

**Program Title:** City of Albert Lea - Land Between the Lakes Habitat Restoration, Enhancement and Public Access Improvement

**Request for Funding Form  
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council  
Fiscal Year 2011**

**Program or Project Title: #40** City of Albert Lea - Land Between the Lakes Habitat Restoration, Enhancement and Public Access Improvement

**Date:** November 2, 2009

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**Title:** City Manager

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Funds Requested (\$000s)	Council Funding Request	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
		FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Outdoor Heritage Fund	<b>1,342,026</b>	0	0	0

**A. Summary**

**B. Background Information**

Albert Lea's motto the "Land between the lakes" defines the community's focus for natural resource stewardship in the lakes and rivers surrounding the City and characterizes as a critical component of the City's identity. The ***City of Albert Lea - Land Between the Lakes Habitat Restoration, Enhancement and Public Access Improvement*** project proposes restoration and enhancement of fishery habitat, shoreland and riparian wetlands, forests and prairies along a half mile reach of the Shell Rock River, the segment that connects Fountain Lake to Albert Lea Lake near the core of Albert Lea's commercial/business district. The project partners will restore and enhance a highly visible reach of natural shoreland communities in the center of Albert Lea.

With the adjoining shoreland, wetlands, floodplain, prairie and oak savanna the project will provide multiple benefits to the lake, water quality, habitat, public use and public health through restoration and enhancement of this public open space corridor in an urban setting. The project area is a high priority for the citizens of Albert Lea, the Shell Rock River Watershed District

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(SRRWD) and MNDNR Fishery managers and even helps Albert Lea realize their community health “Blue Zones” vision that recognizes healthy lakes and outdoor activity boost a healthy community<sup>1</sup>. Because this half-mile stream corridor is the defining natural resource link between land and water the proposed project can help restore the link between man and the environment in Albert Lea.

The project is designed to restore over 10 acres of land and a ½ mile reach of river habitats. The historically degraded shoreland has been acquired by the City for flood mitigation and protection and for the redevelopment of the Farmland Foods complex that was destroyed by fire in 2001. The acquired lands are still being cleared and prepared for restoration of natural features using bioengineering techniques and habitat improvements that will enhance both the land and water. Bioengineering techniques for this project will be defined as utilizing plants and other natural materials to stabilize and restore existing erosion problems. This technique utilizes native vegetation to help improve water quality through the filtration and uptake of sediments and nutrients from stormwater runoff. Through careful plant selection the restoration and enhancement of the stream corridor will provide food, cover and water for wildlife an urban environment.

The restored corridor will provide safe and hospitable public access for fishing and outdoor activities along this urban riparian corridor. The proposed restoration and enhancement plan is ready for the final details and implementation and can be completed within two years. The citizens of Albert Lea are enthusiastic about the opportunity to partner with L-SOHC to bring nature, fish and wildlife back to the core of Albert Lea.

### About Albert Lea

The City of Albert Lea, population 18,356<sup>2</sup>, is at the crossroads of I-35 and I-90, 70 miles south of the Twin Cities and 10 miles north of the Iowa boarder. The natural setting is described as the **Glaciated Plain of the Prairie Provenance** and is at the Center of the headlands of the 246 square mile Shell Rock River Watershed which drains southeast across fertile farmland to the Iowa River. The City encompasses Fountain Lake, the headwater of the Shell Rock River and the river restoration reach that flows to the 2,654 acre Albert Lea Lake. The Shell Rock River Watershed and the City of Albert Lea are the southern gateway to Minnesota’s lakes, our signature natural resource.

Albert Lea Lake and the Shell Rock River are a visitors first view of Minnesota’s water, oak savanna and prairie habitat when coming north on I-35 or coming east on I-90. The glaciated plain of the south eastern edge of the prairie provenance has shallow lakes fed and drained by low gradient rivers that are still fringed by wetlands and floodplain forests and have remnant oak savannas and prairies dotting the uplands. The lake and river corridors provide significant aquatic, shoreland and terrestrial habitat in a landscape now dominated by corn and soybean production. Albert Lea Lake is continuing the recovery of water quality and habitat that was degraded for decades due to adjacent industrial activity. With help from the L-SOHC the enhancements and restoration of the ½ mile river corridor, 10 acres of urban shoreland will show an immediate impact on local natural resources and habitat and will stimulate Albert Lea’s continuing efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Lea is designated as an AARP/Blue Zones Vitality Project that focuses on four areas that are crucial to health and longevity: Community Environment, Social Networks, Habitat, and Individual Sense of Purpose. Blue Zones is an organization that studies the world’s longest-lived populations for wellness information and lifestyle management tools that can help Americans live longer, healthier lives.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Lea: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Lea,\\_Minnesota](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Lea,_Minnesota)

