

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2015 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 122-F

Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project

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

Total Project Budget: \$ 1,500,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 years, July 2015 - June 2018

Summary:

This project is a transition of current funding from LCCMR to other long-term funding sources. This project will enable MN to maximize conservation benefits of the 2014 Federal Farm Bill.

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Sponsoring Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

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Web Address

Location

Region: Statewide

County Name: Statewide

City / Township:

Alternate Text for Visual:

Current project staffing map

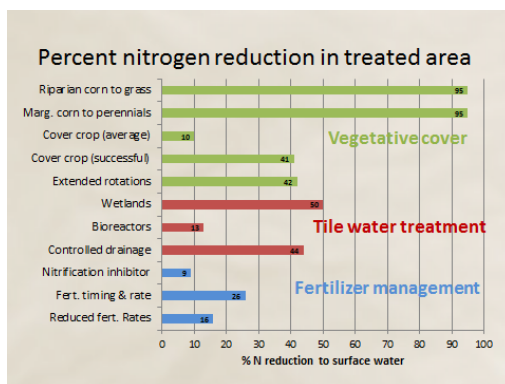
_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL	



I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project is a transition of the existing Conservation Program Technical Assistance project funded by LCCMR to other long-term funding sources. A smooth transition is essential due to the urgent need to address Nitrogen water quality concerns and capitalize on Farm Bill opportunities. The Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project plans to build upon the success of the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) program while placing a greater emphasis on vegetative water quality practices as detailed in MPCA's Nitrogen in Surface Waters Report (MPCA 2013). According to MPCA's monitoring and research 72% of the nitrogen in our surface waters is a result of agricultural field runoff and artificial drainage. We currently have a FBAP presence in priority locations that MPCA highlighted as major nitrogen contributing watersheds. MPCA has established a goal of a 20% reduction of nitrogen in surface waters by 2015 and riparian buffers can be a significant and permanent strategy in reaching that goal. FBAP staff are trained and knowledgeable on vegetative water quality practices and will provide the necessary targeted landowner education and solicitation.

The passage of the 2014 Federal Farm Bill brings new opportunities and possibilities to Minnesota. As part of the new Farm Bill, USDA will provide \$100 million dollars of dedicated funding annually to the newly created regional conservation partnership program. Additionally a new initiative in the 2014 Farm Bill is the dedication of \$35 million dollars over the next three years to conservation practices in the Prairie Pothole Region, which includes overlaps with the majority of the priority watersheds identified in the MPCA study. Competition for these new Farm Bill dollars will be strong and will require greater participation by states in implementation efforts. Continuing to provide the technical assistance staff to leverage these funds will place Minnesota at a competitive advantage and allow us to capture a significant portion of available Federal funding. Additionally there are 710,623 acres of expiring CRP over the next 5 years in Minnesota making it important that we reenroll the most environmentally sensitive of these lands back into CRP or permanently protect these areas through an easement in order to reach our nitrogen reduction and other conservation goals. It is important that Minnesota continues to support the increase of technical assistance funding in order to maximize the effectiveness of federal and state conservation program offerings.



CRP Expiration Year	Total CRP Acres
9/30/2014	206,426
9/30/2015	100,483
9/30/2016	89,918
9/30/2017	102,800
9/30/2018	210,996

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Activity 1: Facilitation of 60,000 acres of vegetative water quality practices

Budget: \$1,500,000.00

Technicians provide the direct link between available conservation programs offered by state and federal agencies and the private landowner. It is anticipated that during the 2 year grant period that



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2015 Main Proposal

Project Title: Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project

60,000 acres of vegetative and other water quality will be implemented to help meet the nitrogen reduction goals. Funding for projects will come from Federal Farm Bill programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and state programs including RIM, Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, and others.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Contracts with SWCD's for employment of 29 FTEs	July 1, 2015
2. Application of 60,000 acres of vegetative water quality practices	June 30, 2017
3. BWSR publishes program impacts and nitrogen reduction outcomes	August 31, 2018

