

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2014 Request for Proposals (RFP)

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Project Title:

Protecting the Best of the Best in Southeast

Category: F. Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat

Total Project Budget: \$ 258,500

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 Years, July 2014 - June 2017

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 1,000

Summary:

This project will provide a framework for the protection and stewardship of unimpaired waters in Southeast Minnesota. The result will be a template for watershed protection in Minnesota.

Name: Richard Biske

Sponsoring Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Location

Region: Southeast

County Name: Dakota, Goodhue, Olmsted, Rice, Wabasha, Winona

City / Township:

MP: 0613-2-058-proposa

Budget: 0613-2-058-bud

Qual: 0613-2-058-qualifi

Map: 0613-2-058-map-R

Resolution: 0613-2-05

List:

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ Employment	_____ TOTAL



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2014 Main Proposal

Project Title: Protecting the Best of the Best in Southeast

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I. PROJECT STATEMENT

To date the majority of watershed conservation efforts are directed toward impaired waters. At a time when agricultural lands within the region are managed more intensively, the ecosystem services provided by the region's natural areas cannot be understated. Protection and proper stewardship of the region's natural areas is important for maintaining what is left of the region's unimpaired waters. It is much more cost-effective to protect habitat and water resources before they are degraded.

The Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota are home to more Species of Greatest Conservation Need than any other ecological subsection in Minnesota. The unique habitats like oak savannas and hickory forests, have been recognized for the wildlife habitat they provide. These same unique habitats when protected and managed responsibly, can maintain healthy rivers. Ecologically sensitive lands continue to be converted to rural residential housing and expanded agricultural production while many private lands are subject to poor management. Each of Southeast Minnesota's major rivers is impaired for turbidity and has suffered from significant flood events in recent years. The project will utilize existing datasets including the Minnesota Biological Survey, the Ecological Ranking Tool and Geologic Atlas to develop a watershed protection framework and tools necessary to keep healthy waters healthy. This project will use a process supported by the US Forest Service and will provide strategic direction for existing state and federal cost-share programs while increasing likelihood of new/additional federal cost-share from the USDA NRCS' Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative.

Goals:

- Protect healthy watershed function, by protecting high quality habitat, springsheds, groundwater recharge zones, riparian areas and essential perennial vegetation.
- Develop guidance on using technical assistance that results in a broader suite of conservation outcomes.
- Conservation Tools for Watershed Protection
 - Targeted: Forest Stewardship, Prairie Stewardship, Invasive Species Management, Prescribed Fire, Conservation Easements, Land Acquisition
- Restore and manage private natural areas using ecologically sound principles leveraging new and existing cost-share.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: *Landscape Stewardship Plans (Cannon and Zumbro)*

Budget: \$176,000

Complete landscape stewardship plans for each watershed with detailed ecological assessments and protection strategies for high biodiversity sub-basins and associated habitats. Landscape Stewardship Plans (LSPs) have been recognized and supported by the US Forest Service and MN Forest Resources Council (MFRC) in the Root River, Camp Ripley and Whitewater River watersheds. LSPs serving as watershed protection plans will be developed for the Cannon and Zumbro watersheds. LSPs developed will be incorporated into MPCA's Watershed Restoration and Protection (WRaP) strategy and local water plans as the protection component. WRaPs are intended to identify watershed protection strategies for unimpaired waters in addition to restoration and source reduction strategies for impaired waters. To date protection strategies for unimpaired waters are often lacking in watershed plans.

Landscape Stewardship Plans will provide a framework for the long-term stewardship and protection of priority sub-watersheds. The landscape stewardship approach is predicated on the likelihood that different stakeholders



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will be satisfied by common solutions. This approach follows five general principles in developing and applying these solutions:

- Invest in priority areas – be strategic.
- Build a collaborative network – create ownership in the process and leverage resources.
- Appeal to self-interest – understand stakeholder motivations and needs.
- Manage for results – align actions with objectives and evaluate outcomes.
- Encourage flexibility at all levels – be adaptive; every situation is unique.

Outcome	Completion Date
<i>1. Engage stakeholders and Conduct Landowner Surveys</i>	<i>November 2014</i>
<i>2. Landscape Stewardship/Watershed Protection Plans for Cannon and Zumbro Watersheds</i>	<i>December 2015</i>
<i>3. Ecological Assessment and Sub-basin Protection Plan</i>	<i>March 2016</i>

Activity 2: Private Land Restoration/Protection

Budget: \$82,500

Private Land Stewardship: Private land stewardship plans will be completed for priority properties identified in LSPs. Comprehensive technical assistance will be directed to priority lands aligning stewardship needs with existing cost-share programs and leveraging new cost-share funds for accelerated conservation practice implementation. (Cannon, Zumbro, Whitewater)

Habitat/Watershed Protection: Plans will guide implementation of conservation activities in priority watersheds using Clean Water Funds and federal cost-share programs. New watershed protection tools will be developed to protect critical upland and groundwater recharge zones identified by LSPs.

