Use of Other Funds
Non-state			

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USDA Programs*	\$55,000.00	\$931,415.02	Implementation of conservation best management practices
Sauk Rapids Sportsmen's Club	\$2,000.00	\$3,500.00	Miss River Event-local landowners
Rice Sportsmen's Club	\$750.00	\$1750.00	Miss River Event-local landowners
Initiative Foundation	0.00	\$1,146.50	Prof. review City of Sartell regulation related to nat resource/shoreland mangt
City of St. Cloud	0.00	\$451.38	River tour, awareness campaign
Stearns County Parks	0.00	\$1,500.00	Miss River Event-Local Landowner
Miller Marine	0.00	\$100.00	Miss River Event-Local Landowner
St. Cloud Optimist Club	0.00	\$650.00	Miss River Event-Local Landowner
<b>TOTAL OTHER CASH FUNDS:</b>	<b>57,750.00</b>	<b>940,512.90</b>	

\*Details of USDA non-State cash match:

	<b>Total (\$)</b>
USDA Miss River Riparian	63,397.28
MRBI Contribution Agreement	122,109.06
MRBI 2010-2013	745,908.68
<b>Total</b>	<b>931,415.02</b>

<i>USDA Miss River Riparian Projects</i>					
<b>County</b>	<b>EQIP (\$)</b>	<b>CRP (\$)</b>	<b>WHIP (\$)</b>	<b>CSP (\$)</b>	<b>Total (\$)</b>
<b>Stearns</b>	17,915	27,220	0	0	45,135
<b>Benton</b>	6,801	8,074.28	3,387	0	18,262.28
		<b>Grand Total=</b>			<b>63,397.28</b>

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District in partners with USDA-Natural Resource Conservation District (NRCS) offer an array of USDA Farm Bill Programs to local landowners. There are several landowner incentive programs available to local landowners to implement conservation practices on their lands; Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP).

Currently, within Stearns County there are approximately 30,000 acres of CRP with an annual payment of ~\$75/acre. The CSP has an additional 36,000 acres enrolled with an annual payment of

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\$1.2 million dollars (2011 figures). In 2011, the SWCD plans to implement \$2.2 million dollars in EQIP contracts. All projects are implemented with motivated landowners.

**C. Other “Non-State Qualifying In-kind” Funds (see Appendix A for detailed explanation):**

<b>Source of Funds</b>	<b>Est. \$ value</b>	<b>Actual Hours (#)</b>	<b>Actual Amount</b>	<b>Use of Other Funds</b>
<b>Non-state staff</b>				
Benton County	\$17,750	0	0	Land-use authority, policy change
Stearns County	\$4,290	0	0	Land-use authority, policy change
Benton SWCD	\$12,000	65	2600	Implementation of conservation best management practices
Stearns Co. SWCD/NRCS	\$61,250	745.5	\$33,945.03	Implementation of conservation best management practices
Marian Bender, Private Consultant	\$5,600	0	0	Advisory assistance
<b>Non-state elected officials</b>	0	<b># of meetings attended</b>		<b>Use of Other Funds</b>
Benton County	\$1050	0	0	Decision maker meeting attendance
Benton SWCD	\$390	0	0	Decision maker meeting attendance
Stearns Co. SWCD	\$510	0	0	Decision maker meeting attendance
<b>City of Sartell</b>	<b>\$550</b>	<b>1</b>	0	Decision maker meeting attendance
<b>Non-state other</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Dollars used</b>		
Benton SWCD	\$14,690	0	0	Water Plan Levy dollars
Benton County	\$500	0	0	Notifications/publications
Benton County	\$3,520	0	0	Planning/Public meetings
<b>TOTAL OTHER “QUALIFYING IN-KIND” FUNDS:</b>	<b>\$121,550</b>		<b>\$36,545.03</b>	

**VII. PROJECT STRATEGY:**

This proposal is a component of a long term effort that began in 2004. The project to date has: gathered and distributed Natural Resource Inventory data; facilitated the use of NRI in conservation plans for Sartell and Sauk Rapids; educated local officials through multiple meetings and presentations in each of the 11 communities; hosted ‘on river’ community events including a BioBlitz, boat tours, and “Take a Day Off on the River”; led a visioning process; worked to gain unanimous acceptance of the vision; and will be authoring goals that support the vision. It is expected that continued restoration and

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protection of riparian lands in MRR stretch will be undertaken after this proposal concludes. Funding from foundations, individuals, and local government will be sought to support cost share and to provide funding for land acquisition easement acquisition, and other implementation activities. Local capacity will be identified to support land and easement acquisition activities.

**A. Project Partners:**

**Project Team**

Stearns County Soil & Water Cons. District (SWCD)  
 Dennis Fuchs, Administrator  
 Kimberly Thielen Cremers, Miss. River Renaissance Coord.  
 0.69 FTE ENRTF appropriations.

