

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2010 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

LCCMR ID: 095-C

Project Title:

Protection of Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

LCCMR 2010 Funding Priority:

C. Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Acquisition

Total Project Budget: \$ \$4,038,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 2 years, 2010 - 2012

Other Non-State Funds: \$ \$40,000

Summary:

One thousand five hundred acres of rare and unique Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem, located in the Upper Minnesota River Valley, will be preserved and enhanced through perpetual conservation easements.

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Sponsoring Organization: Renville SWCD

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Location:

Region: Central, SW

County Name: Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Redwood, Renville, Yellow Medicine

City / Township:

_____ Knowledge Base	_____ Broad App.	_____ Innovation
_____ Leverage	_____ Outcomes	
_____ Partnerships	_____ Urgency	_____ TOTAL

MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: Protection of Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Minnesota River Valley contains a narrow ribbon of exposed ancient granite rock outcrops that provide unique landscape features, a spiritual homeland for the Dakota people, as well as habitat for specialized plant and animal communities rarely found elsewhere in Minnesota. Rock outcrops are threatened by aggregate mining, overgrazing and other development interests. Removal of the rock results in severe degradation and permanent loss of these unique landscape features. This project will offer an economically viable option for landowners to preserve and enhance rock outcrops within a five county area of the Upper Minnesota River Valley. During this time of financial downturn, there is a possibility of increased highway construction due to federal stimulus monies which may increase the demand for aggregate. The rock outcrops, and their associated wetland complexes, are home to state and federal rare, threatened, and endangered species (both flora and fauna). Protection and restoration of rock outcrop habitats will benefit the species found in this ecosystem. When scoring applications, special consideration will be given to rock outcrops harboring these species.

Under ML 2007 5(b) 212.4 acres were protected. In 2009, the LCCMR recommended an additional \$1,500,000 in funding to protect 530 acres. This 2010 grant application is being prepared to provide funding to protect the remaining 1,500 acres of Rock Outcrops owned by landowners who are not funded under the 2009 application, but are strongly interested in a conservation easement. Full funding of this application will be the **final** phase and draw this land protection project to completion.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT RESULTS

Result 1: Habitat Protection through Perpetual Easements Budget: **\$3,813,000**

This project will protect approximately 1,500 acres of rock outcrop complexes within the Minnesota River Corridor and its tributaries. This will be in addition to the 212.4 acres already protected through the ML 2007 5(b) and the anticipated 530 acres to be protected with a 2009 Environment & Natural Resources Trust Fund grant. This project will utilize a scoring system to identify and protect the highest quality sites along the Minnesota River Corridor within the five counties. Compensation for easements to willing landowners will be secured using the local cropland rates of the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program administered through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and Renville, Redwood, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, and Lac qui Parle Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). Easement applications will be prepared and processed by the local SWCD staff and BWSR. Applications will be prioritized and funding will be recommended by a local work group comprised of technical experts from local, state, and federal agencies. The easement will be held by the State of Minnesota working through BWSR. The RIM easement maintains private ownership. Maintenance is shared by the State and the landowner working with the local SWCD office. The local SWCD will conduct an annual inspection of the easement to evaluate the easement for compliance and to determine management needs. Non-compliance or practice failure issues will follow the RIM process. The RIM program strives to achieve a high degree of cooperation between state and local government and the landowner.

Protection of Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

Deliverable	Completion Date
1. RIM Easement applications for 1,500 acres submitted to BWSR for processing	6-30-2011
2. RIM Easements processed, recorded & payments issued	12-31-2011

Result 2: Habitat Protection Invasive Species Removal Budget: \$225,000

A Conservation Plan is developed for each RIM easement. That plan outlines conservation practices such as removal of native and non-native invasive species and habitat protection, and also provides for improvement measures. Habitat maintenance may include rotational grazing systems, fencing, native and non-native invasive species removal (i.e. Red Cedar, Buckthorn, Siberian Elm & Sumac), prescribed burning and in some cases seeding of native species. We will continue to leverage additional funding from federal, state, local, and private agencies to supplement restoration activities. \$225,000/750acres = \$300/ac.

Restoration will begin as easements are recorded and landowners paid. Individual easement conservation plan practices will be targeted for completion within one year of easement recording. Restoration on all easements will be completed by June 30, 2012.

Deliverable	Completion Date
1. Conservation Plans written & reviewed with landowners	6-30-2011
2. Conservation Plans implemented	6-30-2012

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Renville SWCD is the lead for grant administration. Throughout the grant period, SWCD staff in each of the five counties will work with landowners in their respective county to promote and process easements, as well as develop conservation and restoration plans. The US Fish & Wildlife Service and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will provide staff time for the technical evaluation of easement applications and restoration practices. County Boards of Commissioners, along with the Upper and Lower Sioux Indian Communities, have provided letters of support for this project. Soil & Water Conservation District Boards of Supervisors in the five Counties have each submitted a letter of support and have pledged staff time aimed toward the successful completion of this project.

