

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund 2009 Phase 2 Request for Proposals (RFP)

LCCMR ID: 030-A3

Project Title: Conserving Priority Land and Shorelands in Cass County

Total Project Budget: \$ \$511,500

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 years; July 1, 2009-June 30, 2012

Other Non-State Funds: \$ \$0.00

Priority: A3. Technical Assistance for Conserving Land

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Region:

County Name:

City / Township:

Central

Cass

Summary: Incentives and technical assistance for private landowners to permanently protect priority shorelands and vulnerable forest lands in Cass County with donated conservation easements.

Main Proposal: 0908-2-017-proposal-2009 Cass County LCCMR Main Proposal.doc

Project Budget: 0908-2-017-budget-2009 Cass County LCCMR Budget.xls

Qualifications: 0908-2-017-qualifications-2009 Cass County LCCMR Project Manager Qualificat

Map:

Letter of Resolution:

MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: Conserving Priority Lands and Shorelands in Cass County

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Cass County has over 500 high quality lakes, many deep water lakes; hundreds of miles of streams, including the headwaters of the Mississippi river; pristine and undisturbed forests (private, county, state, federal, and tribal owned and managed); hundreds of thousands of acres of original wetlands; abundant recreational opportunities including trails, hunting, and fishing; half of Minnesota's naturally reproducing Muskie lakes; and ranks high for rare plants and high priority wildlife species of greatest concern. These resources have high ecological value to Minnesotans for recreation and continuation of our state's legacy of pristine resources, and they are the cornerstone of Cass County's economic stability. With steady population growth in Cass County (28% between 1990 and 2000 and up to 50% additional growth projected by 2030) the future quality of these natural resources is threatened by shoreland development and forest fragmentation that can lead to increased nutrient loading impacting water quality, degradation of fish and wildlife habitat, and destruction of rare and endangered plants and species. Conservation of priority undeveloped shorelands and vulnerable forest lands will provide permanent protection for these highest and most sensitive natural resources in Cass County.

This project will provide financial incentives and technical assistance to private landowners who are willing to donate conservation easements on priority shorelands and/or sensitive forestlands for permanent protection against future development (Priority A3). Using permanent conservation easements is a long term strategy to protect recreational opportunities, water quality, and critical land and aquatic habitats that is consistent with the identification of ecologically sensitive lands and recommendations in the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan (pages 25-92).

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

Result 1: Protection of 3,000 land acres, including 12 miles of priority shorelands, through the donation of 30 conservation easements from private landowners.

Budget: \$511,500

A recent mapping project by the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation and Cass County Environmental Services identified that 38% of Cass County's shorelands are undeveloped and have high conservation potential. These shorelands plus sensitive shorelands identified by the Minnesota DNR's Pilot Sensitive Shoreland Project in Cass County will be targeted for donated conservation easements. Landowners will be educated about opportunities and benefits of easements with workshops and publications. Lake Association Land Conservation Committees, formed to identify conservation opportunities on their lake and work with local landowners, will receive training on "how to talk to landowners about conservation options" and trained on the application of the DNR's Sensitive Shoreland model to identify high priority shorelands. Conservation specialists will also be available to provide easement consultation to interested landowners.

Once the landowner is ready to donate an easement, financial incentives will be provided through payment of the closing costs associated with easements (appraisals, legal and financial advice, title work, professional review of easement documents, stewardship fees for the Minnesota Land Trust, and other unique closing costs that may arise). The easements will be held by a qualified entity, either governmental (Cass County) or nonprofit (Minnesota Land Trust or others) appropriate to the landowners conservation goals. Cass County Environmental Services Department has proven the cost effectiveness of this approach through a pilot project funded by the Board of Water and Soil Resources. With \$85,000 for incentives, private landowners donated conservation easements on 557 acres and 11,500 feet of shoreline worth \$5.7 million that averaged out to \$7.39 per foot of shoreline for permanent protection. This cost of permanent protect is much cheaper than acquisition or restoration of impaired water quality for permanent resource protection.

Deliverables	Completion Date
1. 30 conservation easements at \$15,000 @	June 30, 2012
2. Two workshops for lake association Land Conservation Committees	August 09 & May 2010
3. Two public informational meetings on conservation options for targeted and interested landowners	September 09; April 2010
3. Technical consultation for landowners	Ongoing
4. Conservation Easement Primer and Educational materials for landowners	January 2010

III. PROJECT STRATEGY AND TIMELINE

A. Project Partners

- **Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF):** LLAWF facilitates the formation of and supports lake association Land Conservation Committees, called Sustainability Committees, with training, educational materials on conservation options, and technical assistance in identifying high priority land parcels for conservation easements and other conservation options. LLAWF will be responsible for the delivery of two workshops for Lake Association Land Conservation Committees and two public information meetings on conservation options, plus the development of fact sheets and a primer on conservation options for landowners.
- **Minnesota Land Trust (MLT):** Qualified holder of conservation easements; they will provide easement consultation and technical review of easement documents.