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**1. What is the problem or opportunity being addressed?**

The project is designed to address a list of specific shoreland, water quality, in-stream habitat and ecology problems and take advantage of a growing list of opportunities:

**Shoreland Problems: Need to restore the shoreland to a natural condition**

The half-mile reach of shoreland has a 130-year history of commercial and industrial development. The recently acquired Farmland site was a meat packing facility since 1877, where from the 1950's until 2001 fire destroyed one of the largest meat packing plants in America. The 29.5 acre facility along the banks of the Shell Rock River and Albert Lea Lake was acquired after the fire by the City. Other shoreland properties have recently been acquired by the City for flood mitigation/prevention and are ready for restoration and enhancement into a new public space that highlights fishing and natural resources in the "Land between the Lakes."

The project proposes natural area restoration, fish habitat improvement and public use in an area that encompasses a significant, highly visible and highly accessible reach of headwaters of the Shell Rock River. The land in this urbanized reach has been identified by local, state and federal resource agencies as a priority restoration project.

**Water and in-stream habitat and ecological problems: Low winter oxygen, carp and spawning habitat degradation**

The MNDNR assessment of Albert Lea Lake states that "Lake habitat and water quality have been seriously degraded from point and non-point industrial, agricultural, and urban sources. Lake conditions have improved remarkably in the past ten years. Industrial and municipal pollution abatement is nearly complete with agricultural and urban pollution the main existing pollution sources, total phosphorous concentrations have decreased to less than one third of the average concentration measured prior to the upgrade of the wastewater treatment plant" (SSRWD Water Plan, June 2004).

The Albert Lea lakes are eutrophic or hyper-eutrophic with water quality problems that cause winterkill. Fountain Lake has had aerators for many years that have prevented fish kills, and the ½ mile river reach in the project area is a major source of water mixing and oxygenation helping to sustain adequate oxygen in the winter and spring. In the winter of 2004 a fish kill in the Albert Lea Lake created an opportunity to control carp and restock walleye.

**2. What action will be taken?**

The City has acquired the necessary land along the half-mile river corridor. The Project will clean-up, restore and enhance the riverine and shoreland habitat through a combination of bioengineering and native plantings to restore the river, wetlands, prairies, floodplain forest and oak savanna on 10 acres of land in the stream corridor. The following outcomes are proposed:

- Restore 4,725 feet of bioengineered shoreline along the 0.5 mile river corridor;
- Restore 1 acre of wetland;

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- Enhance 1.1 acres of wetland plant communities by planting native seed stock;
- Restore 2.4 acres of prairie;
  - Enhance 2.4 acres of prairie by planting native seed stock;
- Restore 6.6 acres of forests (0.5 acres floodplain forest and 6.1 acres oak savanna).

An important component of fish habitat in upper-Midwest streams and lakes is wood structure, which is created naturally by stream bank or shoreline trees that fall into the water. In streams, wood structure provides cover and creates pools used by trout and other fish. It also collects fine sediment, allowing cleaner gravel areas downstream where fish will spawn (Figure 3). In lakes, single downed trees provide cover and spawning habitat for fish such as small mouth and largemouth bass. Also, submerged wood moved by waves and currents in a lake can become clustered and form complex structures upon which algae and small aquatic insects attach. These in turn become a food source for small fish such as black crappie, yellow perch and bluegill, which use the structure for forage, cover, and spawning (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Wood structure in a stream.

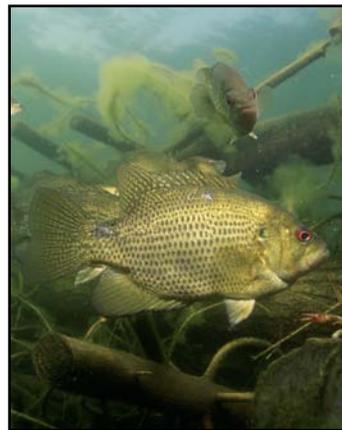


Figure 4. Rock bass using wood structure in a lake.