B. Timeline Requirements

Easement applications will be completed and scored by fall of 2010. Easement processing will take from six months to a year as processing can be delayed if title issues arise. After easements are recorded, restoration work can begin. Restoration completion is dependent on weather conditions. This is a two year project; from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2012.

C. Long-Term Strategy

ML 2007 5(b) LCCMR funded the initial \$563,000 to protect 212.4 acres of Granite Rock Outcrops and Associated Wetlands in Redwood and Renville Counties. In 2009, the LCCMR recommended an additional \$1,500,000 to protect 530 acres in an expanded area which includes five counties along the Minnesota River. SWCD Staff in the five counties have been contacting landowners and anticipate applications far in excess of the 530 acres. Those contacts have lead staff to conclude that the current application to protect 1,500 acres will be the last application and that full funding would be sufficient to provide any interested landowners with an opportunity to enroll in a perpetual RIM easement to protect their eligible lands.

Project Budget
Protection of Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

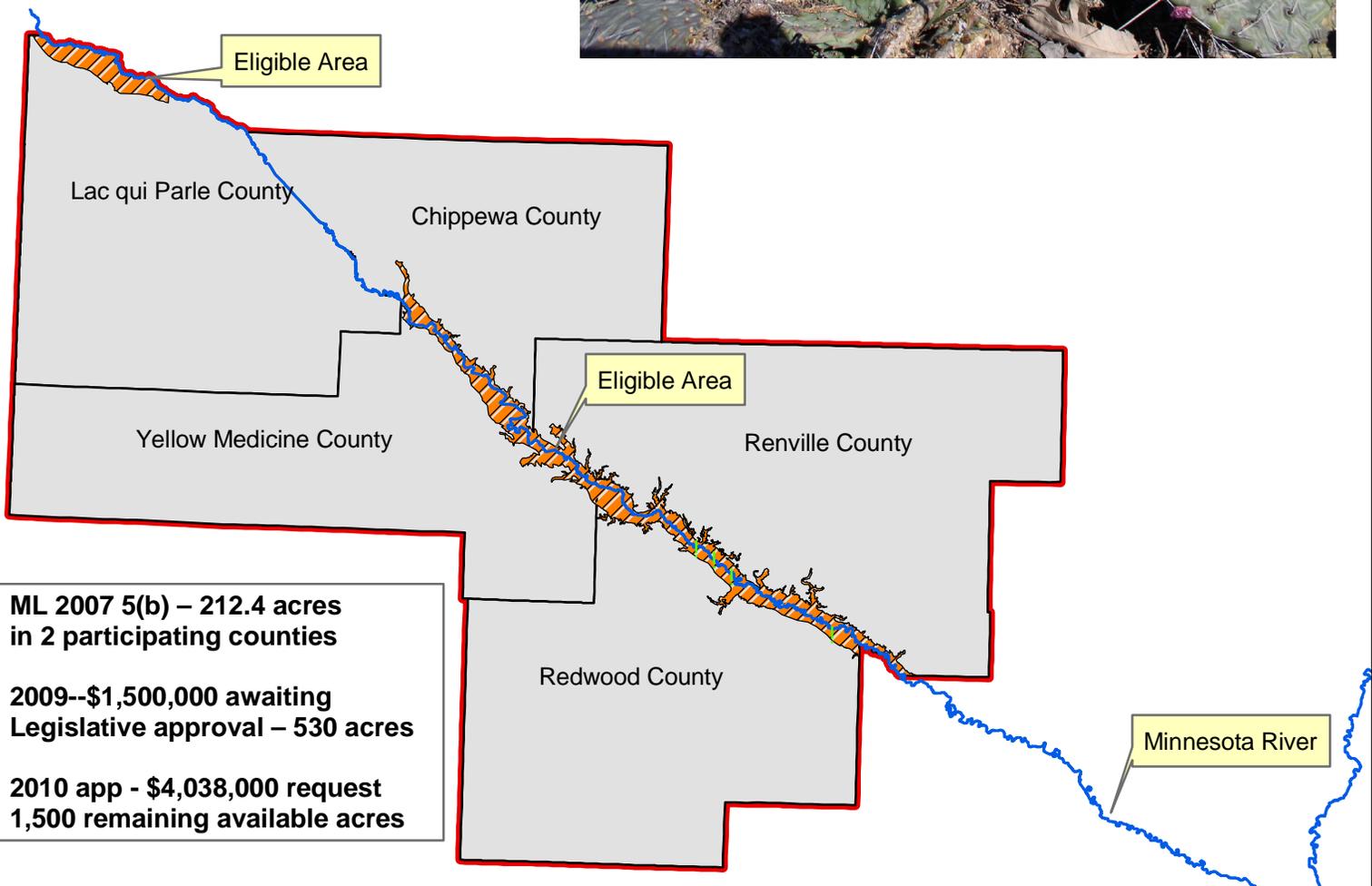
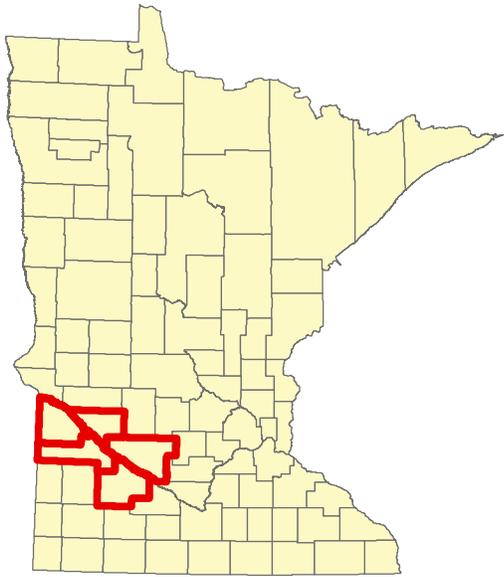
IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET: (Two years from 7/1/2010 to 6/30/2012)

