

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

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 173-F

Creating Foundations for Farmer Led Conservation Planning

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

Total Project Budget: \$ 61,736

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

Summary:

Develop the educational and technical materials, training for farmer and facilitator expertise, support specific local resource assessments, and demonstrate success of farmer led conservation planning councils in Minnesota.

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Sponsoring Organization: Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc

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Location

Region: 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 _____%



PROJECT TITLE: Create Foundations for Farmer Led Conservation Planning Councils

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Farmer-Led Councils consist of small groups of neighbors drawn together by common streams, rivers or lakes who work together to develop local goals and implement practices that improve their water. Farmer-Led Councils work with knowledgeable professionals of their choosing to assess the environment, set local water quality or other natural resource goals, plan strategies for achieving goals, offer locally appropriate solutions for pollution, and utilize assessment tools and monitoring techniques that they have agreed upon locally.

Several watershed organizations in Minnesota are working to adopt this method of conservation planning. There are several obstacles that they are working to overcome, for which this proposal would be beneficial. First, they are finding that for Farmer-Led Councils to be successful there is a need for a trained cadre of individuals who can facilitate their efforts, and coordinate the conservation expertise needed to guide the councils toward meaningful conservation objectives while respecting the farmer’s role as leader. Second, there is a need for some level of consistency and availability of guidance materials, technical assistance, and delivery in the program, so each small group or watershed needn’t begin from square one. And third, a greater level of education is needed throughout the basin for Farmer-Led Councils to make a meaningful difference.

The overall goal of this project is to create a foundation on which groups of neighboring farmers can develop meaningful conservation plans addressing statewide and locally important natural resources; assist in establishing ten pilot Farmer Councils throughout the Mississippi River Basin of Minnesota; and to create this process in a manner that is transferable to other farmers wishing to take on a leadership role addressing their stewardship desires. While we anticipate many natural resource protection outcomes, this project will focus on the establishment of Farmer Led Councils through curriculum and process development, and training farmers and facilitators on the planning process needed to achieve those natural resource protection outcomes.

Farmer-Led Councils for conservation planning, and the implementation of those conservation plans, has many benefits. This process puts a group of neighboring farmers in charge of their local conservation issues, and allows their “combined genius” to create solutions. This is especially attractive in this time when threats of regulation and severe program demands threaten the individualism of our farmers. The process has been successful in addressing water quality issues in Iowa, and we believe that it could be equally beneficial in addressing issues of Soil Health, Water Management, and Energy Conservation. This project would fill in a niche of the ongoing farmer council effort and is critical to its expansion in Minnesota.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Consultant/Facilitator Education

Budget: \$ 6,536.00

Provide training and networking opportunities for consultants to increase their knowledge level needed to provide the facilitation and conservation expertise for successful Farmer-Led Councils.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Course Outline and materials developed for training. (CIG \$ if funded) (Prior to ENRTF)	2/1/14
2. Three workshops to be held within the basin.	2/1/15
3. Create an online system for sharing of information amongst facilitators.	5/1/15
4. Host a facilitator conference to share information and provide networking opportunity.	9/1/15
5. Evaluations conducted for each session.	10/1/15



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2014 Main Proposal

Project Title: Create Foundations for Farmer Led Conservation Planning Councils

Activity 2: Compile and share available tools and information

Budget: \$ 2,014.00

Compile and share educational materials, procedures, and vendor lists of related professional service providers in order to provide timely support for newly establishing Farmer-Led Councils.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Provide tools and templates (i.e. environmental assessments; field demonstration results; monitoring techniques; Innovative practices; practice and activity cost lists).	11/1/15
2. Provide a list of experts available (i.e. water quality experts; planners; engineers; Economists; Landscape Architects; assessment specialists; monitoring experts; modelers).	11/1/15