Outcome	Completion Date
<i>1. 30 Site level comprehensive stewardship plans (6,000 acres of private land)</i>	<i>March 2017</i>
<i>2. 20 Conservation practice plans and associated cost-share (200 acres of practices)</i>	<i>March 2017</i>
<i>3. 6 workshops/field days</i>	<i>April 2017</i>

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

The Nature Conservancy will manage the project, coordinate all activities described above and administer all ENRTF dollars allocated for this project. Cannon River and Zumbro River Watershed Partnerships will assist with stakeholder engagement in their respective watersheds and continue with implementation of strategies. MFRC’s Landscape Program, DNR Ecological and Water Resources and Forestry staff will assist with the development of the plan and execution. MPCA Project Managers will assist with development of the plans to align with MPCA WRaPs.

B. Timeline Requirements

Landscape Stewardship/Watershed Protection Plans will be the primary activity completed in year one of the project. Completing the LSPs simultaneously will expedite implementation, allow for synergy and inform the direction of subsequent activities in the project.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

A LSP was completed for the Root River in 2012 using one-time financial support from the US Forest Service and US EPA. The Nature Conservancy, MN Forest Resources Council, MN DNR Ecological and Water Resources and Fillmore SWCD developed the plan with input from local and regional stakeholders. The Root River LSP will be used as the Protection component of the Root River WRaP being developed under guidance by the MPCA. The Root River LSP is being used to coordinate and implement Outdoor Heritage Fund sponsored habitat protection efforts and landowner outreach. Strategies are beginning to be integrated into Local Water Plans. Similar outcomes will come from the effort proposed here. LSPs will be used as protection plans within Cannon and Zumbro WRaPs to guide watershed protection and restoration over the next 10 years. In turn, effort will be made to incorporate LSPs into Local Water Plans as a means of directing Clean Water Funds toward watershed protection and restoration within priority sub-basins.

2014 Detailed Project Budget

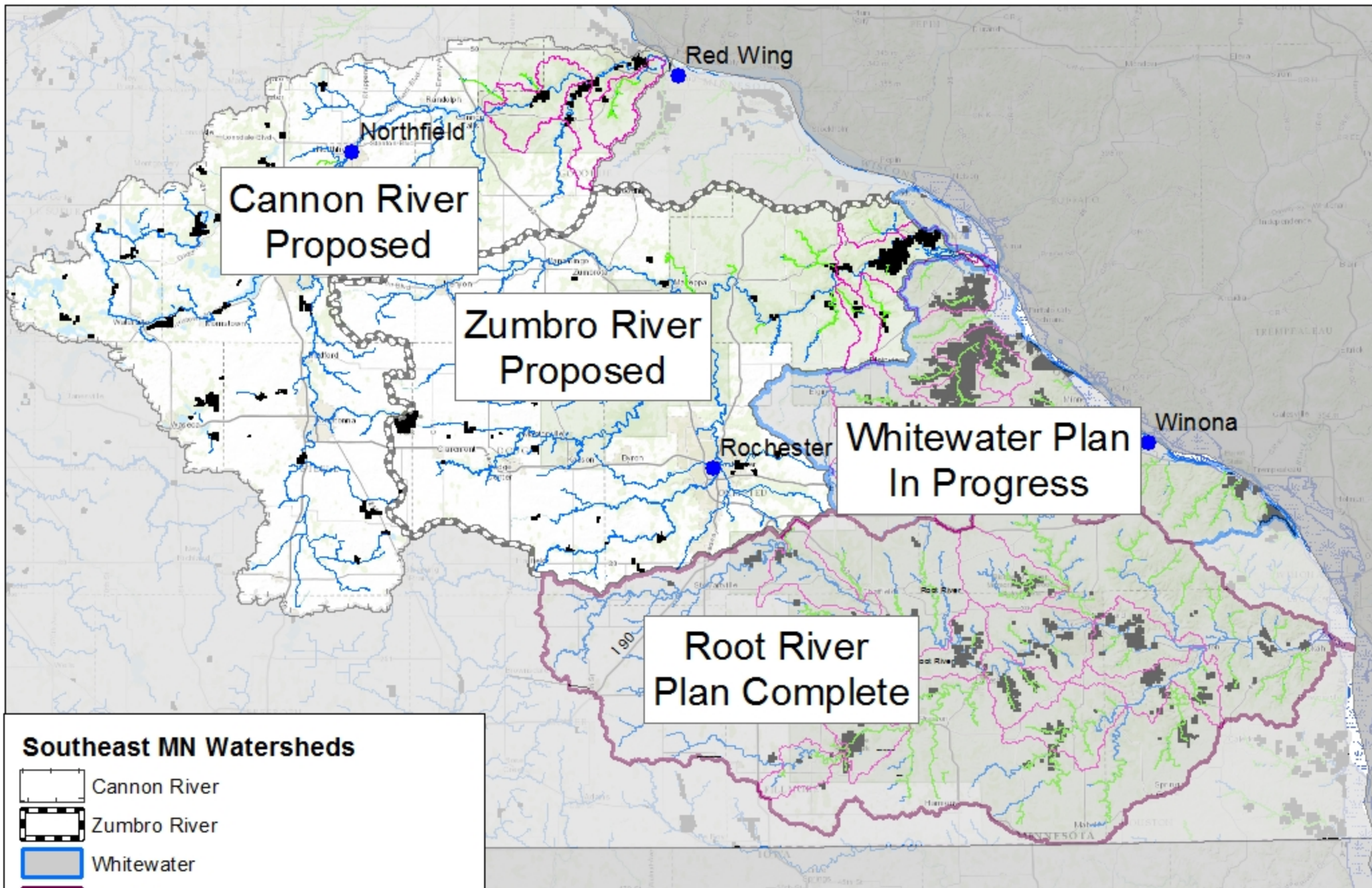
Project Title: *Protecting the Best of the Best in Southeast*