Manager of the funds  
 Salary to be paid with

Stearns County	In-kind Contributor
Brockway Township (Stearns County)	Potential in-kind Contributor
LeSauk Township (Stearns County)	Potential in-kind Contributor
Benton County	In-kind Contributor
*Langola Township	Implementation Assistance
*Watab Township	Implementation Assistance
*Sauk Rapids Township	Implementation Assistance
City of Rice	Potential in-kind Contributor
City of Sartell	Potential in-kind Contributor
City of Sauk Rapids	Potential in-kind Contributor
City of St. Cloud	Potential in-kind Contributor
Benton Soil & Water Cons. District	In-kind Contributor
Marian Bender-private consultant	Advisory & In-kind Contributor
MN Department of Natural Resources –Community Asst.	Advisory (state dollars)
Initiative Foundation – Don Hickman	Advisory

*\*Planning and zoning authority in Benton County, unlike Stearns County, resides at the county level, thus townships within Benton County will assist in implementation and as advisory to the county.*

**Partners**

U of MN Extensions (NEMO Program) – John Bilotta	Training partner to be paid for with ENRTF appropriation (Service Contract)
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**B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy:**

**C. Spending History:**

Funding Source	2004	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011
Mid-MN Mississippi River RC&D			\$1,000			\$5,000
Bush Foundation	\$10,000	\$10,000				
McKnight Foundation	\$45,000			\$65,000	\$65,000	
DNR Greenway Planning Grant	\$30,000					
Initiative Foundation				\$2,000	\$5,000	
Emerging Leaders Forum					\$1,800	
Sauk Rapids Sportsman's Club				\$1,500	\$1,500	\$2,000
Rice Sportsman's Club					\$500	

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Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District				\$10,600	\$42,613	
MN Waters (in-kind)					\$5,000	
CR Planning Inc. (in-kind)				\$4,000	\$4,000	
MN DNR staff assistance (in-kind)				\$50,240	\$27,996	

**VIII. ACQUISITION/RESTORATION LIST: N/A**

**IX. MAP(S):**

**X. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: N/A**

**XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:**

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted not later than ~~January 31, 2012~~, March 31, 2012, ~~July 15-31, 2012~~, and ~~January 30 31, 2013~~. A final report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 1, 2013 as requested by the LCCMR.

Attachment A: Budget Detail for M.L. 2011 (FY 2012-13) Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Projects										
<b>Project Title:</b> <i>Mississippi River Central Minnesota Conservation Planning</i>										
<b>Legal Citation:</b> <i>\$87,000 the first year and \$88,000 the second year are from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District to develop and adopt river protection strategies in cooperation with local jurisdictions in the communities of the 26 miles of the Mississippi River between Benton and Stearns Counties. This appropriation must be matched by \$175,000 of non-state cash or qualifying in-kind funds.</i>										
<b>Project Manager:</b> <i>Dennis Fuchs</i>										
<b>M.L. 2011 (FY 2012-13) ENRTF Appropriation:</b> <i>\$175,000</i>										
<b>Project Length and Completion Date:</b> <i>June 30, 2013; extension to June 2014,</i>										
<b>Date of Update/Final Report:</b> <i>December 1, 2013</i>										
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Activity 1 Budget	Revised Activity 1 Budget	Amount Spent	Balance	Activity 2 Budget	Revised Activity 2 Budget	Amount Spent	Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE
<b>BUDGET ITEM</b>	<i>Adopt local and/or regional policies that increase river protection and restoration</i>				<i>Increase the implementation of river conservation practices among shoreland property owners</i>					
<b>Personnel (Wages and Benefits)</b> Central MN Mississippi River Renaissance Coordinator at 69% time Inputs: salary =70%, benefits= 30 %, two year position, one person in this position.	45,000.00	47,788.81	47,788.81	0.00	83,400.00	80,611.19	57,920.50	22,690.69	128,400.00	22,690.69
<b>Professional/Technical Contracts:</b> TBD Land-use Consultatnt/Project Manager- To work with Mississippi River Renaissance communities to develop a Mississippi River Conservation Overlay District. This would be done collaboratively by and for communities along the Orphan Strech. Identify locally acceptable tool(s) for adoption and implementation.	40,000.00	40,000.00	0.00	40,000.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	40,000.00	40,000.00
<b>Service contracts:</b> Subject Expert/Consultatnts to assist in six training workshops (3 per/yr) to prepare communities for adoption of a Mississippi River Conservation Overlay Distirt, conduct training that may include:overlya districts, shoreland ordinances, incentives, low impact development standards, conseration design standards, long term land stewardship, economics of open space preservation, etc.	3,600.00	3,600.00	2,453.50	1,146.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,600.00	1,146.50
<b>Travel expenses in Minnesota:</b> Mileage: 30 mi x \$0.50 (federal rate at time of travel) x 2 visits x 100 landowner visits	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	284.20	2,715.80	3,000.00	2,715.80
<b>COLUMN TOTAL</b>	<b>88,600.00</b>	<b>91,388.81</b>	<b>50,242.31</b>	<b>41,146.50</b>	<b>86,400.00</b>	<b>83,611.19</b>	<b>58,204.70</b>	<b>25,406.49</b>	<b>175,000.00</b>	<b>66,552.99</b>