

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Laws of Minnesota 2014 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 21, 2013

Program or Project Title: Wirth Park Habitat Enhancements

Funds Recommended: \$ 600,000

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Hennepin

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban

Activity Type:

- Enhance

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest
- Wetlands

Abstract:

Funds of \$600,000 will enhance 150 acres of Wirth Park habitat. This project benefits animal species including the pileated woodpecker and the threatened Blanding's turtle. Primary outcomes include better quality plant communities, reduced fragmentation, and improved shoreline.

Design and Scope of Work:

Theodore Wirth Regional Park was established more than 100 years ago to protect natural resources. Its 750 acres have always provided critical wetland, woodland, savanna, shoreline, and lake habitat for reptiles, amphibians, pollinating insects, fish, and migratory birds within the rapidly urbanizing metro area. The park was recently designated by the Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area and features the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary, the extremely rare habitats of the quaking bog and oak savanna, and several lakes that are important fishing venues for urban families. The park straddles the border between Golden Valley and Minneapolis.

The diversity of native habitats in proximity to the urban landscape puts Wirth on par with internationally known

urban preserves like the Presidio in San Francisco, the McDowell Sonoran Preserve in Scottsdale, AZ, and Vancouver's Stanley Park. All of these parks are habitat oases carefully protected and managed across decades. The preservation of Wirth Park and its ongoing management for high quality habitat is an early example of exactly what LSOHC funding is intended to protect, restore, and enhance. Any land that is set aside through this program may some day need to benefit from a significant enhancement and restoration project, in order to maintain the high habitat quality desired by the people of Minnesota.

Invasive species have increased their foothold since Wirth Park was established. Buckthorn, reed canary grass, honeysuckle, and other invasives threaten the integrity of Wirth's habitat mosaic. The MPRB will use \$600,000 in LSOHC funding to enhance four different types of native habitat in two distinct areas totaling approximately 150 acres. The Twin and Sweeney Lakes area in the northwest corner of Wirth (sometimes called the "Back 40") includes approximately 49 acres of oak forest and two lakes with 5000 feet of shoreline. The South Wirth Area is comprised of 142 acres of oak forest and oak savanna and 22 acres of wetlands primarily south of Glenwood Road. This area is home to the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, the quaking bog, and globally rare examples of oak savanna.

Enhancements in these two project areas will improve shoreline, wetland, forest, and savanna habitats for a variety of animals, including migratory birds on the Mississippi Flyway, just three miles to the east. Wirth, combined with the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, creates an alternate migratory route through the heart of the metro area. Activities in all habitat types will include removal of invasive vegetation, planting of appropriate local ecotype native species, and mitigation of erosion caused in part by invasive species choking out important native shrubs, groundcovers, and young trees upon which wildlife depend for survival.

The MPRB battles invasive species because they regenerate easily unless aggressively removed. In forests, invasive species removal will allow germination of native oak acorns and regeneration of these forests over time. A more diverse age range of native trees and shrubs provides greater variety in habitat niches for birds and small mammals. In the savannas, grassy openings can be reclaimed, thereby providing rare edge habitat for nesting birds and hunting grounds for raptors. Removal of reed canary grass and reduction of cattails from the Wirth Lake wetlands will increase the amount of open water and allow the existing native seed bank to germinate and diversify the species mix. This greater diversity will in turn provide broader food and nesting options for birds and aquatic animals. Correction of erosion and removal of buckthorn along the Twin and Sweeney Lake shorelines will stabilize the littoral zone and create habitat for spawning fish, as well as for reptiles and amphibians. Because these two lakes have residential frontage everywhere except in Wirth Park, the 5000 feet of shoreline included in this project comprise the single largest opportunity to improve habitat on these lakes.

Enhancing four types of habitat together will provide full life cycle benefits to a variety of animals. Many species require a range of landscape types to successfully breed, feed, and find shelter. The close proximity of these different habitats within each of Wirth's project areas is extremely rare in the metro area, and is one of the reasons the land was originally purchased and permanently protected.

Specifically, these enhancements will have positive effects on species currently found in the park, such as pileated woodpecker, green heron, scarlet tanager, red-eyed vireo, and broad-winged hawk; red fox, mink, and bats; painted and snapping turtles, western chorus frog, leopard frog, gray tree frog, and Blanding's turtle. The proposed habitat enhancements would also provide appropriate environments for birds listed in Audubon's Top 20 Birds in Decline, such as common grackle, eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, horned lark, snow bunting, and whip-poor-will.

These enhancements are supported by the public and are a key component of the Wirth Park Master Plan. Since 2005, MPRB Citizens Advisory Committees have consistently listed natural resource enhancements as top priorities. This funding would allow for more economical management in the future, because the MPRB would be

able to focus on ensuring quality habitat in perpetuity, rather than just trying to keep the buckthorn and other invasive species under control. LSOHC funding would also leverage additional cash and in-kind assistance from the Conservation Corps, the Teen Teamworks Green Team (a MPRB summer youth employment program that focuses on environmental job skills training for inner city youth), and The Friends of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden. The restoration costs per acre for this request are well within LSOHC funding metrics.