Activity 3: *Transfer of information and promotion of process*

Budget: \$ 303,213.00

Disseminate information and knowledge gained through early adopter Farmer-Led Councils throughout the Mississippi River Basin in order to expand farmer utilization of this process of farmer led conservation.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Develop and carry out an information campaign promoting farmer adoption of process.	10/30/15
2. Organize or assist 10 Farmer-Led Councils	11/1/15
3. Assist with funding locally specific planning assessments	3/1/17

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

The MN Association of RC&D Councils (MARC&D) will be the fiscal agent and only organization to directly receive ENRTF funds. John Beckwith, Executive Director of MARC&D will be responsible for coordinating the overall project. Project activities will be contracted out to local NGO's or local SWCD or Watershed District staff where local knowledge is beneficial or when the work can be accomplished more economically or efficiently. To date these local partner organizations include: Hiawatha Valley, Three Rivers, Onanegozie and Mid-MN Mississippi River RC&D's; the Zumbro River and Cannon River Watershed Partnerships; and the Whitewater Watershed District. Funding has been requested through the USDA-Conservation Innovation Grant and the proposal has cleared the pre-proposal selections and is in consideration for funding the final project proposal. MARC&D will also be a provider of cash and in-kind contributions to this project.

B. Timeline Requirements

If funded by USDA-NRCS through the CIG program, the project would be initiated beginning in September of 2013, and expanded through the ENRTF funding when those funds were made available in July of 2014. We understand ENRTF funding cannot be spent or obligated prior to LCCMR authorization. Year one of the ENRTF funded activities will focus on development of training materials, training of consultant/facilitators, and seeking farmer leaders for establishing councils. Year two will focus on establishment of farmer councils and working with them to better understand their local environment and relationships to it. And year three will continue that process, assessing the results of the councils, and working to share the knowledge gathered in order to transfer this process to other interested farmer leaders and councils.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

The goals of this project are to develop the tools needed to educate farmers and facilitators on the farmer led conservation planning council process; to create a platform upon which this process can grow across Minnesota without each individual effort reinventing the process; and to provide successful examples of how this process can make meaningful differences on the landscape. We believe that this effort can be completed in the timeframe given and demonstrate how environmentally informed farmers can work together to solve many of the environmental concerns of their locale. Implementation funding will utilize current programs.

2014 Detailed Project Budget

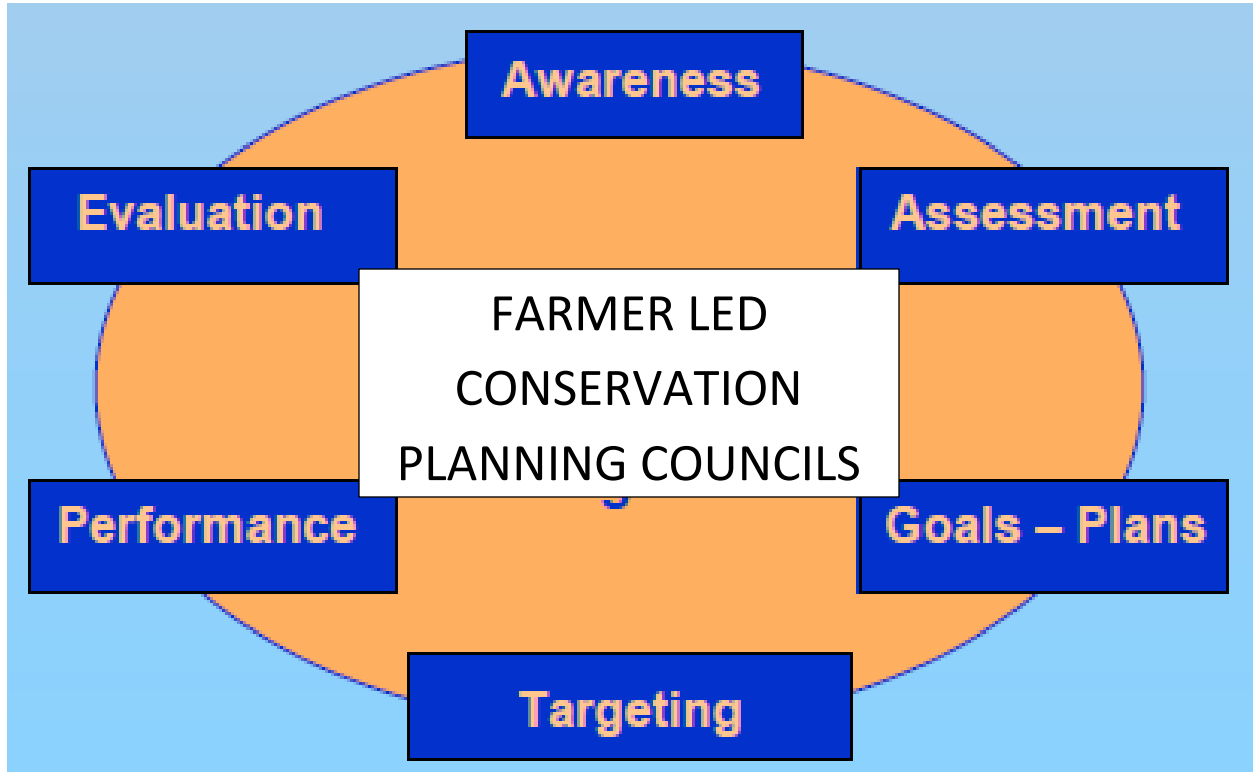
Project Title: Create Foundations for Farmer Led Conservation Planning Councils

