

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2011-2012 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Subd: 03r

Project Title: Saint Croix Basin Conservation Planning and Protection

Category: C3+4. Technical Assistance and Community-Based Planning

Total Project Budget: \$ 200,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 yrs, July 2011 - June 2014

Other Non-State Funds (secured): \$ 0

Summary:

This project links local, state, and federal governmental units, citizen-led non-profits, and design & technical expertise in an effective, well-coordinated partnership to set priorities, implement targeted on-the-ground projects, protect wildlife habitat, and promote land and water stewardship to enhance and protect the very special place the Saint Croix River Basin is to live, recreate, and work.

Name: Deb Ryun

Sponsoring Organization: St. Croix River Association

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Location:

Region: NE, Metro

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

County Name: Aitkin, Anoka, Carlton, Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Pine, Washington

City / Township:

**2011-2012 MAIN PROPOSAL
November 2010 Revised Proposal**

PROJECT TITLE: St. Croix Basin Protection: Coordinated, Innovative, Targeted

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Problem: Portions of the St. Croix River Basin are now on the impaired waters list; rare landscapes, plant and animal communities are threatened by development pressures. Multi-jurisdictional conservation efforts are complex, lack focus and coordination in the St. Croix Basin. If current Basin trends continue, the quality of our own wild and scenic St. Croix River will continue to decline.

Need: A means to stream-line and focus conservation efforts on areas with the most critical need in the Basin is vital for governmental units and citizens to change this course. This includes addressing existing problem areas, preventing new ones, and creating a culture of stewardship in the entire Basin.

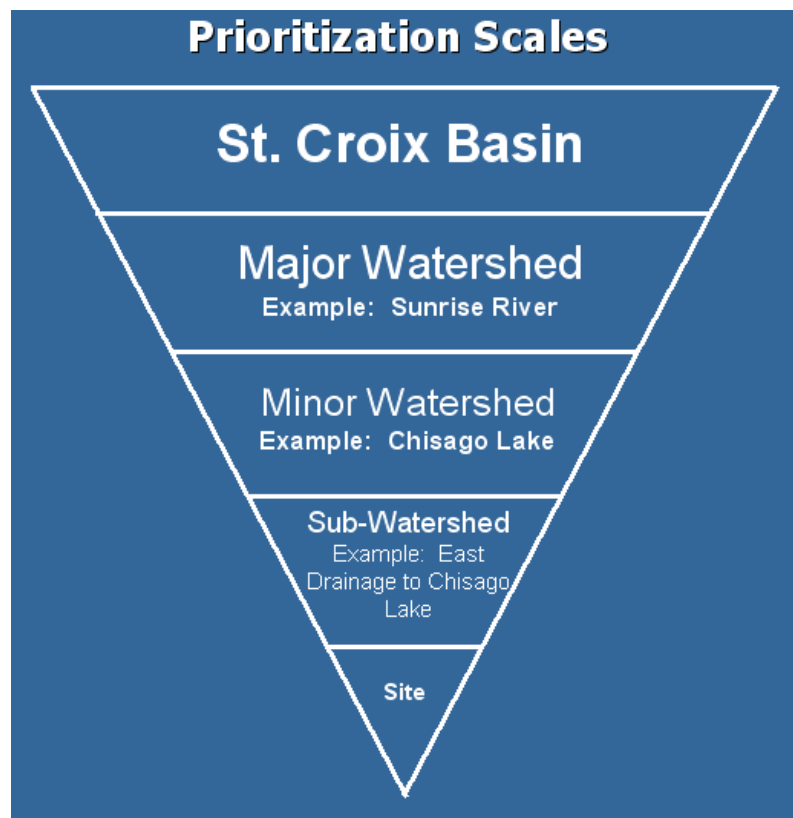
Short Project Description: This project links local, state, and federal governmental units, citizen-led non-profits, and design & technical expertise in an effective, well-coordinated partnership to set priorities, implement targeted on-the-ground projects, protect wildlife habitat, and promote land and water stewardship to enhance and protect the very special place the Saint Croix River Basin is to live, recreate, and work.

