

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

LCCMR ID: 106-D-3d

Project Title: 3d - HCP 7 - Wetlands Reserve Program

Category: D. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

Total Project Budget: \$ \$1,330,000

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

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 7,500,000

Summary:

Ducks Unlimited will provide engineering assistance and contract with 10 wetland restoration specialists to provide technical assistance to help the USDA-NRCS promote, secure, and restore federal Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easements.

Name: Jon Schneider

Sponsoring Organization: Ducks Unlimited

Address: 311 E Lake Geneva Rd
Alexandria MN 56308

Telephone Number: 320-762-9916

Email: jschneider@ducks.org

Web Address: www.ducks.org

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: HCP7-3d Wetlands Reserve Program

I. PROJECT STATEMENT: Minnesota has lost over 90% of our prairie wetlands and 99% of our native prairie grasslands. Restoring and protecting restored native prairie and wetland complexes is a priority among conservation agencies and organizations in the state and is often recognized as a primary objective in strategic conservation plans. The federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a key part of this effort by restoring and protecting prairie wetland complexes on land that remains in private ownership and on which local, county and state taxes are paid.

To accelerate the WRP in Minnesota, Ducks Unlimited (DU) will provide technical assistance by contracting with 10 grant-funded wetland restoration specialists to help NRCS promote and secure new WRP easements and plan and implement restorations on WRP easements secured in previous years. In addition, DU will also provide staff engineering services to assist NRCS with survey, design, and construction management tasks on larger restorations that require complex water control structures. The objective of WRP is to restore and permanently protect wetland and associated upland habitats to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality. To meet this objective, NRCS purchases easements that gives NRCS the right to restore and protect wetland and associated upland habitats.

Securing a WRP easement with a willing seller typically takes a year or more from the time a landowner expresses interest, and the application and easement process involves many steps. Once an easement is closed, NRCS begins and funds the restoration of wetland and upland habitats within the easement, a process that takes 2-3 years to fully complete. Often, WRP easements are combined with RIM easements to leverage state and federal resources. All restoration details are documented in an NRCS restoration plan for each easement. This complicated federal WRP easement application and restoration process relies heavily on the assistance and expertise of DU specialists, which have been supported by Trust Fund grants.

The DU contracted wetland specialists funded through this grant will make it possible for USDA-NRCS to secure WRP easements on approximately **5,000 acres** in prairie areas of Minnesota at an estimated cost of **\$7.5 million** to NRCS. Once secured under a WRP easement, NRCS will restore wetlands and grasslands in future years. Restoring these wetlands and native prairie grasslands is critical to maintaining continued federal funding for the WRP in Minnesota into the future, and will significantly improve and expand existing blocks of habitat and help improve downstream water quality. Grant funds will be used by DU for 10 contracted wetland restoration specialists (\$1,230,000), for DU staff engineering services to USDA-NRCS (\$50,000), and for DU grant administration and partnership coordination that includes managing contractors and coordinating with USDA-NRCS field, area, and state office personnel (\$50,000).

NRCS alone does not have enough technical assistance to implement the WRP at the accelerated levels described in this proposal without the DU contracted technical assistance. NRCS estimates that the \$7.5 million of WRP expense will create or maintain over 75 jobs and stimulate increased economic activity estimated near \$10 million. This project directly addresses Item D "Land Acquisition for Habitat & Restoration" and Item C "Methods to Protect, Restore, Enhance Land and Habitat" in the 2011- 2012 LCCMR Request For Proposals. This work also directly addresses the "Statewide Conservation & Preservation Plan".

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES:

Activity 1: Technical Assistance to Help NRCS Secure WRP Easements **Budget:** \$1,330,000

Description: DU will use grant funds to contract with ten (10) wetland restoration specialists to provide technical assistance to the USDA-NRCS and private landowners to help protect 5,000 acres of private land through new Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easements. DU staff will also provide engineering services to assist NRCS with survey, design, and construction management on larger restorations that require complex water control structures. DU will administer this grant and coordinate WRP partnership activities. The USDA-NRCS will fund the associated easement and restoration costs. The contract specialists will implement all aspects of the WRP program that will result in lands being enrolled and wetlands and uplands restored under the WRP. This project will be delivered throughout the prairie portion of Minnesota.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Technical and engineering assistance provided by 10 contracted specialists and DU engineering to help USDA-NRCS secure WRP easements. Ongoing technical assistance will include landowner contacts, WRP applications submitted, easement restoration plans submitted, wetland restoration designs, and restoration project oversight/management.	June 30, 2013
2. Secure 5,000 acres of new WRP Easements by USDA-NRCS	June 30, 2013

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners: This project is part of the Habitat Conservation Partnership Phase 7 proposal. Jon Schneider from Ducks Unlimited and Tim Koehler from USDA NRCS will be the Co-Project Managers. WRP easements will be secured as stand alone and in conjunction with Reinvest In Minnesota Reserve program easements administered by The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and funded through State Capital Investment (Bonding) funding. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and other partners assist the implementation of the WRP.