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET [Insert # of years for project] years

BUDGET ITEM (See "Guidance on Allowable Expenses", p. 13)	AMOUNT
Personnel: Personnel of the MARC&D are employed on a contract basis.	\$ -
Contracts:	\$ -
Name/Position, Agency, Estimated Hourly Rate (anticipated add'l funds from USDA-CIG)	
John E. Beckwith, MARC&D executive director/program manager, \$45/hr. (CIG=\$5,280) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Project Management • Project Reporting • Project Evaluation <p><i>Note: The MARC&D staff assistance is provided through contracted services of an executive director/program manager. The contracted executive director/program manager would be assigned management of this project due to the experience of that individual in working with farmers and agencies throughout Minnesota. Time and expenses of this individual are accounted for in detail, and not comingled with the responsibilities carried out in service as executive director. We do request approval to utilize the contracted executive director/program manager for project management.</i></p>	\$ 5,828.00
Project Specialist(s), Local NGO and/or agency, 34.50/hr. (CIG=\$3,485) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop course outline for training facilitator cadre • Plan and carry out three training sessions for facilitator cadre • Conduct evaluations of training sessions • Design a system for online sharing of information amongst facilitators and councils • Host a conference for facilitators to share experience and enhance their training 	\$ 3,485.00
Web specialist, TBD, 125/hr. (CIG=\$750) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a system for online sharing of information amongst facilitators and councils 	\$ 750.00
Adult Educator, TBD, 35/hr. (CIG=\$0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance and review of course outline and materials for facilitator training and council processes. 	\$ 1,400.00
Equipment/Tools/Supplies:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-ring binders and dividers for training documents and misc. supplies 	\$ 300.00
Travel: (Anticipate CIG grant to cover estimated \$1,500 in-state travel plus \$3,000 for sharing project at national meeting)	NA
Additional Budget Items:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with funding locally specific assessments or evaluations needed for decision making process. (examples might include: engineer assessment of options to improve drainage water management system, foliar nutrient measurements to assess nutrient excess or deficiency, other similar assessments specific to that council, but transferable to others as an option for solving their similar issues. We anticipate an average of 5,000 per established council. 	\$ 50,000.00
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 61,736

