

Itasca County Environmental Trust Fund Grant Program Policy

September 25, 2007

I. Background: The Environmental Trust Fund was established as a part of state legislation that allowed Itasca County to sell tax-forfeited lakeshore lease lots. Receipts from the lease lot sales were deposited in a trust fund that earns interest income that then can be spent by the County Board for purposes related to the improvement of natural resources.

II. Responsible Departments: The County Auditor/Treasurer is responsible for the financial management of the Environmental Trust Fund. The Land Commissioner is responsible for the administration of the Trust Fund Grant Program as outlined in this policy. The Land Department Real Estate Specialist is responsible for the day-to-day coordination and management of the Trust Fund Grant Program.

III. Purpose: To expend interest-earned from Environmental Trust Fund for purposes related to the improvement of natural resources by partnering with non-profit organizations, governmental entities/agencies, and educational institutions within Itasca County with:

- 1) **Challenge grants** for natural resource improvement projects.
- 2) **Base grants** for natural resource improvement programs and activities that may include but are not limited to Soil and Water Conservation District, MN Extension – Itasca County, Forestry Education and Awareness Program, natural resource land acquisition and Itasca County capital expenditures. The Itasca County Board will review requests and allocate funds at their discretion. No matching funds are required.

IV. Challenge Grant Program Management:

1. The County Board shall receive an estimate of the amount of funds available for the upcoming year from the Auditor/Treasurer in November.
2. Upon receipt of this information the County Board shall set aside twenty-five percent or more of the available amount in reserve capacity and determine what amount (if any) shall be made available for the grant program during the upcoming year.
3. The Real Estate Specialist shall notify county departments and other interested parties of the availability of funds and provide applications to all interested parties throughout the year.
4. Applications for the grant program shall be due by January 1st of each year.
5. Following the application closing date the Environmental Trust Fund Grant Review Committee shall review, rate, and rank the grant proposals using the Project Evaluation Criteria within 30-60 days from the application due date. The review committee membership will include TLM staff and Land Department staff with technical input sought from MnDNR, SWCD, MPCA, and other agencies as deemed necessary. The Real Estate Specialist shall present the recommendations of the review committee to the County Board within 60 days from the application due date.
6. The County Board will review the recommendations, decide on, and approve grants at their discretion within the amount of funding available.

7. Funded projects can then begin promptly following County Board approval and must follow the timeline on the approved grant. Funding can be allocated either designated up-front or reimbursable as a part of the County Board decision.
8. During the course of the project progress reports must be submitted as required by the County. Following completion of the funded project a final report must be submitted that includes information about the project and measurement of the projects outcomes. Representatives may be asked to present the results at a County Board meeting.
9. Failure to submit a final report acceptable to Itasca County shall be grounds for a loss of eligibility for future Itasca County grants.

V. Challenge Grant Priorities:

1. Reserve Capacity: Twenty-five percent or more of the annual interest accrued will be placed/kept in reserve in order to strengthen the account, for future projects, for special projects, or for longer term multi-year projects.
2. Grant Program: The County Board may elect to allocate a certain amount or no amount of funding to the grant program each year. The grant program priorities for funding shall be as follows:
 - a. Enhancement: examples of projects include: prevention/mitigation of soil erosion, protection of water quality, protection/restoration of natural vegetation, wetland protection, establishment of vegetation buffers, and other practices consistent with the improvement of natural resources.
 - b. Service: examples of projects include: development and implementation of community service activities that promote natural resource improvement practices, cooperative clean-up projects of water resources such as streams, wetlands, and lakes. Other creative cooperative service projects that meet the program purpose are encouraged.
 - c. Education: examples of projects include: creation, development, and dissemination of educational programs and/or products such as manuals, brochures, videos, handbooks that disseminate natural resource improvement practices. Other creative cooperative educational projects that meet the program purpose are encouraged.
3. Additional priority shall be given to proposals that are hands-on oriented.
4. Planning activities or study proposals will generally be given low priority.
5. Additional priority will also generally be given to proposals that include a 25% or greater cash match.
6. The County cannot commit to projects beyond the available amount of funding.

VI. Challenge Grant Requirements:

1. Purpose: The grant program's purpose is to encourage and support natural resource improvement projects through cooperation between non-profit organizations and local government.
2. Eligible Applicants: Applications and grants are limited to non-profit organizations, governmental entities/agencies, and educational institutions within Itasca County.
3. Matching Contribution: Grants are awarded for a maximum of 50% of the total project costs. The maximum grant awarded is generally around \$10,000 but may be lower or higher based on the funding available and amount of applications. Applicant proposals must provide a 50% match. The 50% match can be either cash or in-kind services. Matching cash must be from a non-county environmental trust fund/county challenge grant source. The in-kind match can be in the form of volunteer labor, and contributions of materials, equipment, and services. Preference may be given to proposals with a 25% or greater cash match.
4. Ineligible projects/activities: Capital development / construction such as buildings and trails, curriculum development, existing organizational staff and program activities, project administration costs, overhead, and indirect costs.

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Board approved: 10/26/2004; 6/28/2005; 9/25/2007