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

The Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) program Steering Committee will provide direction to this project and consists of the following: Mike Tenney (MN DNR), Matt Holland (Pheasants Forever), Tabor Hoek (MN BWSR), Ryan Galbreath (USDA-NRCS), and MN Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

B. Project Impact and Long-Term Strategy

- Priority is placed upon those counties experiencing the greatest potential loss of CRP acres in critical watersheds.
- Once restored and protected nitrogen losses will be calculated and will move the state closer to achieving the 20% reduction of nitrogen goal as outlined in the MPCA report.
- The greatest emphasis is on permanent enrollment, but we also recognize that once funding for permanent programs is exhausted, we must utilize shorter term federal programs to their fullest extent.
- With a 2 year goal of 60,000 ac. this project will facilitate in excess of \$100 Million being paid to private landowners from state and federal sources.
- At a time when the Minnesota landscape is rapidly changing due to a reduction in CRP acres and the desire to farm all available acres, this project will have an immediate impact on grassland and wetland retention for clean water and wildlife habitat. Key parcels will be identified for permanent protection as funding is available.

As this program is an extension of previous efforts, there is a tremendous opportunity for success based on a proven track record. The partners know how to implement the programs and there will essentially be no start up time required. **This request is for the start of a transition period as we move the funding for the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership away from a LCCMR funded project to an agency funded project. We are currently asking LCCMR to fund 50% of total project costs with the remaining 50% coming from agency and LGU partners during this 2 year transition.**

C. Timeline Requirements

This project is designed to be in place from July 1, 2015 until June 30, 2018. The budget is for 2 full staffing years spread out over a 3 year period to accommodate hiring, vacancies and full utilization of the funding for the intended purpose.

