

L-SOHC Questionnaire

Program Request Title: 22 Protect (Acquire) Key Industrial Forest Land Tracts in Central Minnesota

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A. REQUEST FOR FUNDING OVERVIEW:

1. Why there is an urgent need to act NOW?

Problem: Central Minnesota, especially the area in Cass County from Brainerd/Baxter to Walker, has and will continue to see some of the fastest human population growth in Minnesota. This growth will also lead to increased recreational demands/use of this area, it's natural resources and related public land base that needs to support this growth.

Opportunity: Key industrial forest tracts (i.e. in-holdings in large public land tracts, public access issues, etc.) are being considered or currently being offered for sale by a large industrial forest owner (Potlatch Corporation) in this area. Market conditions and a willingness by this industrial forest owner to sell at this time is an opportunity that should be addressed now since it is narrow and may close (properties sold) at any time.

B. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

1. Tell the Council how much of your proposal is acquisition and how much restoration/enhancement? 100% protection (fee title acquisition)

2. How will the public be able to use the all the projects in this program and enjoy the benefits of this public investment? Tracts acquired will be open to public use as per regulations that relate to the specific management unit they are acquired for (Cass County, State WMA or State Forest as noted in Table 6. of the original proposal).

C. PRIORITIES

1. Specifically, how does your program address the Council's statewide and/or regional priorities?

This project directly provides the following forest protection features: Protect aquatic components; Protect riparian forests; Parcels that put together existing lands to create unfragmented landscapes; Open (public) access; Parcels that provide access to landlocked parcels; Eliminate incompatible in-holdings; Complements other public lands to create corridors and protect larger blocks of land; Complete existing WMAs. Examples of these land protection efforts are noted in Figure 1 on the last page of this questionnaire.

This project indirectly provides the following forest and wetland wildlife habitat protection features: Lands that protect already protected lands; Lakes lightly developed or undeveloped, minimally impacted by invasive species, or historically supported wild rice; Wild rice wetlands and shallow lakes that provide exceptional and unique habitat for a wide range of game and non-game wildlife.

2. Tell the Council how do you set priorities among the opportunities available to this program? Be SPECIFIC

Tracts in Table 6 of initial request are currently listed in an ascending sort by legal description (Township, Range and Section). Cass County Land Department personnel in conjunction with MNDNR Area Forestry and Area Wildlife staff will prioritize these tracts based on the following criteria: miles of common boundary (reduces future survey, maintenance needs), easement (road, recreational trail) needs, public access needs (how many acres does it preserve access for, open up), State/County land consolidation needs (and related management as State WMAs or State Forest), etc.

3. Tell the Council how you define “science-based strategic planning”

The Cass County Land Department defines “science-based strategic planning” as future actions and management decisions based off the best data and information available. The data used to make future decisions must have integrity and a history of maintenance. The information for our planning process comes from public input after the data has been presented for comment. Our Forest Resource Management Plan is our best example of “science-based strategic planning” in that it is subject to change due to new and better information as well as input from stakeholders.

D. PROGRAM DETAILS:

1. The Work

a. Enumerate the specific kinds of action you plan to take to protect, enhance, and/or restore natural systems.

The specific types of actions we plan to take include managing the acquired land under our current Forest Resource Management plan. This includes protecting the integrity of native plant communities, restoring forest covertype consistent with the successional stage of the stand, and working to achieve the landscape goals identified in our plan.

b. What species will be helped? Tracts are primarily forested with lake/wetland attributes. Current forest habitats are primarily cutover pine types that have been replanted to Norway Pine and/or Jack Pine, some Aspen and other hardwoods exist on transition edge to wetlands. Wildlife species in these forested types included: Eastern Hognose Snake, Northern Goshawk, Barred Owl, Black-backed Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Hermit Thrush, Pine Siskin, Least Chipmunk, White-tailed Deer, Black Bear, etc. Wetland habitats include shoreline (i.e. Farnham Lake and Turtle Shell impoundment within the Dry Sand WMA) and river/stream frontage. Wildlife species found in these wetland types include: Mallards, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Trumpeter Swan, American Beaver, American Mink, Northern Leopard Frog, Snapping Turtle, Blanding’s Turtle, American Bittern, etc.

c. Do you currently have the capacity to get the work done that you are requesting dollars for in FY 2011? -- Explain

The current trend in land sales and decrease in timber revenue will allow our current staff to work with Potlatch and the MNDNR to achieve land asset management goals as they pertain to the proposed acquisitions. The Cass County Land Department has the funds available to use for acquisition as long as funding is secured for reimbursement.

2. Program Work Location

- a. **What percent of your work will be prairie?** 0%
- b. **What percent of your work will be wetland?** 20%
- c. **What percent of your work will be forest?** 80%
- d. **What percent of your work will be aquatic systems?** 0%
- e. **Is it part of a larger habitat complex? If yes BRIEFLY describe the complex.**
All of the proposed tracts are in-holdings or adjacent to existing public lands (Cass County or State), therefore they add to/preserve wildlife habitat in these forested and wetland habitat complexes (See Figure 1).

3. How We Plan to Use the Funds Requested

- a. **What percent reduction could you accept without rendering your project inoperable?** 50%, but it would severely reduce the amount of acres protected. *Reduction could be made up in future L-SOHC project requests, but the window of opportunity to purchase these tracts is closing rapidly. Potlatch has kept this initial set of tracts off their sale list for the last couple of years, patiently waiting for an acquisition process to transfer these tracts to public ownership.*
- b. **Have you also applied to the Outdoor Heritage Fund Conservation Partners Grant Program operated by DNR?** *No*
- c. **Where else might you get money for this project?** *Internal County funds, Forests for the Future Program, State Wildlife Management Area, and/or State Forest acquisition proposals.*

4. Personnel Details

- a. **Describe the personnel duties. Are they office staff or field staff – existing or new positions?**

The Cass County Land Department has existing staff trained and currently practicing land asset management. They are Resource Managers that fill both office and field duties. We have many successful land purchases and land exchanges completed with the cooperation of our County Board and the support of local units of government. We feel the parcels requested will be a perfect fit with our current goals and Forest Resource Management Plan.

Figure 1. Potlatch tract examples