Proposed Action: To improve the habitat in the Shell Rock River we propose to increase large woody debris by cutting and dropping selected streamside trees into these streams at a rate of 5 to 10 trees per half mile. The channel between Fountain and Albert Lea lakes will be treated. The cutting and placing of these selected trees would be conducted so as to look as natural as possible and to maintain riparian and stream tree canopy cover. To increase the habitat benefit and prevent the woody debris from blocking the stream channels, the trees may need to be winched into place with a manual or chainsaw winch.

To work toward meeting the habitat needs of Shell Rock River, we propose to install conifer bundles in the lake to provide cover and spawning habitat for black crappie, yellow perch, and other fish species in the lake. Ten bundles of conifers would be placed near each other on the bottom of the lake. Each bundle would contain four to eight 4-8 inch diameter conifer trees. The bundles would either be assembled at the lakeshore and ferried out to the placement site by boat or be assembled on the lake ice and allowed to

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sink during spring thaw. Lake depth where these structures would be placed is approximately 10 to 15 feet. The completed structures would lie parallel to the lake bottom. The conifer bundles would be assembled with trees taken from nearby upland sites. The bundles would be tied together with rope and weighted with concrete blocks.

**3. Who will take action and when?**

The City of Albert Lea, the Shell Rock River Watershed District and Chamber of Commerce will begin restoration efforts as soon as the grant is awarded, but not before July 1, 21010 when the L-SOHC approves the accomplishment plan. The Master Plan, plans and specifications, streambank bioengineering and wetland, forest and prairie restorations will be completed by the City of Albert Lea in cooperation with a consultant or contractor.

**4. How will you coordinate this program with the other Constitutional Funding?**

This project proposal seeks funding for habitat restoration and enhancement that has been already been prioritized and planned by the City of Albert Lea and the Shell Rock River Watershed and seeks funding for a Master Plan and professional design and specification work elements that will address both the specific habitat needs as well as water quality and site access and use issues that may involve other constitutional Funds in the future. Water quality improvements for stormwater or maintenance of winter oxygen levels in the lake and the site access elements are not part of this request, however, depending on the outcome of the Master Planning process there may be future requests to the Clean Water Legacy Fund or the Legislative-citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources.

A component of this project includes developing a trail connection between the newly completed trail around Fountain Lake (October 2009) and the MNDNR Blazing Star State Trail that runs from Albert Lea Lake to Myre-Big Island State Park. A statewide trail connection in the heart of Albert Leas will provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor recreation opportunities. This portion of the project will be coordinated with other constitutional funding in future years, specifically with the Regional Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program.

**5. What specific habitat changes will occur if this item is funded? Be specific about and list multiple benefits if they exist.**

The following habitat changes will be completed:

- Restore 4,725 feet of bioengineered shoreline along the 0.5 mile river corridor;
- Restore 1 acre of wetland;
  - Enhance 1.1 acres of wetland plant communities by planting native seed stock;
- Restore 2.4 acres of prairie;
  - Enhance 2.4 acres of prairie by planting native seed stock;
- Restore 6.6 acres of forests (0.5 acres floodplain forest and 6.1 acres oak savanna).

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**6. Will your Outdoor Heritage Fund dollar request complete the planned accomplishments?**

**YES**                       **NO**

**If not, how will you finance completion?**

**7. How will you pay for the maintenance of the accomplishments?**

Since habitat enhancement of the property will be completed on city-owned land, the City of Albert Lea will dedicate at a minimum \$2,000 annually to maintain the Outdoor Heritage Fund accomplishments with revenue from the city's general fund.

**8. How does this action directly restore, enhance, or protect prairies, wetlands, forests or habitat for fish, game, and wildlife?**

For the past 130 years the project site has been devoted to commercial development. Converting this stream corridor to natural habitat will directly restore and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife. The project will enhance public fishing access along the entire stream corridor.

**9. If you are restoring or enhancing property, is the activity on permanently protected land?**

**YES**                       **NO**

**If yes briefly describe the kind of protection.**

Funding provided by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for enhancement activities will be completed on land that is owned by the public. Therefore, the enhancement activities will be accomplished on permanently protected land in the City of Albert Lea's ownership.

**10. How will you ensure transparency and provide information about your work and use of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars.**

The City of Albert Lea is dedicated to make this project highly transparent to the public and ensures Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars will be adequately highlighted. Habitat enhancement activities will occur in the heart of Albert Lea's downtown district on shoreland between Fountain and Albert Lea Lakes. Due to the projects central location enhancement activities will be highly visible by residents and visitors traveling along the U.S. Trunk Highway 65 corridor, a major thoroughfare that bisects the downtown area. Signs will be installed on both sides of the highway near the Shell Rock River channel crediting the Outdoor Heritage Fund for their support of habitat enhancement activities. Based on the 2006 average daily traffic count estimates from the Minnesota Department of Transportation the City of Albert Lea believes the placement of signage will at a minimum provide public transparency for approximately 13,600 vehicles in a given year.