Outcomes Activity 1:

- **Master list** of basin conservation strategies that reflects an effective and practical approach to protecting the St. Croix
- **A team committed to implementation** of conservation priorities
- **Prioritization criteria** to guide Activity 2
- **Task and assignments** for efficient and coordinated implementation by all players

Outcomes Activity 2:

- A basin to site **Prioritization Protocol** identifying the best returns for investment
- **8 to 10 Priority Minor Watershed Conservation Areas** identified
- **3 to 5 Subwatershed Assessments** that identify the most cost-effective projects with the highest conservation value
- **30 to 50 Priority Actions**
- Installation of **10 practices on the ground** using matching funds



II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Craft a collective, far-reaching conservation strategy for the Basin in the project area. Budget: ETF: \$30,000 Local Match: \$100,000

Much work has already been completed in the St. Croix Basin. The St. Croix River Association will collect and distill county water plans, Soil and Water Conservation District comprehensive plans, municipal capitol improvement plans, National Park Service plans, DNR regional plan, nonprofit priorities, and others. These players will form the St. Croix Action Team. From all of these plans, **one master list** of priorities will be created.

Building on what we know, the Team will identify big-picture strategies needed to prevent and mitigate changes that are likely to degrade land and water resources. Based on these strategies, the Team will develop prioritization matrix to be used in Activity 2 to identify priority actions. The prioritization matrix will develop criteria for multiple landscape types (rural, urban, developing land, forested, agriculture) based on factors such as:

- Environmental Quality: Habitat, Species Diversity, Water Quality
- Economic Impacts: Scenic Value, Tourism/Recreation, Development, Transportation
- Recreational Opportunities
- Implementation Funding from Existing Funding
- Local Support

These criteria will be used to assign task and roles to Team members.

Lead Organization: St. Croix River Association (SCRA)

Partners: Center for Changing Landscapes, Conservation St. Croix (CSC – Nine SWCDs in the Basin), DNR, St. Croix Basin Team, St. Croix Collaborative

Outcome	Completion
1. Master list of basin conservation strategies that reflects an effective and practical approach to protecting the St. Croix	January 2012
2. A team committed to implementation of conservation priorities	January 2012
3. Prioritization criteria based on existing plans and team input	July 2012
4. Task and role assignments for efficient and coordinated implementation by all players	September 2012

Activity 2: Develop a basin to site prioritization protocol, identify priority conservation areas and the priority actions needed, and implement targeted projects to protect and maintain healthy landscapes and watersheds in the Basin. Budget: ETF: \$170,000 Local Match: \$100,000

This comprehensive, ecosystem approach will integrate water quality, recreation, wildlife, and economic interests and ultimately better leverage the current federal, state, and local resources available to support action on the ground. Furthermore, the multi-scale prioritization protocol will provide critical information for local implementers about where to target education, technical assistance, and incentive programs.

Prioritization Protocol will analyze the landscape at multiple scales: *basin, major watershed, minor watershed, subwatershed and site*. Integrated hydrologic and ecologic analysis will indicate where conservation actions will be targeted to have the greatest cumulative impact to protect, improve or restore systems, including: 1) land and habitat; 2) water quality and hydrology; and 3) recreation and scenic.

Ecologic Models and Water Quality Models: Models that can effectively and efficiently prioritize land to focus on-the-ground efforts and identify where more detailed evaluations are needed. A variety of models exist to assist with prioritization. This project will overlay and assess the results of water quality models, such as the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT), with ecological models such as the statewide Ecological Corridors.

Priority Minor Watershed Conservation Areas: Using the results of the prioritization protocol approximately 8 to 10 priority conservation areas will be identified. For each area the project will:

- Evaluate what *threats or stressors* are present,
- **Prioritize** where water quality, ecological quality and recreation *systems are most in need of protection or restoration*,
- Create a **list of actions** most likely have a positive influence on the target systems or negative impacts on a non-target system (i.e., a water quality practice may degrade a native plant population), and
- Evaluate the **most appropriate** implementation **funding sources**.

Subwatershed Assessments: Approximately 3 to 5 Subwatershed Assessments will be conducted in priority areas. These assessments will identify sites (within parcels) and the best management practices to implement at those sites to realize water quality, ecological health, economic benefits. The results will be shared with officials and the public as educational outreach. These assessments will include detailed natural resource and water quality modeling, a prioritized list of activities and cost-benefit analysis of priority conservation actions.