2015 Detailed Project Budget

Project Title : Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project

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

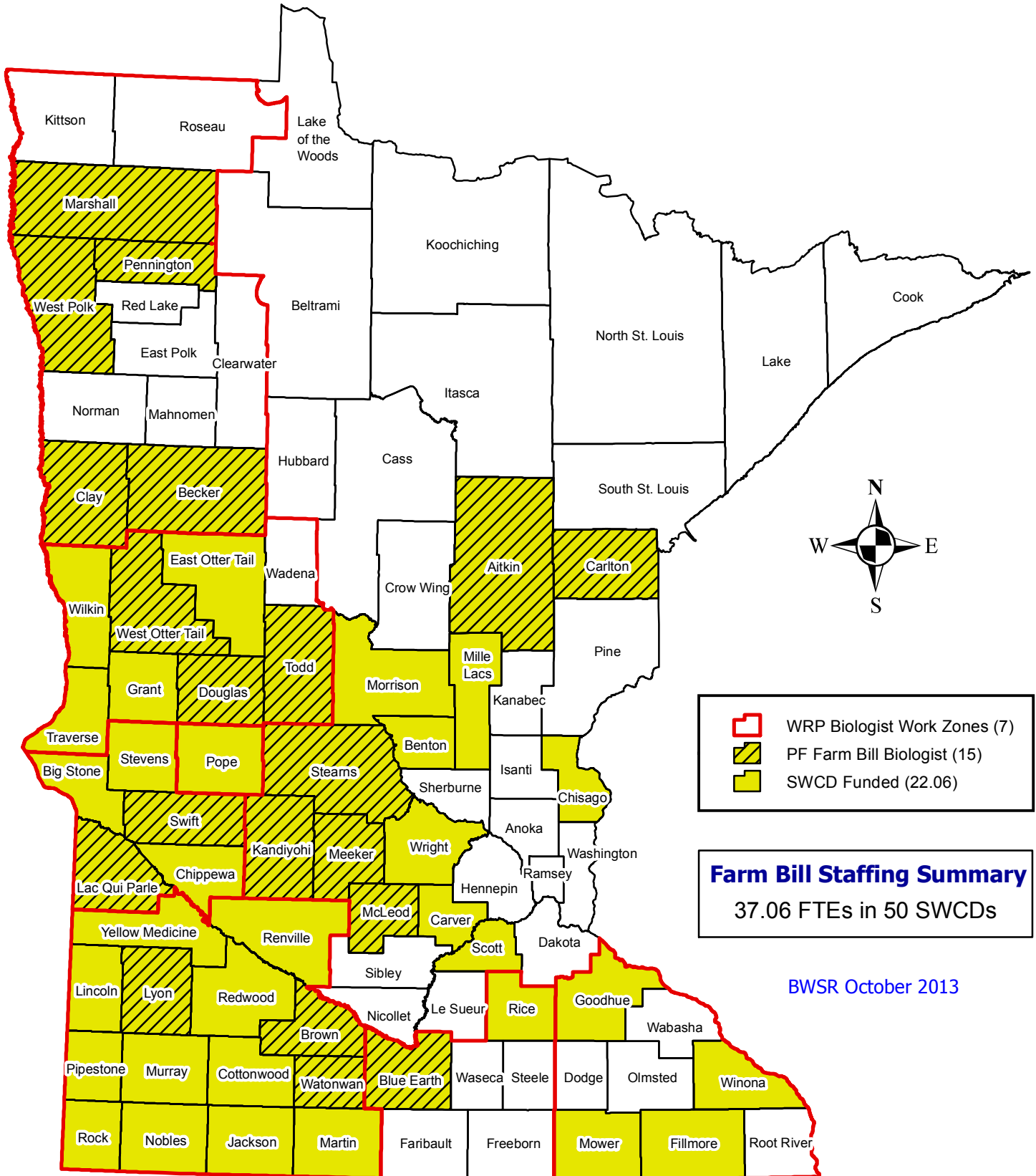
BUDGET ITEM <i>(See "Guidance on Allowable Expenses", p. 13)</i>	AMOUNT
Personnel: 1.0 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE's) Coordination. Staff will be based in the field and provide leadership at the field level in hiring, training, and tracking and reporting all project activities.	\$ 150,000
Contracts: Contracts with SWCDs to employ 29 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE's) for Fy 16 & 17. Staff will be making direct landowner contacts to explain relevant programs and walk them through the enrollment process. We anticipate staff coverage in up to 50 agricultural based counties.	\$ 1,350,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies: N/A	\$ -
Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements): N/A	\$ -
Travel: N/A	\$ -
Additional Budget Items: N/A	\$ -
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 1,500,000

V. OTHER FUNDS *(This entire section must be filled out. Do not delete rows. Indicate "N/A" if row is not applicable.)*

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: Agency partners and LGUs will be providing a portion of the 50% match for these positions.	\$ 510,000	Pending
Other State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: State funding will be secured as a portion of the 50% cash match to fund this project in full.	\$ 510,000	Pending
In-kind Services To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: Agency partners, LGUs and Agencies will be providing a portion of the 50% match for these positions.	\$ 480,000	Pending
Funding History: \$3,000,000 M.L. 2013, Chpt. 52, Conservation Program Technical Assistance Grants; \$625,000 M.L. 2011 1st Special Session Chpt 2, Acceleration of MN Conservation Assistance; \$1,000,000 M.L. 2009 Chpt 143, Farm Bill Assistance.	\$ 4,625,000	M.L. 2009 and 2011 completed and M.L. 2013 Ongoing
Remaining \$ From Current ENRTF Appropriation: 6 months completed of a 2 year budget from the M.L. 2013 ENRTF appropriation.	\$ 2,587,878	Ongoing

Farm Bill Assistance Positions

Phase XIII - July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014



Project Manager Qualifications:

The project manager for the grant will be Tabor Hoek, BWSR Private Lands Coordinator, located in the Marshall BWSR office. Tabor has over 20 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.

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 funds to SWCD's to implement this type of work. We intend to use that existing process to provide financial and administrative oversight.