Information about the project will also be posted on the City of Albert Lea and the Shell Rock River Watershed District official websites throughout the projects beautification process. A series of two to three press releases will also be submitted to the local newspaper throughout the project.

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**11. When do you expect to see these changes?**

Immediately after July 1, 2010 when the L-SOHC approves the accomplishment plan changes will begin to occur on the land between the lakes.

**12. Why will this strategy work?**

Currently the site is in a degraded state from years of industrial and commercial activity. The proposed shoreline bioengineering and wetlands, prairies, forests and fish habitat restoration and enhancement will stabilize stream banks through the installation of native plants, which have proven to be effective strategies to reduce erosion and enhance wildlife habitat. The site is centrally located in the heart of downtown Albert Lea, providing high visibility of L-SOHC funds.

**13. Who might make decisions that assist or work against achieving the expected impact program?**

The City does not anticipate anyone will make decisions that work against the proposed project. The Freeborn County Comprehensive Plan, the Freeborn County Local Water Plan and the Shell Rock River Watershed District Management Plan all indicate restoration of the project area is a high priority. All of these plans have been approved and are favored by local community residents who are supportive of the proposed project.

**14. If this is acquisition of land, has the local government formally approved the acquisition?**

Not applicable

**15. If this is fee simple acquisition of land, is the land free of any other permanent protection such as a conservation easement?**

Not applicable

**16. If this is an easement acquisition, will the eased land be open for public use?**

Not applicable

**17. If easement acquisition, will the easement be a permanent conservation easement as described in MS 2009, Chapter 84C.01, specifically protecting the natural resource values of real property forever?**

Not applicable

**18. If you are proposing funding for a new or ongoing program how long into the future do you expect this program to operate?**

\_\_\_\_\_5\_\_\_\_\_ Years

See Number 4 for explanation.

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**19. Which planning sections will you work in? Check all that apply in the list below.**

- Northern Forest
- Forest/Prairie Transition
- Southeast Forest
- Prairie
- Metropolitan Urbanizing Area

**20. Does the request address an urgent conservation opportunity that will be lost if not immediately funded?**

**YES**                       **NO**  
**If yes, please explain.**

This project is has been selected as a high priority for the City's conservation based planning and will fulfill a need to develop visible projects following years of land acquisition.

**21. Does the request restore and/or enhance habitat on existing state-owned Wildlife or Aquatic Management Areas or Scientific and Natural Areas?**

**YES**                       **NO**  
**If Yes, list the names of the AMAs, WMAs and/or SNAs and the acres to be restored and/or enhanced.**

**22. Is this request based on assessment through a science based strategic planning and evaluation model similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model?**

**YES**                       **NO**  
**If yes explain the model briefly.**

**23. Explain the scientific foundation for your project, and the benefits it will produce.**

The project is has been selected as a high priority for restoration and was selected due to its proximity and connect with land and water in the City of Albert Lea. Scientific methods will be used for the implementation of habitat activities.

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**24. How do you set priorities? (Be sure to list the criteria you use and the weight you give each one.)**

Lead by the City of Albert Lea and the Shell Rock River Watershed District, in cooperation with the MDNR and MPCA and many other federal, state and local partners, the restoration and enhancement of the River between Fountain and Albert Lea lakes has become a primary goal with high priority when the 2004 Shell Rock River District Water Management Plan was adopted. The adopted Watershed Plan also approved local funding to be dedicated to the identified watershed priorities.

The City and SRRWD restoration plan priorities were developed after reviewing more than 16 local and regional scientific studies and resource management plans dating back to the 1962 Minnesota Health Department "Report on Investigation of Pollution in Albert Lea Lake and Watershed" to the 1999 Visions for the Albert Lea Lake Ecosystem and the more current MNDNR Lake management Plans.

The City has taken into consideration the studies and advice of numerous resource professionals in both the public and private sector.

The high priority for the proposed project is derived from the existing goals of the City and SRRWD and the City's recent purchase of flood prone shoreland in the project corridor.