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Personnel: Each of the 5 SWCD offices will receive a base amount to promote the program within their county-\$2,500/SWCD office for technical staff. Anticipate 3% FTE in each of the 5 SWCD offices. Salaries & benefits vary as individual SWCD Boards determine those amounts. Salary, benefit & job description information can be obtained from each individual SWCD.	\$ 12,500
Project Manager & Renville SWCD Office Manager will share administrative responsibilities. Estimate 4% FTE total.	\$ 3,500
\$7,500/easement for the Easement Specialist in the SWCD where the land is located to process easements and develop conservation plans (20 easements). Estimate 9% FTE. Salaries, benefits, job titles & duties vary as individual SWCD Board of Supervisors determine personnel issues.	\$ 150,000
Contracts:	\$ -
BWSR for Easement Processing (\$350 X 20 easements)	\$ 7,000
Local Attorneys for Title work & Title Insurance (\$2,000/easement X 20 Easements)	\$ 40,000
Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements): 1,500 acres X \$2,400/acre in perpetual RIM easements. Landowners retain ownership	\$ 3,600,000
Restoration: 750 acres X \$300/acre. Estimated that half of all easement acres will require some degree of native and non-native invasive species removal, prescribed burning, seeding of native species and in some cases fencing. If this amount is insufficient to do necessary restoration work outlined in the conservation plan, additional funds will be solicited from private conservation groups or other conservation agencies.	\$ 225,000
TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET REQUEST TO LCCMR	\$ 4,038,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: US FWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program for habitat restoration	\$ 40,000	<i>Pending Congressional appropriations</i>
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost-Share Program through the Board of Water & Soil Resources -- awaiting legislative funding of the program	\$ 20,000	<i>Pending</i>
In-kind Services During Project Period: Staff from USFWS, DNR Ecological Services and possibly others score applications (minimum 3/team). Each site is physically viewed by the team.	\$ 27,168	
Remaining \$ from Current Trust Fund Appropriation: ML 2007 5(b)	\$0	
Funding History: \$1,500,000 has been recommended for funding under the 2009 proposals. Awaiting legislative approval.	\$ -	Pending

LCCMR Granite Rock Outcrop Grant Eligible Area



ML 2007 5(b) – 212.4 acres in 2 participating counties

2009--\$1,500,000 awaiting Legislative approval – 530 acres

2010 app - \$4,038,000 request 1,500 remaining available acres

Legend

-  ML 2007 5(b) Easements
-  MN River
-  Grant Eligible Area
-  Participating Counties

Upper MN River Valley

4

93,000 46,500 0 93,000 Feet

LCCMR Proposal 2010

Renville Soil & Water Conservation District

Protection of Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

Project Manager: Thomas J. Kalahar, District Technician, Renville Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), Olivia MN

Tom Kalahar has 30 years of experience as a technician at the Renville SWCD. His experience includes administration of the State of Minnesota easement programs since their inception in the late 80's. Renville SWCD has had nearly 400 easement applications funded by the RIM, PWP & CREP programs. Tom has carried the bulk of the responsibilities for promoting the easements, doing the easement processing, as well as working with landowners on practice implementation and long-term maintenance. He has worked extensively with the easement staff at the Board of Water & Soil Resources and has an excellent working relationship with both the local attorney handling the legal work and the Renville County Recorders office. He has a good working relationship with the Redwood, Yellow Medicine, Chippewa, and Lac qui Parle SWCD staff who also have extensive experience with easement promotion and processing.

Tom would be the lead staff person in promotion, administration, and implementation of the grant. He would oversee any staff working with landowners and with the overall easement process.

Organization Description: Renville Soil & Water Conservation District is a Local Unit of Government which employs two full-time technicians and an administrative assistant. All of the employees have a solid understanding of natural resources as well as conservation easement program management. The SWCD Staff & the five elected Supervisors are committed to conserving the natural resources of Renville County and are committed to working with other Soil & Water Conservation Districts as well as other local, state and federal agencies to preserve and enhance the natural resources of the State of Minnesota.