

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
2011-2012 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

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**LCCMR ID: 178-G**

**Project Title:** Minnesota Conservation Apprentice Academy

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**Category:** G. Environmental Education

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**Total Project Budget: \$** \$387,000

**Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested:** 2.5 yrs, July 2011 - Dec 2013

**Other Non-State Funds: \$** 0

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**Summary:**

The apprentice program trains the next generation of conservation managers by pairing experienced Soil and Water Conservation District professionals with 30 university-level MCC students during summer field season.

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**Sponsoring Organization:** Board of Water and Soil Resources

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**Location**

**Region:** Statewide

**Ecological Section:** Statewide

**County Name:** Statewide

**City / Township:**

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<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/> Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Base
<input type="checkbox"/> Extent of Impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific/Tech Basis	<input type="checkbox"/> Urgency
<input type="checkbox"/> Capacity Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/> Leverage	<input type="checkbox"/> Employment	<input type="checkbox"/> TOTAL <input type="checkbox"/> %

# 2011-2012 MAIN PROPOSAL

## PROJECT TITLE: Minnesota Conservation Apprenticeship Academy

### I. PROJECT STATEMENT

1. The two primary goals of the Conservation Apprenticeship program are to: 1) train and mentor Minnesota's future conservationists, transferring knowledge from experienced professionals to the next generation of conservation managers and 2) to bring much needed apprenticeship service to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) during their busy construction season to increase the number and quality of on-the-ground conservation projects.
2. Why is the Conservation Mentor Program and Academy important?
  1. Many of our most experienced conservation professionals and practitioners are nearing retirement age, but due to budget/hiring constraints will not be replaced until they have left employment. Consequently, we are missing a great opportunity to transfer knowledge and experience to the next generation responsible for Minnesota's conservation.
  2. While college graduates with conservation-related degrees are expected to be knowledgeable in technology, theory and research methods, their practical, on-the-ground skills need development. Communicating with landowners and adjusting designs for field nuances are vital to the success of conservation projects and best learned from seasoned professionals. In turn, apprentices will bring knowledge of emerging technologies and other innovations to improve the quality and productivity of current conservation efforts. This allows for a cross-pollination of ideas and solutions for natural resource challenges.
  3. Conservation funding from LCCMR, Bonding and General Fund sources, along with Federal Farm Bill Conservation programs (EQIP, WRP, CRP), would be accelerated with this cost-effective workforce dedicated to designing, installing, and maintaining conservation projects.
3. What are some of the benefits?
  1. Familiarizing future conservation leaders with Minnesota's various land-use practices, water and soil resources, plant and animal habitats, and landowner concerns.
  2. Showcasing the benefits of living and working in rural Minnesota, especially for college graduates who may not have considered a career in Greater Minnesota.
  3. Promoting greater diversity among young people interested in conservation careers.
  4. Educating future employees for upcoming jobs in federal, state, local and private sector conservation and green economy jobs with real-world experience in design and construction.
  5. Guaranteeing college students at least two years of environmental study to affirm their career choice and bring this passion to their remaining studies.
  6. Proving participants with access to (federal) AmeriCorps service and education award opportunities.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

**Activity 1:** Refine academy structure, recruit participating SWCDs, with 30 employment agreements

**Budget:** \$ 52,000

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Academy structure and participant list (year 1)	March 2013

**Activity 2:** Recruit, select and train academy participants

**Budget:** \$335,000

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Recruiting materials for use at U of M, MnSCU and private institutions, with professional and technical environmental curriculums	September 2012
2. Select candidates and develop individual workplans and mentor commitments; place persons at SWCD offices	April – May 2013
3. Train participants; MCC lead, others assist	May - June 2013
4. Evaluate progress and contributions	September 2011
5. Repeat for year two, with adjustments	October 2014

## III. PROJECT STRATEGY

### A. Project Team/Partners

MN Conservation Corps – recruit, select, employ and train – receives 97 percent of project dollars

SWCDs – provide workplace, daily assignments, and mentor/training

BWSR – grants and training using [classified staff paid exclusively with special project funds](#) – receives 3 percent of dollars funds

NRCS – train and mentor within district offices

MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts – assist with recruiting

### B. Timeline Requirements

In order to continue the apprenticeship program long enough to address anticipated retirements and bridge several university graduating classes, we projected a need to run this program at least four years. Assuming the 2010 legislature approves our pending grant, this application would address years three and four. We did not and do not anticipate a need for LCCMR funding beyond a total of eight years (i.e. six additional years) at the very most.