**C. Relationship to the *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and Other Published Resource Management Plans**

The proposed project is in keeping with the 2009 Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan recommendations including:

- Shoreland (Habitat 2)
- Shallow Lake (Habitat 4)
- Wetland (Habitat 5)
- In-Water Habitat (habitat 6)
- Improvement of connectivity and access to outdoor recreation (Habitat 3)
- Conservation –based Community Land Use Planning (Land Use Community 1 and 2).

The Albert Lea proposal, in advance of the Minnesota Conservation Plan, had adopted a similar strategic framework of integrated conservation planning. These local efforts led to the critical land protection leading to the current request for land and water restoration and enhancement. Albert Lea and SRRWD completed the foundation planning for the restoration of the "Land between the Lakes;" the land acquisition is now completed. It is now necessary to accomplish the needed restoration.

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**D. Budget**

<b>Budget Item</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 11</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 12</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 13</b>
<b>Personnel</b>	59,400		
<b>Contracts</b>	1,279,626		
<b>Equipment/Tools/Supplies</b>	4,000		
<b>Fee Acquisition</b>			
<b>Easement Acquisition</b>			
<b>Easement Stewardship</b>			
<b>Professional Services</b>			
<b>Travel</b>			
<b>Additional Budget Items</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,342,026		

**E. Personnel Details**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Amount.</b>
Environmental Engineer	Kyle Skov	\$16,700 (0.20 FTE)
Engineering Technician	Clark Hagen	\$11,000 (0.20 FTE)

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**F. All Leverage** In the table below list the sources and amounts of leverage you anticipate by fiscal year you anticipate receiving it. Include state and non-state leverage.

<b>Source of Non-State Leverage</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 11</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 12</b>	<b>Fiscal Year 13</b>
City of Albert Lea			
Land Acquisition	\$ 82,000		
Maintenance	\$ 4,000		
Albert Lea/Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce	\$ 6,000		
Fountain Lake Sportsmen's Club	\$ 16,000		
MNDNR Fisheries	\$ 6,400		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 114,400</b>		

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**G. Outcomes:**

<b>Table 1 Accomplish- ments</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>Forests</b>	<b>Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife</b>
<b>Restore</b>	<i>Restore 1.1 acres of wetlands</i>	<i>Restore 2.4 acres of prairie</i>	<i>Restore 6.6 acres (0.5 acres floodplain forest and 6.1 acres oak savanna)</i>	<i>Restore ~ 4,725 feet of bio-engineered shoreline</i>
<b>Protect</b>				
<b>Enhance</b>	<i>Enhance wetland plant communities by planting native seed stock on 1.1 acres</i>	<i>Enhance native prairie by planting native seed stock on 2.4 acres</i>		

<b>Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>Forests</b>	<b>Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife</b>
<b>Restore</b>	<i>Prairie (1.1 acres)</i>	<i>Prairie (2.4 acres)</i>	<i>Prairie (6.6 acres)</i>	<i>Prairie (~4,725 feet of shoreline)</i>
<b>Protect</b>				
<b>Enhance</b>	<i>Prairie (1.1 acres)</i>	<i>Prairie (2.4 acres)</i>		

<b>Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>Forests</b>	<b>Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife</b>
<b>Restore</b>	<i>70,217</i>	<i>66,977</i>	<i>60,977</i>	<i>1,080,857</i>
<b>Protect</b>				
<b>Enhance</b>	<i>3,000</i>	<i>6,000</i>		

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<b>Table 4 Leverage \$</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>Forests</b>	<b>Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife</b>
<b>Restore</b>	28,600	28,600	28,600	28,600
<b>Protect</b>				
<b>Enhance</b>	\$0	\$0		

<b>Table 5 Acquisition Data</b>	<b>Wetlands</b>	<b>Prairies</b>	<b>Forests</b>	<b>Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife</b>
<b>Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability</b>				
<b>Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability</b>				
<b>Permanent Easement</b>				

**H. Accomplishment Time Table** Using the headings below, include a clear statement of how much of what is being accomplished and when. Attach a map showing where accomplishments are anticipated. Accomplishments should clearly restore, enhance or protect forests, wetlands, prairies and habitat for fish, game and wildlife.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
Master Plan Completion	June 30, 2012
Site preparation of upland shoreline (10 acres)	September 30, 2010
Seeding and Planting (10 acres)	June 15, 2011
Bioengineering of Shoreline	June 30, 2011

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**I. Relationship to Your Current Budget**

The City of Albert Lea currently operates and manages a budget well within the capacity of this grant proposal and has a successful history of completing project on time and within budget.