Priority Actions: The subwatershed assessments will guide the development of 30 to 50 **priority actions** that will function as a to-do list for project partners in the identified priority areas.

Implement Projects: Out of the 30-50 priority projects, 10 will be installed in partnership with landowners, federal agencies, and others using matching funds.

Lead Organization: Conservation St. Croix (CSC – Nine SWCDs in the Basin)

Partners: St. Croix River Association (SCRA), Center for Changing Landscapes, DNR, St. Croix Basin Team, St. Croix Collaborative

Outcome	Completion
1. A basin to site Prioritization Protocol identifying the best returns for investment	August 2012
2. 8 to 10 Priority Minor Watershed Conservation Areas identified	January 2013
3. 3 to 5 Subwatershed Assessments that identify the most cost-effective projects with the highest conservation value	June 2013
4. 30 to 50 Priority Actions	June 2013
5. Installation of 10 practices on the ground using matching funds	June 2014

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

- St. Croix River Association (SCRA) is the sponsoring organization, will manage the project, and lead Activity 1.
- U of MN Center for Changing Landscapes will create visual materials and designs at site and community scales, engaging citizens and establishing plans that will be implemented by local implementers and landowners.
- Conservation St. Croix (CSC), a partnership of the nine Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the St. Croix Basin, will receive funds to lead Activity 2, identify local priorities, implement subwatershed

assessments, and install projects on the ground.

- MN DNR will provide in-kind support from the Division of Ecological and Water Resources (EWR) and Region 3 GIS staff. The Region 3 planner and hydrologist will participate in activity 1. EWR will coordinate bringing staff experts (all DNR Divisions) and GIS data and analysis to activity 2, with a particular emphasis on the integration of habitat, wildlife and outdoor recreation. *
- BWSR will provide in-kind project participation. BWSR manages significant state funding for conservation and this project will help target those resources.

*In 2010 DNR Central Region Management Team selected the St Croix Basin as its priority landscape and is committed to participating in collaborative efforts in the basin. This project is also congruent with the new Division of Ecological and Water Resources (EWR) vision for healthy watersheds by leading and supporting efforts to improve water, biodiversity, and ecosystem services through integrated, collaborative and community-based approaches. The EWR and Regional Operations GIS staff will engage subject matter experts and provide ecological analysis to help the St. Croix Action Team identify priority areas and write action plans for healthy lands and habitats, water resources and watersheds, fish and wildlife populations and high-quality and diverse outdoor recreation opportunities.

B. Timeline Requirements

Three years from start of funding is requested to complete all deliverables.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

Once this project is completed, the collaborative approach will become the new “business as usual” for stakeholders, shape how they make their investments in the basin and establish priorities for funding requests from federal sources and others. Successful completion of the project will stimulate and inform similar efforts in Wisconsin. SCRA will continue to facilitate coordinated work across the basin and leverage additional funding.