B. Timeline Requirements: This is a two-year project. WRP funds are allocated annually to Minnesota NRCS. Application periods are conducted followed by ranking of applications and funding decisions. For each of the last five years, over \$50 million of applications have been received and it is anticipated that this trend will continue. During this two-year grant period, all easement processing will occur and restoration planning activities will begin.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs: The USDA's Wetland Reserve Program is the most effective wetland restoration program in Minnesota and restores more acres of wetlands and associated native prairie uplands than any other effort. Continued federal funding for new easements is contingent upon previously enrolled lands being restored in a timely manner. Thus, DU contracted wetland specialists are key to helping restore previously enrolled easements and to maintaining the federal funds for new WRP easements in Minnesota. The USDA-NRCS funds the restoration work, and subsequently routinely monitors and enforces the terms of its easements and works with landowners to manage these restored wetlands and prairie uplands into perpetuity. The USDA-NRCS will fund all future monitoring and management of these WRP easements.

2011-2012 Detailed Project Budget
Ducks Unlimited (DU) & Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
HCP Phase 7, Part 3D

IV. TOTAL TRUST FUND REQUEST BUDGET for 2 years

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Personnel: wages and benefits for DU biologist (30% FTE) and manager (10% FTE) project administration and coordination, contract tech hiring and supervision (60% salary, 40% benefits).	\$ 50,000
Personnel: wages and benefits for DU engineer (30% FTE) and engineering technician (20% FTE) to survey, design, and manage construction on one or more large wetland restorations involving large water control structures (60% salary, 40% benefits).	\$ 50,000
Contracts: professional services contracts for 10 WRP wetland restoration field technicians to promote and help NRCS secure WRP easements and contract engineering work.	\$ 1,230,000
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST	\$ 1,330,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: USDA NRCS funding for WRP easement purchase during the grant period.	\$ 7,500,000	Secured for 5,000 acres of WRP easements
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:	\$ -	
In-kind Services During Project Period: NRCS and DU will contribute in-kind services to deliver the WRP in Minnesota, but the value is difficult to estimate.	\$ -	
Remaining \$ from Current ENRTF Appropriation (if applicable): DU anticipates receiving \$350,000 from the 2010 appropriation to be spent in FY11, but these funds have yet to be granted. In addition, DU is currently spending 2009 grant funds that total \$420,000, but those are fully obligated through six existing contracts with wetland restoration specialists.	\$ 770,000	All existing ENRTF funds are legally Obligated
Funding History: DU and NRCS have received the following ENRTF appropriations for the WRP in Minnesota since 2005: \$450,000 in 2005, \$350,000 in 2007, \$267,500 in 2008, \$420,000 in 2009, and \$350,000 in 2010 (recommend).	\$1,837,500	ENRTF Appropriations since 2005

2011-2012 Acquisition List for Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Proposal

Project Title: HCP7-3d Wetlands Reserve Program

Project Manager Name: Jon Schneider (Ducks Unlimited) & Tim Koehler (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service)

