

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

LCCMR ID: 081-C3+4

Project Title: MN Conservation Assistance Project

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

Total Project Budget: \$ \$1,500,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 2 yrs, July 2011 - June 2013

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 643,000

Summary:

A conservation partnership to employ 24 field technicians to secure enrollment and retention of 60,000ac. of critical grasslands, wetlands, and forest on private land in MN.

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Sponsoring Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

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Location

Region: Statewide

Ecological Section: Statewide

County Name: Statewide

City / Township:

<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/> Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Base
<input type="checkbox"/> Extent of Impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific/Tech Basis	<input type="checkbox"/> Urgency
<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Leverage	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment	<input type="checkbox"/> TOTAL <input type="checkbox"/> %

2011-2012 MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: MN Conservation Assistance Project

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The MN Conservation Assistance Project is an expansion and modification of the existing MN Farm Bill Assistance Project funded by LCCMR in fiscal years 2010 and 2011. This project builds upon the success of this original project is very timely given federal and state program opportunities that are available. The current \$1.0 million LCCMR project is funded until June 30, 2012 and provides funding for 16 full time equivalents (FTEs) while leveraging funding for an additional 6 FTEs. The 22 FTEs are spread across 32 full or part time field technicians (see attached map). It is our desire to maintain and create additional jobs to meet increased demand and new opportunities. We propose to expand this current effort with an additional 8 FTEs to include better coverage of MN within the agricultural region as well as the Northeast forested region. Conservation technicians will focus on grassland, wetland and forest resource management for water quality and wildlife habitat. We will provide assistance on 30,000 ac. per year and leverage over \$60 million in federal and state funding for project implementation.

Numerous programs exist, or are being developed, to implement conservation on private lands. However, with all of these programs, there are seldom funds available to promote programs with landowner's, educate them of the many choices they may have, and walk them through the process of enrollment. This project has been very successful at one on one landowner contacts that either retain or restore critical areas for water quality and wildlife habitat. Although we have over 1 year remaining on our existing LCCMR project, we see an emerging need to expand our efforts into areas of MN that we have not been able to focus on due to limited funding.

Acceleration of the existing Farm Bill Assistance Project through this expanded effort addresses the Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land and Habitat priority of the 2011-2012 RFP. Additionally, this project will work to address the concerns being identified within the BWSR Critical Lands Assessment project funded by LCCMR for fiscal years 2010-2011. Fundamentally, it will allow for knowledgeable technicians to contact landowners with expiring CRP contracts and work to insure that existing conservation practices remain or are replaced with another appropriate practice. We see a large opportunity to secure new buffer areas next to critical water bodies as well as forest management where habitat has become unsuitable for certain species.

Although BWSR will act as the manager of this project, it is a direct partnership of BWSR, DNR, Pheasants Forever (PF), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). Many other groups such as US Fish and Wildlife Service, Audubon Society, and local conservation groups also bring financial and program support to the project. There is no funding relationship of this project to any base agency base budget. All funding provided goes directly into staff positions at the local level to accelerate program delivery. This project has not been a part of any state agency base budget.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Assistance on 60,000ac. of critical private land projects Budget: \$ 1,500,000

Technicians provide the direct link between available conservation programs offered by state and federal agencies and the private landowner. This project will focus on enrollment, retention and management of 30,000 ac. of native grasslands, wetlands and forest lands each year of the two year project. The committee comprised of BWSR, DNR and Pheasants Forever, will utilize grant funding to cover 70% of the cost for two years of staffing with the remaining 30% provided as cash match at the local level. Applications for program funding are submitted to the committee for review and selection.

The BWSR Board provides final funding authorization and enters into reimbursement contracts with selected SWCD's. The BWSR also coordinates contracts, maintains data on program impacts and results for the committee.

Outcome	Completion Date
<i>1. Contracts with SWCD's for employment of 24 staff equivalents</i>	<i>July 1, 2011</i>
<i>2. 60,000ac. native grasslands, wetlands, and forestlands</i>	<i>June 30, 2013</i>
<i>3. BWSR publishes program impacts and results</i>	<i>August 31, 2013</i>
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III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

The oversight committee is a partnership made up of three organizations. The BWSR provides overall coordination of project and completion of contracts to SWCD's. The DNR farmland wildlife program assists in reviewing program applications and targeting to Working Lands Initiative priority areas and programs. Pheasants Forever coordinates with local PF chapters to provide financial match for positions. The committee serves as the decision making body and provides oversight and accountability for funding expended. Quarterly progress reports are submitted by each individual to document landowner contacts, time spent and acres enrolled. Progress is reviewed every 6 months by the full committee. Corrective actions are taken and project adjustments are made annually to target funding and staff at areas of greatest need and success. There are no grant funds used for committee activities.

B. Timeline Requirements

This project will run from July 1, 2011 until June 30, 2013. To fund 24 FTE's there is a cost of \$45,000/FTE or \$1,080,000 annually. Over two years there would be a total cost of \$2,160,000 of which local SWCD's would match on a 70:30 basis. This request is for \$1,512,000 from LCCMR with a local cash match of \$648,000. In addition to the cash match there is also in kind match of an estimated \$480,000 which is derived from rent, vehicle use, benefits and related overhead of housing an employee.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

The partnership has been successful in putting together 9 years of funding to keep this project going. Past sources of project funding will not be available beyond June 30, 2011. Local SWCD's may try to arrange for continued funding of these staff as grant funds expire. Future emphasis and success will depend upon our ability to leverage federal funding sources and programs. Minnesota has a strong conservation tradition of enhancing federal programs to achieve our states priorities for water quality and wildlife habitat.