V. OTHER FUNDS

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:		
USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovations Grant (CIG): This budget proposal anticipates receipt of a grant from USDA. This grant focusses on the training aspects of the proposal and does not have funds for funding of unique practices or activities. This funding is critical to the success of the project as proposed.	\$ 41,950	Pending
MARC&D Funds from program income: MARC&D anticipate some income from registrations for training events and these funds would be used for this project purposes	\$ 3,500	Pending
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:		
In-kind Services During Project Period:		
MARC&D Contributions to Mission Support Costs: Although ENRTF does not include Mission Support costs, sometimes referred to as "indirect costs", it is important to recognize these are a very real part of a well managed nonprofit. We have committed to these costs if the CIG grant is approved.	\$ 18,360	Pending (Secured if CIG is approved)
Travel: Cost of local meeting attendance by farmers and conservation specialists donating their expertise	\$ 4,500	Pending
Professional Services: Time and expense of training participants attending the educational workshops	\$ 5,198	Pending
Other: Cost of preparing materials, procedures, and vendor lists donated by local entities and existing farmer led councils.	\$ 800	Pending
Funding History:	\$ -	



WORKING TOGETHER, NEIGHBORING FARMERS CAN:

1. Enhance their understanding of how their farm operation's impact the environment and the community as a whole.
2. Learn from conservation professionals through general information for their area, and conduct additional detail assessments needed for good decision making for solutions.
3. Set goals for their local area of concern, and share their progress with each other and the community.
4. Target their resources, and program resources to the areas of greatest impact.
5. And with these processes in place, they can move forward with other programs to implement those plans and evaluate their success.

Create Foundations for Farmer Led Conservation Planning Councils: Project Manager Qualifications & Organization Description

Project Manager Qualifications

John Beckwith is a graduate of the University of Minnesota in Crookston with an Associate of Applied Science in Soil and Water Technology, and a Graduate of the University of Minnesota St. Paul with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Soil Science. John has 39 years' experience in natural resource protection, with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Soil and Water Conservation District, and most recently with the MN Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc. He has worked throughout the State of Minnesota in various natural resource and management positions and in multiple other states. He has been in key leadership positions of project development and management with NRCS and Resource Conservation and Development Councils.

Experience that will lend itself to this project management role includes supervision of multidisciplinary teams at area office and state office levels in NRCS. He was the area conservationist in Eau Claire, WI supervising the area staff of scientists and engineers. He was the water resources staff leader in the Minnesota State Office for six years, supervising a team of professionals, overseeing watershed and river basin planning activities, and represented NRCS on numerous stakeholder groups for TMDL planning. He also served as the USDA-NRCS assistant state conservationist for operations for several years, a key leadership position in that agency. Most recently, John has been the executive director and project manager for the Minnesota Association of RC&D Councils. He is currently managing projects associated with agricultural wetland mitigation banking and technical service provider development.

Organization Description

The vision of the Minnesota Association of RC&D Councils (MARC&D) is "Leadership in harmony with human, economic and Natural Resource Development". Our mission is to "Partner with RC&D Councils in Minnesota to strengthen the RC&D Program, achieve natural resource conservation and impact community and rural development". MARC&D addresses resource conservation and development issues throughout the state of Minnesota. Our projects have primarily focused on protection of natural resources, improving agricultural practices for resource protection and alternative crop production, and rural community development. These broad objectives have been accomplished through project activities including tours and demonstrations, information and education programs, and project coordination with numerous partners.

MARC&D is incorporated in the State of Minnesota as a Charitable Trust and was recognized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization by the IRS in November of 1989. The organization's board is comprised of up to eighteen members. There are currently nine members on the board. These members represent their respective Councils and may include members from areas of the State not currently active with an RC&D Council. The board has four officers, President, Vice-President, Treasurer and Secretary.

Local people know what is best for their communities. That is the core premise of the RC&D Program, and the key to its success. Each RC&D Council is made up of local volunteer board members who know their communities well. These volunteers are driven by a passion to serve. They identify the challenges their communities are facing, forge partnerships to take on those challenges... and work hard to resolve them. It is this drive that we believe makes us very suitable to make this project a success.