2011-2014 Detailed Project Budget - revised November 2010

IV. TOTAL TRUST FUND REQUEST BUDGET 3 years

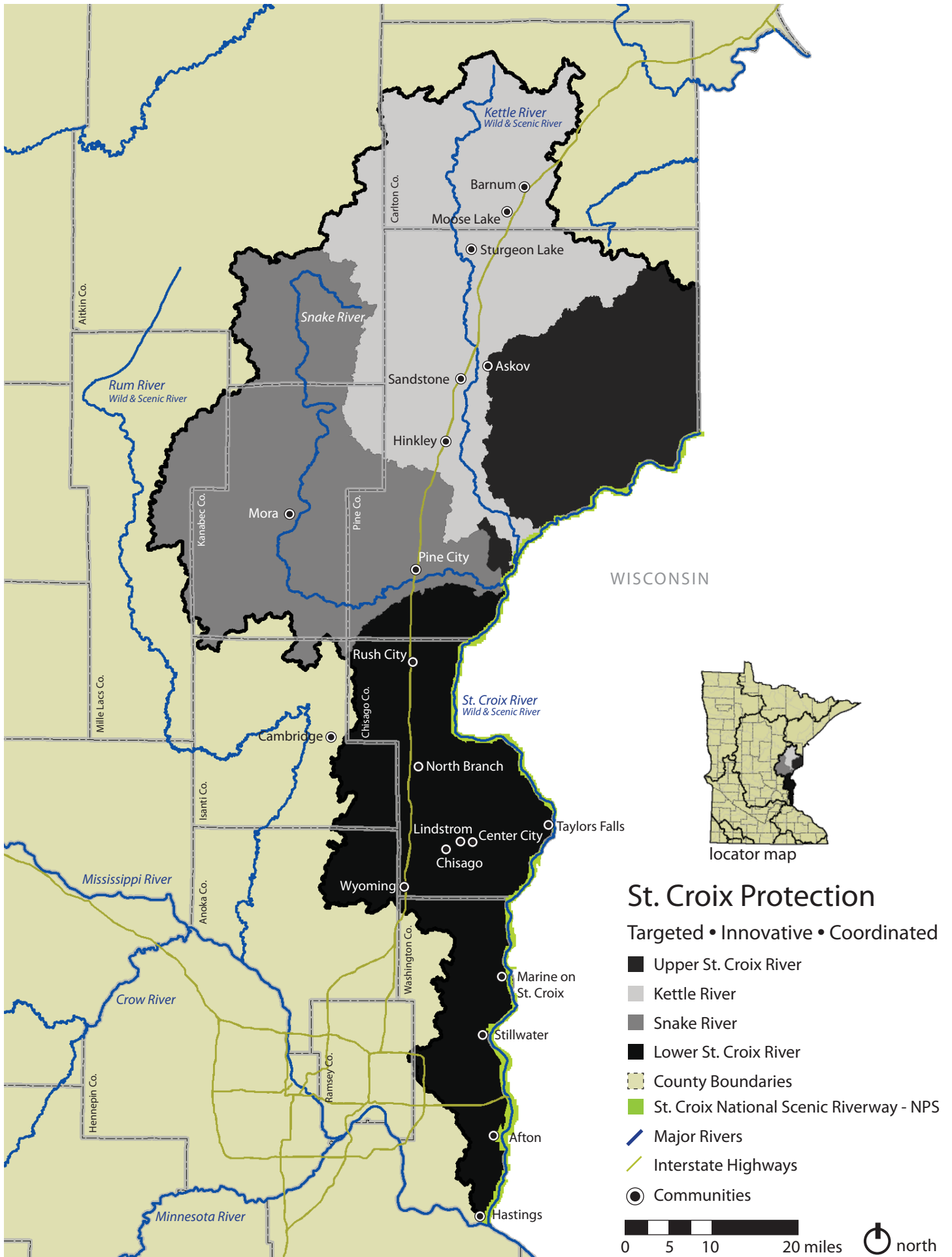
<u>BUDGET ITEM</u> (See list of Eligible & Non-Eligible Costs, p. 13)	<u>AMOUNT</u>
<p>Personnel: based on 75% Salary/25% benefits unless otherwise noted</p> <p><u>St. Croix River Association (SCRA):</u> 15% FTE for 2 years to manage the project, compile and distill existing studies and plans, convene stakeholders and facilitate developing a collective conservation vision and action strategies. (\$ 20,000)</p> <p><u>U of MN Center for Changing Landscapes (CCL):</u> Co-Director \$3,000 60 hours (94% salary/6% benefits); 2 Research Fellows \$6,000 285 hours (83% salary/17% benefits.) to identify the landscape and cultural changes that are anticipated in the Basin and help develop mitigation strategies (\$9,000.)</p> <p><u>Conservation St. Croix (CSC):</u> A new 1.0 FTE for 2 years to lead subwatershed assessments, provide technical support for identification of priority landscapes, coordinate local and Federal participation, and integrate with local implementation programs. (\$160,000.)</p>	\$ 189,000
<p>Contracts: <u>DNR Bureau of Management Information Services GIS</u> to integrate habitat analysis with water quality analysis to help identify priority conservation areas. (\$10,000)</p>	\$10,000
<p>Equipment/Tools/Supplies: Supplies and printing services for U of MN CCL</p>	\$1,000
<p>TOTAL ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST</p>	\$ 200,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
<p>Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: SCRA is seeking a combination of private donations and foundation grants to help fund the SCRA Watershed Coordinator position (85% FTE for 2 years.)</p>	\$ 100,000	<i>Pending</i>
<p>Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: MN DNR: 1.5 FTE for 2 years from DNR Division of Eco/Waters \$112,500; and .50 FTE for 2 years from Regional Operations GIS and Planner) \$75,000. DNR total in-kind (not including shared services): \$187,500. BWSR: 0.3 FTE staff participation in project \$35,000</p>	\$ 200,000	<i>Pending</i>
<p>In-kind Services During Project Period: <u>SCRA:</u> In-kind board and staff support for project management, project reporting, facilitation and coordination of activity 1 and participation in activity 2. \$25,000 <u>CSC:</u> In-kind staff time support for project status reports subwatershed assessments support, outreach, technical assistance, and project implementation provided by the nine SWCDs (and Federal partnerships) in the basin.</p>	\$100,000	<i>Pending</i>

