

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2010 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

LCCMR ID: 097-C

Project Title:

Conserving Sensitive and Priority Shorelands in Cass County

LCCMR 2010 Funding Priority:

C. Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Acquisition

Total Project Budget: \$ \$570,800

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 years, 2010 - 2013

Other Non-State Funds: \$ \$0

Summary:

Financial incentives and technical assistance for 12-14 riparian landowners willing to donate conservation easements to permanently protect 3-5 miles of sensitive or priority shorelands already identified in Cass County.

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Sponsoring Organization: Cass County Environmental Services Department

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Location:

Region: Central

County Name: Cass

City / Township: all in Cass County

_____ Knowledge Base	_____ Broad App.	_____ Innovation
_____ Leverage	_____ Outcomes	
_____ Partnerships	_____ Urgency	_____ TOTAL

MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: Conserving Sensitive and Priority Shorelands in Cass County

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Cass County has over 500 high quality lakes that are critical habitat for fish and wildlife and include half of Minnesota's naturally reproducing Muskie lakes. These resources have high ecological value to Minnesotans for recreation and continuation of our state's legacy of pristine resources. They are also the cornerstones 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 increasing shoreland development. In 2008, the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation and Cass County did GIS mapping of 55 of the highest quality lakes in Cass County. The project identified shoreland properties with "high conservation potential" and revealed that approximately 38% of the shorelands in Cass County are still privately owned, undeveloped or large parcels with minimal development. Some of these same parcels have been identified as sensitive shorelands (i.e. highly susceptible to degradation by development) through the LCCMR-funded Project: *Cass County/DNR Intra-Lake Zoning To Protect Sensitive Lakeshores*. This proposed project will target the landowners of the already identified sensitive, undeveloped shorelands as donors of conservation easements to permanently protect these highest and most sensitive lakeshores in Cass County. As a financial incentive, the closing costs for placing an easement on their property (\$15,000/easement) will be paid for 12-14 landowners willing to donate an easement. Acquisition money has been included to purchase easements (preferably at below market value) on several key parcels where donation of the easement is not feasible. The majority of the easements will be in Cass County, though sensitive shoreland parcels in other North Central Counties (Crow Wing, Aitkin, Hubbard, or Itasca) will be considered if the opportunity arises.

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). This strategy is also included in the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's *Recommended Desired Outcomes, Goals and Strategies for the North Central Landscape Region* Report, January 27, 2004 and in the Cass County Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan (Objective 1, Strategy #4).

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 the North Central region. This project will insure that while the population continues to grow and communities prosper, a legacy of quality natural resources and abundant recreational opportunities for many Minnesotans will be maintained for future generations to enjoy.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

Result 1: Permanent protection of 1,200-1,500 acres of riparian land, including 3-5 miles of sensitive and/or priority shorelands through the donation or acquisition of 12-14 conservation easements from riparian landowners. **Budget: \$570,800**

Available GIS maps of riparian parcels of "high conservation priority" in Cass County correlated with the sensitive shorelands identified by the DNR/Cass County Intra-Lake Zoning Project will be used to target critical parcels for conservation easements (see attached sample Ten Mile Lake

Completion Date

map). A land conservation specialist will contact the landowners of these parcels to inform and educate them about the benefits of conservation easements and work with interested landowners to explore their conservation options and encourage donation of permanent easements using payment of the closing costs as a financial incentive. These costs typically include, but are not limited to, appraisals, legal and financial advice, title work, and stewardship fees for the easement holder. The easements will be held by a qualified entity, either governmental (Cass County) or nonprofit (Minnesota Land Trust) appropriate to the landowner's conservation goals. Financial incentives for donated easements have proven to be very successful in securing permanent protection of priority shorelands. With an \$85,000 BWSR grant for easement closing costs, Cass County Environmental Services secured 5 donated easements on 557 acres and 11,500 feet of shoreline worth \$5.7 million; average cost was \$7.39 per foot of shoreline for permanent protection. Permanent protection through donated easements is more cost effective than acquisition of riparian lands or restoration of impaired water quality.