B. Project Impact

The impact of this project will ultimately be protection of some of Minnesota's most pristine, and ecologically sensitive, natural resources located in Cass County and it will insure that while the County population continues to grow and prosper, a legacy of quality natural resources and ample recreational opportunities for many Minnesotans will be maintained for future generations to enjoy.

C. Time

Funding is requested for three years primarily because it takes considerable time to bring an easement from initial landowner interest to final completion.

D. Long-Term Strategy (if applicable)

Using permanent conservation easements is a long-term strategy for water quality and habitat protection identified in the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan. The easements placed through this project will serve as a model and incentive for additional landowners to follow with similar land protections. This projects also meets the objectives of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council's *Recommended Desired Outcomes, Goals and Strategies for the North Central Landscape Region Report*, January 27, 2004, that identifies fragmentation of landscapes from increasing development as a major resource concern in the North Central Region. The plan recommends the use of conservation easements to meet goals for minimizing the loss of forestland (riparian and non riparian) and protecting sensitive and/or undeveloped shorelines. The plan further promotes educating lakeshore owners and lake associations on the environmental benefits of natural shorelines and providing cost share programs to improve and protect shorelines.

Project Budget

Conserving Priority Lands and Shoreland in Cass County

IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET Three years July 09 to June 30, 2012

BUDGET ITEM (See list of Eligible & Non-Eligible Costs, p. 17)	AMOUNT	% FTE
Personnel: Cass County Environmental Services staff at 0.25FTE for 3 years to provide landowners consultation, technical assistance, and processing of	\$ 37,500	25%
	\$ -	%
	\$ -	%
Contracts: <i>With whom and for what? List out by item.</i>	\$ -	
Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation for delivery of training workshops, and public information meetings; publication of educational materials; and	\$14,000	
Minnesota Land Trust: easement technical consultation and assistance for private landowners, and technical review of easement documents.	\$ 10,000	
Equipment/Tools: <i>What? List general description of needs.</i>	\$ -	
Acquisition (Including Easements): <i>Closing costs for 30 donated conservation easements from private landowners on 3,000+ land acres,</i>	\$450,000	
Restoration: <i>List # of acres.</i>	\$ -	
Other: <i>List by item and explain.</i>	\$ -	
	\$ -	
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET REQUEST TO LCCMR	\$ 511,500	

V. OTHER FUNDS

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Remaining \$ From Previous Trust Fund Appropriation (if applicable): <i>How much Trust Fund money remains not spent or legally obligated from any previous Trust Fund appropriation for any directly related project of the proposing project, project manager, or project organization? Specify the appropriation.</i>	None	Unspent or Not Legally Obligated
Other Non-State \$ Being Leveraged During Project Period: <i>What additional non-state cash \$ will be spent on the project during the funding period? For each individual sum, list out the source of the funds, the amount, and indicate whether the funds are secured or pending approval.</i>	None	Secured or Pending
Other State \$ Being Spent During Project Period: <i>What additional state cash \$ (e.g. bonding, other grants) will be spent on the project during the funding period? For each individual sum, list out the source of the funds, the amount, and indicate whether the funds are secured or pending approval.</i>	None	Secured or Pending
In-kind Services During Project Period: Cass County Environmental Services Director project management and oversight, \$4,000; travel \$250;	\$ 4,250	
Past Spending: <i>List money spent or to be spent on this specific project, cash and/or in-kind, for 2-year timeframe prior to July 1, 2009</i>	None	

2009 CASS COUNTY LCCMR PROPOSAL

PROJECT MANAGER QUALIFICATIONS

John Sumption, Environmental Services Director, has worked for Cass County for 31 years. As Director, he coordinates the functions of the Environmental Services Department for Cass County and is directly responsible to the Board of Commissioners. John oversees delivery of service and regulation relating to planning, zoning, and land conservation. He supervises surface water quality programs, reviews development and stormwater management plans, and administers the Wetlands Conservation Act and the Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan. Position responsibilities also include supervision of staff and their related duties, budget development and monitoring, public information, ordinance revision and enforcement, liaison with state and federal agencies. John is a 1973 graduate of the University of Minnesota.

John was recently the local project manager for a 2006 3-County BWSR grant to secure donated conservation easements. With \$85,000 in incentives, private Cass County landowners donated conservation easements on 557 acres and 11,500 feet of shoreline worth \$5.7 million.