Appendix C. Preserving or Enhancing Natural Resources Substantially Impaired or Destroyed

Name of Granting Agency: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Title of Grant Program/Opportunity: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program

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Short reference: Preserving or Enhancing Natural Resources

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C.1 Purpose and when to use Appendix C

Use Appendix C when the primary funded purpose of your project is to preserve or enhance an identifiable air, land, water or other natural resource that otherwise may be substantially impaired or destroyed.

For this funding opportunity, grant requests must be $20,000 to $150,000, and substantive project work must be completed within 12 months or less. Up to two additional months may be authorized for approved startup and closeout administration, but not to extend substantive project work.

A project in this activity area should connect three things: the natural resource, the existing condition or credible threat affecting it and the work proposed to preserve or enhance it.

A project does not fit this activity area solely because it takes place outdoors, uses native plants, improves the appearance of a site, supports recreation, includes volunteers or generally benefits the environment.

C.2 What makes a project fit

A project may fit this activity area when it identifies a specific natural resource or resource system, explains what is happening or reasonably may happen to that resource without the proposed work and proposes activities with a credible and direct relationship to preserving or enhancing the resource.

Natural resources may include air, land, water, lakes, rivers and streams, wetlands, groundwater, shorelines, soils, forests, prairies and grasslands, habitat, fish, wildlife, native vegetation and other ecological resources.

For this funding opportunity, preserving a natural resource may include reasonable work to prevent or reduce substantial impairment, degradation or loss, including addressing a credible threat before major damage occurs.

Enhancing a natural resource generally means improving its condition, quality, function, resilience or environmental value.

C.3 Natural resource, condition and proposed intervention

Your project should identify the natural resource and the condition or threat the project is intended to address.

The condition or threat may involve existing degradation or a reasonably anticipated risk. Depending on the resource and project, this may include erosion, habitat loss or fragmentation, invasive species, declining native vegetation, water-quality impairment, repeated disturbance, pollution, altered hydrology, climate-related stressors, disease, pests or another credible threat.

The DNR will determine whether the identified condition or threat and the proposed work are sufficient to meet the statutory requirement that the resource otherwise may be substantially impaired or destroyed. Applicants may rely on existing plans, observations, technical information, public data or other reasonable evidence appropriate to the project. A new technical study is not normally required for the Stage 1 Concept Note.

C.4 Projects that may fit

Depending on the resource, condition and proposed work, projects that may fit include:

- Habitat preservation, rehabilitation or enhancement
- Native vegetation or plant-community work that improves ecological condition or function
- Erosion prevention or stabilization that protects a natural resource

- Water, shoreline, wetland, forest, prairie, grassland, soil, fish, wildlife or habitat stewardship and management
- Invasive-species work when preserving or enhancing the affected resource is the project's primary purpose and another statutory activity area does not fit more directly
- Ecological repair or restoration following an identified disturbance
- Preventive stewardship addressing a credible threat to an existing resource
- Planning or assessment that directly supports a defined preservation or enhancement objective, subject to the requirements in this appendix

The activity used to carry out the project does not independently establish eligibility. The project must still connect the proposed work to preservation or enhancement of a natural resource that otherwise may be substantially impaired or destroyed.

C.5 Projects that do not fit

Appendix C is not intended to serve as a general environmental improvement category. A project may not fit when its primary purpose is:

- Beautification, general landscaping or general park improvement without a demonstrated natural-resource preservation or enhancement purpose
- Recreation infrastructure where natural-resource work is incidental
- Scientific research prohibited by the Community Grant Program
- General organizational planning or operating activity
- A project without an identifiable natural-resource condition or credible threat, or
- A project that inherently requires more than 12 months of substantive work or cannot reasonably be designed within the $20,000–$150,000 grant range

Planning or assessment may fit only when it directly supports a defined preservation or enhancement objective, produces an actionable result and has a reasonable pathway toward implementation.

An unresolved technical, permitting, site or approval matter does not automatically make a project ineligible unless it fails a published eligibility requirement. Otherwise, a material unresolved issue may affect evaluation under the published Project Feasibility criterion.

C.6 Activity-specific information required at Stage 1

If you select this as your primary activity area, the Stage 1 Concept Note will ask for concise information needed to understand how the project fits this activity area. You should be prepared to identify:

- The natural resource and general project location
- What is happening, or reasonably may happen, to the resource without the proposed work
- How you know about the condition or threat
- What the project proposes to do to preserve or enhance the resource
- The realistic natural-resource benefit expected from the project

- Known site, property-access, permit, approval, technical-expertise or other implementation issues that could materially affect feasibility

Stage 1 does not normally require a new technical study, detailed design, complete permit package, final landowner authorization or other developed Stage 2 documentation unless a specific requirement states otherwise.

C.7 Additional activity-specific information at Stage 2

If your Concept Note advances, the Stage 2 Full Application may ask for additional information needed to evaluate the actual project. Depending on the project, this may include:

- A more developed description of the resource condition, project area and proposed treatment or management method
- Maps, photographs, site information, species or planting information or technical designs when relevant
- Landowner or site authorization and the status of permits or approvals
- Technical expertise, contractor or partner roles and an implementation schedule
- Ecological risks and how the project will avoid unintended harm
- Maintenance, stewardship or continuing-responsibility needs
- Practical measures for understanding project progress and natural-resource results

The DNR will request only information relevant to the proposed project and the published Stage 2 evaluation criteria. A straightforward stewardship project should not be required to provide technical information needed only for a more complex construction, treatment or restoration project.

C.8 Site, permit, technical and continuing-responsibility issues

Some projects may require additional technical or specialist review because of the work proposed. This may include significant ground disturbance, engineered structures, hydrologic alteration, shoreline or wetland work, regulated waters, pesticides or herbicides, prescribed fire, vegetation removal, invasive-species treatment, threatened or endangered species, fish or wildlife habitat manipulation, cultural or archaeological resources, sensitive resource information or other specialized issues.

Projects involving Tribal lands, waters, natural resources, jurisdiction, treaty-protected interests, culturally important resources or other matters subject to Tribal governmental authority will require coordination, authorization or other action by the affected Tribal Nation. Applicants should not submit culturally restricted, sacred or other protected information through ordinary application fields.

When a permit, approval, property interest, technical standard or continuing stewardship responsibility is important to project feasibility, applicants should identify the issue at the stage when the DNR needs it. Not every permit, agreement, contractor or technical detail must be complete before an applicant can compete for funding.

The DNR will rely on applicable DNR and other authoritative technical requirements rather than creating separate Community Grant Program technical standards for each type of natural-resource work.

C.9 Help and technical information

Applicant resources and technical assistance may provide additional help with choosing the appropriate activity area, describing a natural-resource condition or threat, identifying project-specific technical requirements, planning for permits or site authorization and developing a realistic preservation or enhancement project.

Resources and technical assistance may explain the requirements in the RFP but do not create new eligibility or scoring requirements.