Deliverable

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1. 12-14 conservation easements protecting 1200-1500 acres of sensitive shoreland and/or priority shorelands. | June 30, 2013 |
| 2. Technical consultation with riparian landowners | Ongoing |
| 3. Educational materials assembled and distributed to targeted landowners | January 2011 |

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

- **Cass County Environmental Services:** Develops, coordinates, and maintains all environmental programs for Cass County; qualified and willing holder of easements.
- **Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF):** A 501(c) 3 nonprofit land trust experienced with land conservation transactions in the Leech Lake watershed (Cass County, eastern third of Hubbard County, and southern tip of Beltrami County). LLAWF works closely with lake associations to identify riparian properties with high conservation potential and educate landowners about conservation options and sustainable lake management. Under contract, LLAWF will provide the land conservation specialist and develop/distribute educational materials.
- **Minnesota Land Trust (MLT):** Is a qualified holder of conservation easements and has identified the North Central Region as a high priority for land conservation. Their staff will provide easement consultation and technical review of all easement documents.

B. Timeline Requirements

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

C. Long-Term Strategy

Sensitive shoreland parcels have been identified on only 17 lakes in Cass County through the Cass County/DNR Intra-Lake Zoning Project. The DNR is developing a GIS model to predict sensitive lakeshores based on the data collected in the Intra-lake Project. This model will be useful to identify sensitive shorelands on 38 additional priority lakes in Cass County that have already been mapped for parcels of "high conservation potential". Additional funding of the Intra-lake Project will benefit future plans to protect sensitive lakeshores.

Project Budget 2010-2013

Conserving Sensitive and Priority Shorelands in Cass County

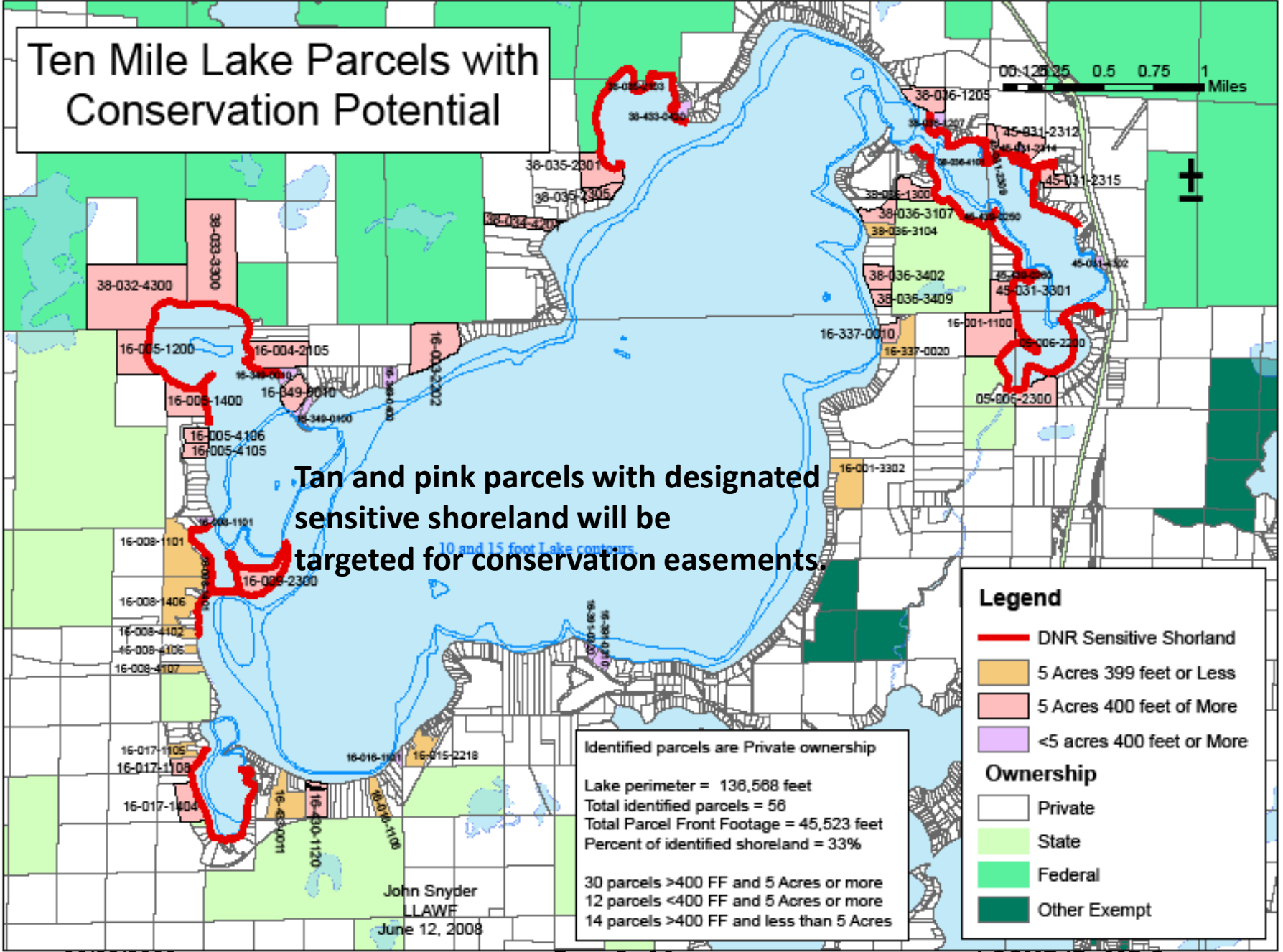
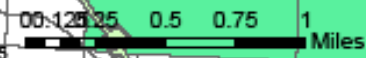
IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET 3 Years