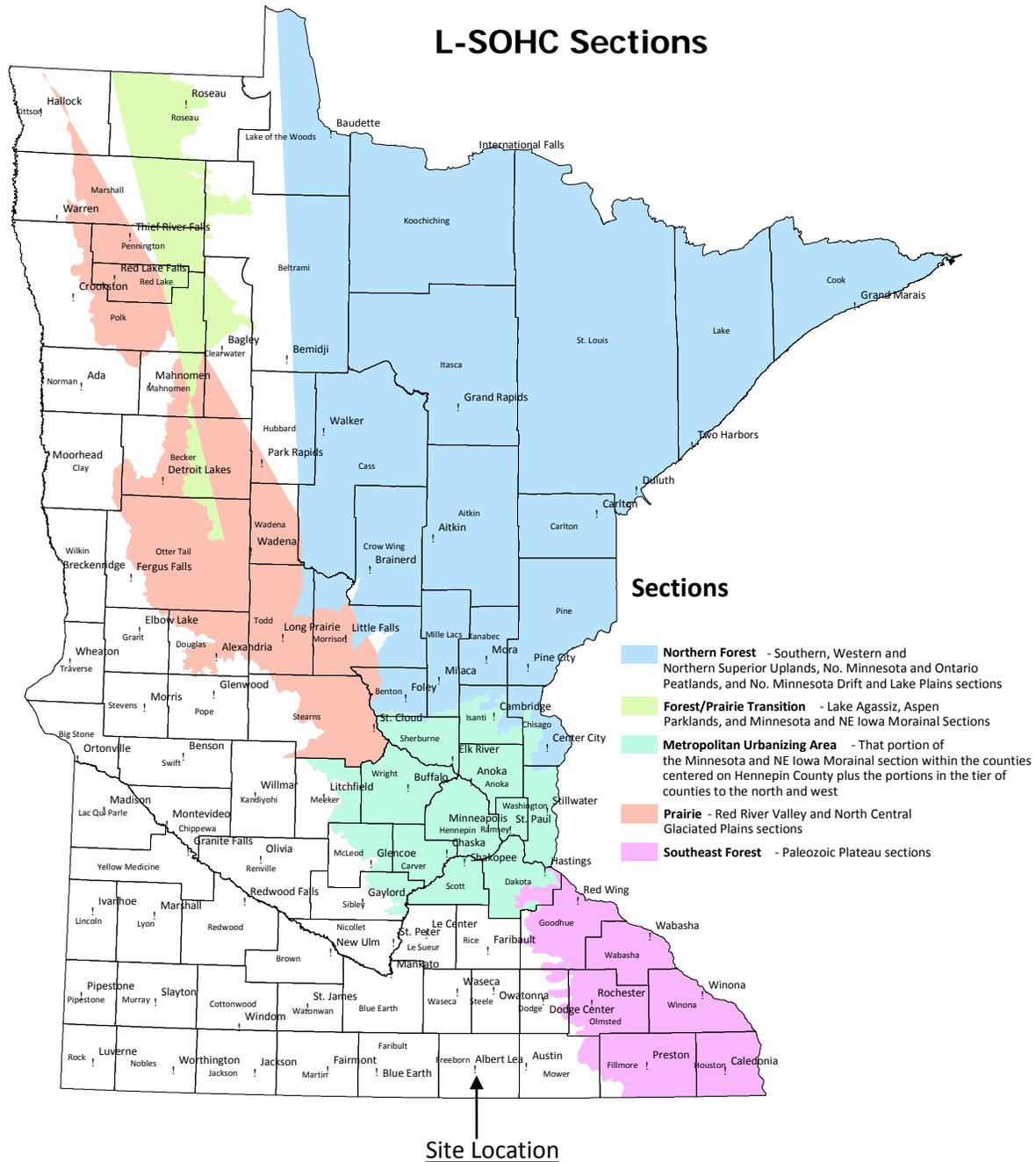
**J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?**

After the grant period has ended the habitat improvements will be maintained by the City of Albert Lea and will be sustained by dedicating a portion of the city’s general fund, up to \$2,000 annually to maintain the site.

**K. Attach a list of your projects listing their county location and edit the map of Minnesota on the next page to show each project as a symbol.**

<b>Project</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Township</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Section</b>
City of Albert Lea – Land Between the Lakes Habitat Enhancement and Public Access Improvement	Freeborn	102	21	9

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