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund \$ Request: \$1,330,000

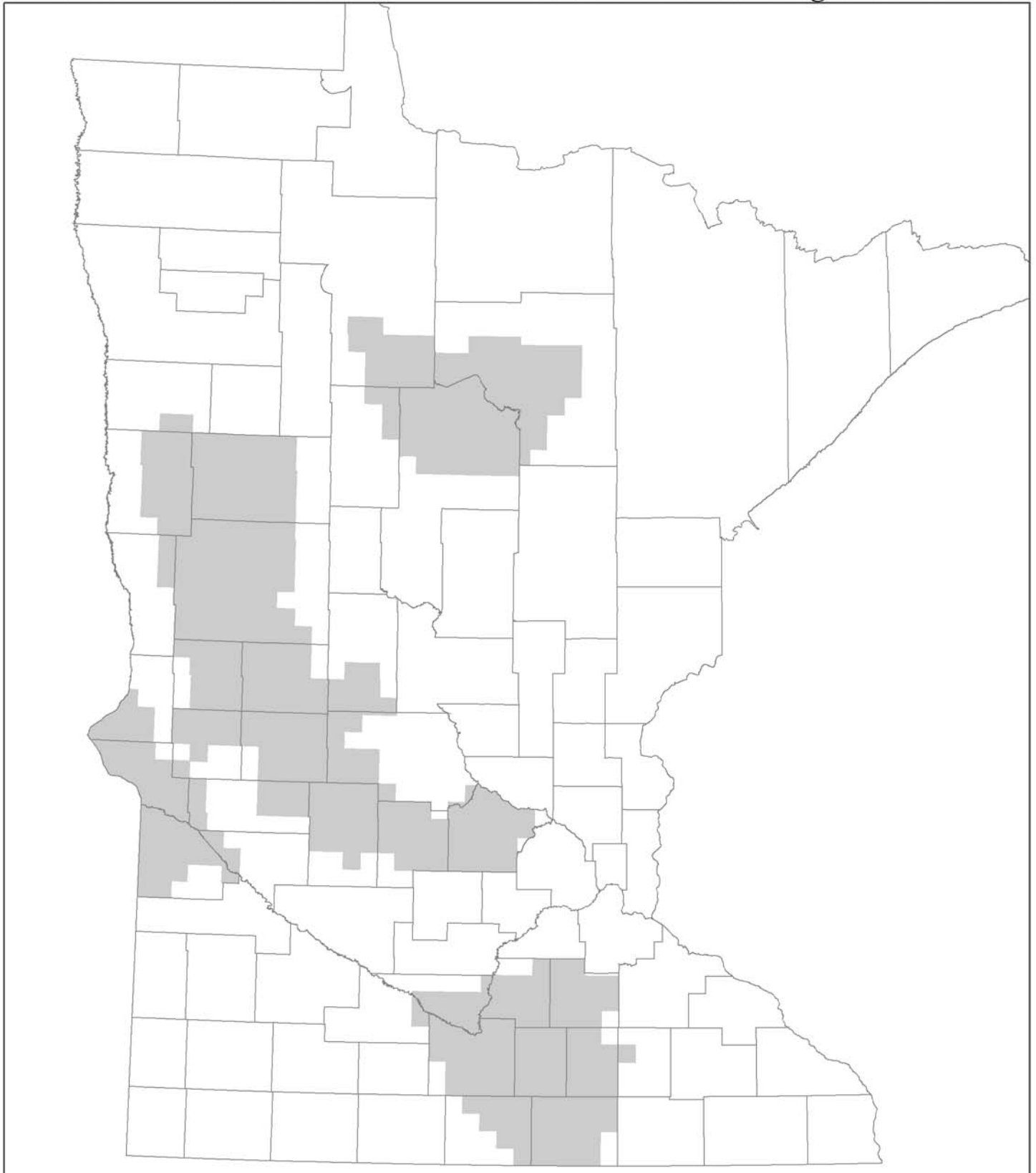
Final Title Holder(s): USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

#	Parcel Name	Acquisition Type (Fee-Title OR Conservation Easement)	County	Estimated # of Acres	Geographical Coordinates (Provide Latitude/Longitude OR UTM-X/UTM-Y)			
					Latitude	Longitude	UTM-X	UTM-Y
1	A WRP application signup is being held in spring 2010, and thus an list or map of specific easement locations is not available at this time. WRP easements selected for federal funding will be subsequently listed in our work program that results from any ENRTF grant, if recommended by LCCMR.							
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
NOTES:								

2010 LCCMR Habitat Conservation Partnership Phase 7 Grant



Potential Locations for Wetland Reserve Program Easements



■ LCCMR HCP Phase 7 Project Areas: A WRP application signup is being held in spring 2010, and thus an list or map of specific easement locations is not available at this time. WRP easements selected for federal funding will be subsequently listed in our work program that results from any ENRTF grant, if recommended by LCCMR

As Conservation Program Manager for Ducks Unlimited in Minnesota since 1999, Jon Schneider is responsible for all public grant management, partner coordination, and conservation program implementation to support Ducks Unlimited's Living Lakes Initiative. This involves significant project and program level coordination with agency partners and field staff, DU field biologists and engineers, DU land protection staff, and both DU support staff and administrators. Jon has been responsible for the development and management of DU's Minnesota conservation budgets totaling over \$2 million annually, and has administered four LCCMR grants, six North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant, and multiple smaller DNR grants for individual projects since 1999. Jon is a Certified Wildlife Biologist (The Wildlife Society) and Professional Wetlands Scientist (Society of Wetland Scientists), and holds a B.S. degree in Business Administration & Biology from the State University of New York College at Oswego and an M.S. degree in Range & Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University.

The mission of Ducks Unlimited is to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North American's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people. The continental vision of Ducks Unlimited is wetlands sufficient to fill the skies with waterfowl today, tomorrow, and forever. In Minnesota and Iowa, Ducks Unlimited is strategically focused on the conservation of shallow lakes through our "Living Lakes" conservation initiative. The vision of DU's Living Lakes Initiative is to establish stepping stones of perpetually protected and managed shallow lake complexes from southern Iowa through northern Minnesota to provide high quality wetland food and habitat resources for waterfowl. The initiative will help preserve this region's rich waterfowling heritage and support conservation of the primary source of its birds, the prairie breeding grounds. Since its founding in 1937, DU has raised more than \$1.6 billion, which has contributed to the conservation of more than 11 million acres of prime wildlife habitat in all 50 states, each of the Canadian provinces, and in key areas of Mexico. In the U.S. Alone, DU has helped to conserve more than 2 million acres of waterfowl habitat. Some 900 species of wildlife live and flourish on DU projects, including many threatened or endangered species. DU conservation staff based in Minnesota work from home offices, and are supported by the Great Plains Regional Office staff in Bismarck, ND, and by DU National Office staff in Memphis, TN.