Personnel: Cass County Environmental Services personnel to coordinate conservation easements held by Cass County; 0.10 FTE + 20% benefits.	\$ 14,500
Contracts: With whom and for what? List out by item	\$ -
Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation for a land conservation specialist (3 years; \$20,000 per year) to provide consultation and technical assistance to targeted and interested landowners; coordination with the holder of the conservation easement (e.g. Cass County or Minnesota Land Trust); coordination with Cass County for processing of financial incentive costs; development and distribution of education materials to targeted landowners; coordination of two public information meetings on conservation easements.	\$ 60,000
Minnesota Land Trust: Will be a qualified holder of easements; will provide easement consultation and technical review of all easements documents	\$15,000
Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements): Acquisition by donation or purchase for 12-14 permanent conservation easements on 1,200-1,500 acres of riparian land, including 3-5 miles of sensitive shorelands. Financial incentive of \$15,000 per donated easement for closing costs.	\$ 480,000
Travel: For contract land conservation specialist to meet with landowners and intended holder of the conservation easement	\$ 1,000
Additional Budget Items: Printing of educational materials on conservation easements for targeted landowners.	\$ 300
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET REQUEST TO LCCMR	\$ 570,800

V. OTHER FUNDS

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: Minimal estimate of the land value of the 12-14 donated conservation easements; value could be higher depending on the easements completed.	\$1,500,000	<i>Pending</i>
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:	unknown	
In-kind Services During Project Period: <i>Cass County Environmental Services Director for project management and oversight; \$4,000; travel \$250</i>	unknown	
Remaining \$ from Current Trust Fund Appropriation (if applicable):	None	
Funding History: Cass County/DNR IntraLake Zoning Project; LCCMR \$110,000 (2007; MN Laws 2007, Chapter 30, Section 2, Subd. 5h); \$125,000 (2008; MN Laws 2008, Chapter 367, Section 2, Subd. 4e). Total: \$235,000	\$235,000	

Ten Mile Lake Parcels with Conservation Potential



Tan and pink parcels with designated sensitive shoreland will be targeted for conservation easements.

Legend

- DNR Sensitive Shoreland
- 5 Acres 399 feet or Less
- 5 Acres 400 feet of More
- <5 acres 400 feet or More

Ownership

- Private
- State
- Federal
- Other Exempt

Identified parcels are Private ownership

Lake perimeter = 136,568 feet
 Total identified parcels = 56
 Total Parcel Front Footage = 45,523 feet
 Percent of identified shoreland = 33%

30 parcels >400 FF and 5 Acres or more
 12 parcels <400 FF and 5 Acres or more
 14 parcels >400 FF and less than 5 Acres

John Snyder
 LAWYER
 June 12, 2008

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.