Money is used to fund summer construction and field work. This means there is a small time lag between appropriation and use of the majority of the funds during the following full field season.

### C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

State and Federal conservation agencies will consider successful interns for future employment opportunities and build the **Minnesota Conservation Apprenticeship Academy** into other requests as a long-term strategy.

## 2011-2012 Detailed Project Budget

### IV. TOTAL PROJECT REQUEST BUDGET (Two years)

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
<b>Personnel:</b> BWSR Program trainer; 2 years; 5% FTE	\$ 10,000
<b>Contracts:</b> Minnesota Conservation Corps - program manager, recruiter, administrator, and 30 SWCD interns for approximately 600 hours per year; for two years	\$ 363,000
<b>Travel:</b> In-state work-related travel for MCC supervisors; 2 years (included in MCC contract)	\$ 14,000
<b>TOTAL ENVIRONMENT &amp; NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST</b>	<b>\$ 387,000</b>

### V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
<b>Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:</b> Unsecured federal farm bill project dollars proportioned to 30 SWCDs (predominately Wetland Reserve Program and Environmental Quality Incentive Program.	\$ 110,000	<i>pending</i>
<b>Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:</b> RIM/WRP wetland restoration, project realty, project design dollars associated with cost-share programs managed by SWCDs. (State base grants to 30 SWCDs estimated in column at right.)	\$ 700,000	<i>pending</i>
<b>In-kind Services During Project Period:</b> SWCD & NRCS to provide office, computer/IT services, substantial vehicle access, and technical training	\$ 190,000	estimated
<b>Funding History:</b> 2010 Legislative anticipated to fund previous application	\$ 368,000	

## **Project Manager Qualifications**

### **Project Manager: Steve Woods, Assistant Director, BWSR**

Steve Woods has 25 years of management, planning, design, and construction experience obtained with private and public sector organizations spanning the Upper Midwest. Strong leadership, inter-governmental, and technical skills are all leveraged in current position as one of two Assistant Directors at the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources.

**Education:** Bachelor Agricultural Engineering, University of Minnesota  
Masters of Public Administration, Hamline University

Licensed Professional Civil Engineer  
MN Supreme Court list of approved ADR neutrals

### **Experience:**

#### **Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, Assistant Director 1999—Present**

As Assistant Director for Statewide Operations, directly supervise three regional supervisors and the agency's performance review coordinator. The 37 regional employees are located in seven field offices and provide financial, technical, and administrative support to a network of 91 soil and water conservation districts, 47 watershed districts, 87 counties, and over 300 wetland regulatory jurisdictions.

#### **Montgomery Watson Harza, Inc., Supervising Professional 1987—1999**

Served as Office Manager for two years and long-term Manager of the Water Resources Division of this international environmental consulting and design firm's Great Lakes Office. Responsible for managing a variety of hydrologic and environmental restoration projects across the Upper Midwest for on-time and on-schedule completion.

**Organization Description:** **MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)** will serve as the lead state agency for this grant. The BWSR has a strong connection with SWCDs and their implementation role in soil and water conservation. We intend to use existing financial and administrative processes to provide oversight.

**Minnesota Conservation Corps:** Len Price, Executive Director, provides overall leadership and strategic direction. As a former teacher (34 years) and state legislator (20 years), Len's strengths are his public relations skills, knowledge of government agency operations and numerous contacts at all levels of government. He served on the Minnesota Conservation Corps board of directors during its transition from a state agency to nonprofit, and joined the organization as Executive Director in 2005. Len currently serves on the boards of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and the Corps Network, a national association of conservation corps.