Total Eligible Pending Cash and InKind Match \$ 200,000

Total Other Funds \$ 400,000



St. Croix Protection

Targeted • Innovative • Coordinated

- Upper St. Croix River
- Kettle River
- Snake River
- Lower St. Croix River
- - - County Boundaries
- St. Croix National Scenic Riverway - NPS
- Major Rivers
- Interstate Highways
- Communities



St. Croix Basin Protection: Coordinated, Innovative, Targeted

Project Manager Qualifications

Deb Ryun, Executive Director of the St. Croix River Association (SCRA), will act as project manager. In this role she will provide oversight of the project as a whole and manage the Conservation Coordinator who will be hired to staff the effort. Extensive past experience and her work to date at SCRA have provided Ryun with key skills needed for this project, including: management and coordination of multi-stakeholder initiatives; watershed-level planning; and implementation of on-the-ground projects to protect land and water. Prior to joining SCRA, Ryun served as Executive Director for Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI), a non-profit organization working to conserve and enhance soil and water resources on private working lands. While and CDI she was appointed by former Governor Tom Vilsack to serve as a member of numerous key committees and she recently served as co-chair of Iowa's Water, Land and Legacy committee. Ryun graduated from Coe College with a self-designed degree in environmental studies. Her previous job experience includes work as a naturalist for the Linn County Conservation Department and as communication and education coordinator for Trees Forever in Marion, Iowa.

This project also will benefit from the expertise of partnering staff:

- Marybeth Block, DNR St. Croix Basin Project Liaison, has experience managing LCCMR projects - most recently the MeCC DNR Metro Greenways Grant Program and in the past BWSR's Local Water Management Matching Challenge Grant Program. Block's experience working for local government and with private land owners to implement conservation practices will help her effectively orchestrate DNR resources to carry out this project.
- Jay Riggs, Manager of the Washington Conservation District (WCD), has extensive experience coordinating District activities with watersheds and local units of government and providing technical support for natural resource inventories, innovative stormwater management and implementation of conservation projects improvements. He is a Certified Professional in Storm Water Quality, member of the Minnesota State Stormwater Steering Committee and chair of the Minimal Impact Design Standards (MIDS) Workgroup.
- Mary Vogel is a designer with extensive experience in looking at the interface between environmental issues and recreational facilities/highway/community design. Her work has been recognized for its design excellence and has been implemented all across the state. She has led design teams that have received four honor awards and one award of excellence from the Minnesota Chapter of American Society of Landscape Architects.

Organization Description

The mission of the SCRA is to protect, restore and celebrate the St. Croix River and its watershed. Founded in 1911, SCRA began a significant transformation in 2008, moving from a volunteer organization to a more active leader with the appropriate vision, governance and resources. This transformation was stimulated by a widely-acknowledged need for an organization focused specifically on protecting and improving the St. Croix River and its basin.

SCRA works closely with the National Park Service, nonprofits and state and local governments. We also support and collaborate with existing partnerships, including the St. Croix Conservation Collaborative, a working group initiated by SCRA in 2005 to increase collaboration among groups working on land protection in the basin; and the St. Croix Basin Water Resources Planning team (Basin Team), which was formed in 1993 by the agencies overseeing the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and has led water quality research and established a basin-wide goal of reducing phosphorous pollution to the river by 20 percent. (SCRA is currently partnering with the Basin Team to administer \$500,000 in Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds for water quality testing and implementation work on the St. Croix.) These existing partners will be closely engaged in work on this project through SCRA's coordination.

SCRA is committed to applying the systems developed through this project over the long-term — and across the entire basin, including Wisconsin — and leading work to leverage funds from private, federal and other sources.