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 3 years

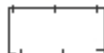






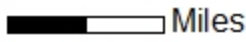
<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Personnel: <i>TNC Project Manager will: 1) coordinate the development of Landscape Stewardship Plans with Ecological Assessments 2) Administer contracts associated with the project, 3) Coordinate site based stewardship plans, 4) Organize and lead field days, educational events and landowner outreach activities .25 FTE/yr, 70% for salary and 30% for benefits for grant funded position.</i>	\$ 56,000
Contracts: <i>Landscape Ecologist - RFP will be sent for completion of Zumbro River Landscape Stewardship/Watershed Protection Plan based on input from TNC staff and stakeholders.</i>	\$ 70,000
<i>Landscape Ecologist - RFP will be sent for completion of Cannon River Landscape Stewardship/Watershed Protection Plan based on input from TNC staff and stakeholders.</i>	\$70,000
<i>Consulting Forester - Provide technical assistance and develop 30 comprehensive site stewardship plans with Conservation Activity Plans for private landowners to implement conservation practices covering the priority 10% of watersheds leveraging new and existing state and federal cost-share programs.</i>	\$ 62,500
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 258,500

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: <i>TNC for travel expenses and supplies</i>	\$ 1,000	<i>Pending</i>
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: <i>Minnesota Forest Resource Council for stakeholder coordination and plan development.</i>	\$ 10,000	<i>Pending</i>
In-kind Services During Project Period: <i>MPCA, DNR staff contributions toward Landscape Stewardship Plans.</i>	\$ -	<i>Secured</i>
Remaining \$ from Current ENRTF Appropriation (if applicable): <i>NA</i>	\$ -	<i>NA</i>
Funding History: <i>US Forest Service for Root River Landscape Stewardship Plan</i>	\$ 40,000	<i>Secured</i>
<i>US Forest Service Grant to MN DNR/MFRC for Whitewater LSP</i>	\$ 75,000	<i>Secured</i>



Southeast MN Watersheds

-  Cannon River
 -  Zumbro River
 -  Whitewater
 -  Root River
 -  Potential Sub-basin Healthy Watersheds
 -  Blufflands Trout Streams
 -  State Land
-  Miles
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Protecting
the Best of the Best
in Southeast

Project Manager Qualifications:

Project Manager: Richard Biske, Southeast Minnesota Conservation Coordinator, The Nature Conservancy

Responsibilities Pertaining to the Proposal:

- 1) Coordinate the development of Landscape Stewardship Plans with Ecological Assessments
- 2) Administer contracts associated with the project,
- 3) Coordinate site based stewardship plans,
- 4) Organize and lead field days, educational events and landowner outreach activities

Rich has coordinated the Conservancy's efforts in Southeast Minnesota since August, 2005. He helped lead a team of resource professionals to develop a Landscape Stewardship Plan for the Root River Watershed. He has developed and implemented conservation plans from the 8 digit HUC water watershed scale to the site level. Rich has applied many innovative conservation practices to protect fresh water from run-off and pollution. He has also protected hundreds of acres of land adjacent the Mississippi River through acquisitions and conservation easements. Rich has more than 12 years of professional experience in conservation. He received his BS from the University of Minnesota, majoring in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies with a minor in Forest Resources Management.

The Nature Conservancy

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Since 1958, The Nature Conservancy has helped protect more than 650,000 acres of forests, prairies, rivers, lakes and wetlands in Minnesota.