When Wirth Park was established more than 100 years ago as an urban natural area, the land was relatively untouched and not impacted by urbanization or invasives. Times have changed. Buckthorn, reed canary grass, honeysuckle, and erosion threaten the quality of this critical mosaic of metro habitat. Every year that passes allows these species a greater foothold. LSOHC funding will allow MPRB and its partners to get out ahead of habitat loss. It will return Wirth to its historic place as a prime example of wetland, woodland, savanna, shoreline, and lake habitats.

Planning:

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H4 Restore and protect shallow lakes
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H6 Protect and restore critical in-water habitat of lakes and streams
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU6 Reduce Upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices

Plans Addressed:

- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Sustainability Framework
- National Audubon Society Top 20 Common Birds in Decline
- National Fish Habitat Action Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for States and Physiographic Regions
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Projects Joint Ventures Plan
- MPRB Theo. Wirth Regional Park Master Plan (under approval)

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Restore or enhance habitat on permanently protected land
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity
- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)
- Protect, enhance, and restore riparian and littoral habitats on lakes to benefit game and nongame fish species

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- Parks and Trails Fund

Theodore Wirth Park has received funding from the Parks and Trails fund in past years which has improved recreational facilities and existing recreational structures in the park. Work has improved trails, beaches, playgrounds, a picnic pavilion and other features. Some parks and trails funding enhanced a wetland adjacent to Wirth Lake which also receives storm water from a parking lot. Clean Water funds received by the Bassett Creek watershed improved the Wirth Lake outlet to Bassett Creek, a key project in its TMDL.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

Wirth was established more than 100 years ago to provide habitat within the urban area. Over the years, portions of the 750 acres, such as the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary and the quaking bog, have been set aside as nature areas because they provide rare and unique habitats for plants and animals. In essence, LSOHC funding will further the decades of effort by MPRB staff and volunteers to protect, preserve, and enhance the Wirth landscape. The Eloise Butler garden and the quaking bog, specifically, have been carefully managed, but sit within South Wirth woods increasingly impacted by invasive species. LSOHC funding will extend the work done in these two habitat islands out into the broader landscape. Volunteers and youth teams have been working to remove buckthorn and other invasives, especially on the shorelines of Twin and Sweeney Lakes. Without a major removal and erosion stabilization effort, however, these invasives will return. LHOHC funding will leverage the volunteer and youth hours already used and allow these groups to participate in enriching habitat management and enhancement work in the future, rather than continued invasive species removal.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The stewardship plan for the restored habitat in Wirth Plan will be led by MPRB environmental services and planning staff. The primary focus will be to continue reducing the seed beds of the invasive species, stabilizing eroded areas, and supporting the re-establishment of native species. They will contract with organizations like Conservation Corps and engage Green Team of Teen Teamworks, as necessary. The Green Team consists of youth workers who spend their summer developing job skills in environmental work in the Minneapolis park system. A portion of their time is dedicated to invasive species removal. The 5-year grant is expected to significantly decrease the level of invasive species, thus maximizing the impact of \$60,000 in annual habitat restoration funding and efforts of staff and contractors. In addition, committed volunteer groups such as the Friends of the Eloise Butler Garden will help sustain the restored habitat. The Friends of Eloise Butler have found that after about five years of intensive invasive control, the level of invasive species is reduced to around 10% of the initial effort. Finally, all erosion work is expected to be stabilized before the end of the grant.

Permanent Protection:

*Is the activity on permanently protected land and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15? - **Yes (County/Municipal)***

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
upland Invasive species removal	2019
upland erosion repairs and establishment	2019
upland native tree, shrub and forb enhancement planting and seeding	2019
wetland/shoreline grading and erosion repair	2019
wetland/shoreline invasive species removal	2019
wetland/shoreline native re-vegetation	2019

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need *Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of restored habitat.*
- Improved aquatic habitat indicators *Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of wetlands and littoral areas restored habitat.*
- Protected habitats will hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting *Increased percentage of native plant species relative to non-natives and plant diversity will be assessed during annual site visits of restored habitat.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan

Total Amount of Request: \$ 600000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$35,000	\$160,000	MPRB General Fund,MPRB General Fund,MPRB General Fund,MPRB General Fund	\$195,000
Contracts	\$500,000	\$0		\$500,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$65,000	\$0		\$65,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$600,000	\$160,000		\$760,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
planning project manager	0.16	5.00	\$15,000	\$45,000	MPRB General Fund	\$60,000
environmental coordinator	0.20	5.00	\$20,000	\$60,000	MPRB General Fund	\$80,000
summer youth crew leaders	0.30	5.00	\$0	\$9,000	MPRB General Fund	\$9,000
summer youth crew workers	2.70	5.00	\$0	\$46,000	MPRB General Fund	\$46,000
Total	3.36	20.00	\$35,000	\$160,000		\$195,000

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	15	0	135	0	150
Total	15	0	135	0	150

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$252,000	\$0	\$348,000	\$0	\$600,000
Total	\$252,000	\$0	\$348,000	\$0	\$600,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	150	0	0	0	0	150
Total	150	0	0	0	0	150

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$600,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600,000
Total	\$600,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$600,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

1 miles

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Hennepin

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Wirth Park	02924220	150	\$760,000	yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type protect.

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.