2011-2012 Detailed Project Budget

IV. TOTAL TRUST FUND REQUEST BUDGET: Two Years

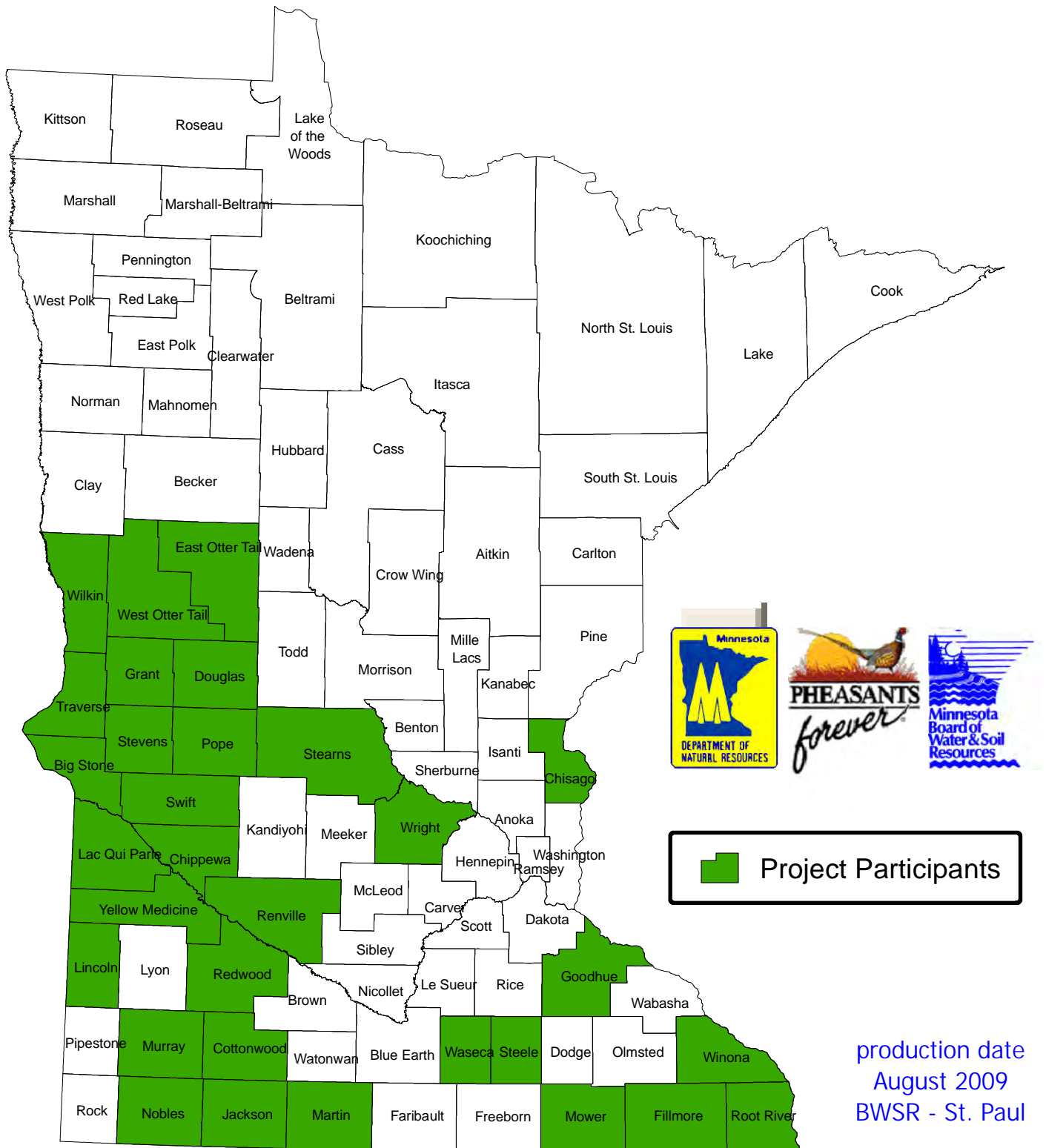
<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Contracts: Contracts with SWCD's to employ 24 FTE's over a 2 year period from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2013.	\$ 1,500,000
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST	\$ 1,500,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: SWCD local cash match in the amount of 30%.	\$ 643,000	Pending
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: NA		
In-kind Services During Project Period: Staff support consisting of transportation, office space, computer access, administrative support, postage, phone.	\$ 480,000	
Remaining \$ from Current ENRTF Appropriation (if applicable): ENRTF Appropriation #029-A3 MN Farm Bill Assistance Project. The second year funding of \$500,000 will be obligated in June 2010 for year 2 of that project.	\$ 500,000	Not legally obligated
Funding History: DNR Heritage Enhancement Account and Duck/Pheasant Stamp as well as BWSR Bonding for RIM easements, Federal reimbursements for services and clean water legacy technical assistance	\$ 2,095,650	

Farm Bill Assistance Positions

PHASE IX - July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010



FARM BILL STAFFING SUMMARY

21.74 FTEs in 36 SWCDs



Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description:

The MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) will serve as the lead state agency for this grant. The BWSR has the strongest connection with SWCD's and their implementation role of soil and water conservation practices in MN. The BWSR has historically provided similar grant and contract funds to SWCD's to implement this type of work. We intend to use that existing process to provide financial and administrative oversight.

The project manager for the grant will be Tabor Hoek, BWSR Private Lands Coordinator located in the Marshall BWSR office. Tabor has over 15 years experience in coordinating state conservation programs implemented by SWCD's. Tabor has been the lead agency contact for all past efforts of the Farm Bill Assistance Project that is the foundation for this grant request.