

Grant Proposal Submitted to: Illinois Clean Energy
Community Foundation

**Re: Acquisition of Floodplain and Wetland along Kishwaukee River
(40.18-acres)**

Project Description:

The Boone County Conservation District is seeking funds to purchase 40.18-acres of conservation land, including three buildings located on the property. This proposal involves purchasing the property from CorLands, who acquired the property from willing sellers (John and Lois Holland). Funds from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, if awarded, would be used toward the purchase of the land and associated land acquisition costs and will not be used to cover the cost of the buildings located at the site.

Our proposal focuses on an opportunity to protect important conservation lands, preserve an important & strategic reach of the Kishwaukee River, which is classified as a “*Unique Aquatic Resource*,” and obtain a site that will significantly expand District facilities.

In 1995 the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Department of Conservation (now called the Illinois Department of Natural Resources) designated this reach of the Kishwaukee River as a “Unique Aquatic Resource” or Class “A” stream as part of their *Biological Stream Characterization Rating* analysis. Only a handful of streams were rated this highly throughout the entire state of Illinois.

The Kishwaukee River, its floodplain and associated wetlands are the dominant natural feature of the site. The site supports a rich blend of habitats and affords a diverse biologic ecology. As an example, a pair of Sand Hill Cranes, an Illinois state threatened species, nested in the wetlands at this site. An informal afternoon botanic inventory identified eight species of native plants including Blue Flag, Purple Meadow Rue, Swamp Milkweed, and Meadow Anemone. These riparian areas provide many important natural functions such as storing floodwater, improving water quality by filtering out nutrient rich sediments as well as providing habitat for a biologically rich ecology.

In 2006 Openlands collaborated with a group of organizations supported by funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, including the BCCD, to develop “*A Vision of the Kishwaukee River Water Trail*.” This plan details the location of existing and proposed elements for a water trail system beginning in McHenry County and continuing through to the confluence of the Kishwaukee and Rock Rivers. Acquisition of this site secures a strategic, public access point furthering the implementation of this vision plan. In addition, the buildings and property provide resources that can be converted to recreational and educational facilities not available at other Boone County Conservation District sites. Coupled with access to the Kishwaukee River and its’ associated wetlands, the site and facilities combine to offer an ideal balance of ecological, recreational, and educational resources.

Conservation of lands within this reach of the Kishwaukee River is a priority identified in the following documents:

- The Crow’s Foot Conservation Area Feasibility Study
- The Boone County Conservation District Open Space Plan
- The Boone County Conservation District Master Plan
- The Boone / Winnebago County Regional Greenways Plan

- The Belvidere / Boone County Comprehensive Plans
- The Kishwaukee River Ecosystem Partnership's Strategic Plan for Habitat Conservation and Restoration
- The Illinois Department of Natural Resources State Wildlife Management Plan.

The strategic value of this site, relative to the implementation of the above referenced plans, is key to the BCCD's decision to pursue this acquisition project. The site is centrally located between the City of Belvidere and the Village of Garden Prairie. Acquisition of this site establishes a public holding within the Crow's Foot Conservation Area, the value and importance of which goes well beyond this single property.

Acquisition of this site sets the stage for future conservation efforts by: *providing an ideal location for public access and parking; *providing a great location for a public canoe access; *taking advantage of buildings and structures located on the property capable of being easily remodeled, to serve a range of public functions including recreational, educational, and administrative uses. Purchase of this property with its' residential dwelling and outbuildings from a willing seller establishes a positive perspective with surrounding residents, which may foster additional interest and participation in future conservation efforts including land acquisitions, use of conservation easements, and/or programs administered by other conservation organizations.

The site is currently leased from CorLands by BCCD. The residential dwelling is being used for office & meeting space. The out buildings are being used for storage. The residential dwelling and shop building need renovations to meet building codes and American with Disabilities Act compliance before either can be made available for complete public use. The pole barn will be used for storing canoes and outdoor recreational equipment.

Nearly all BCCD sites and all programs are open to the general public. Boone County residents as well as non-county residents enjoy the wide range of programs and facilities available at District sites. This site, located off of US Route 20, will be easily accessible off of Interstate-90 and will also be available to the public at large. *The Crow's Foot Conservation Area Feasibility Study* was completed with a regional-use perspective as an essential element of consideration.

Work Plan:

The BCCD now seeks to obtain the funds needed to purchase the property and complete this land acquisition project. CorLands has provided a budget detail that outlines all of the acquisition costs. If this project is selected for funding by the ICECF, a closing will be scheduled with CorLands and the project will be completed at the soonest opportunity. The work plan includes publicizing the grant award with press releases about the project site, the funding sources and acknowledgement of the technical assistance provided by CorLands.

Our arrangement with CorLands has the District leasing the property and existing facilities until the purchase can be made. As such, the District is managing the buildings and property, but is currently limiting public access as none of the buildings meet the requirements for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or other code requirements for public use. Ollmann Earnest Architects have evaluated the buildings to identify and address the code issues. They have provided a technical drawing that identifies the existing deficiencies and offers the design details to correct them. This service was donated to the District.

The District has requested funds from the City of Belvidere Land/Cash fund toward the purchase of the buildings and to cover the expenses associated with the required improvements, including

the installation of a gravel parking area. Completing these improvements will facilitate the ability of the District to provide public use and access of this property.

Description of your organization’s ability to carry out the project:

The Boone County Conservation District (BCCD) has successfully completed two Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation land acquisition grant projects. The first project was named “Acquisition of Kishwaukee River Bottomland – 103.32 acres” and was completed in the spring of 2005. The second project was “Acquisition of Piscasaw Creek Habitat Corridor (80-Acres)” and was completed in August 2008. It is our understanding that the ICECF has been satisfied with the results of these projects.

Additional information about the BCCD: The BCCD was established by referendum and became the first Conservation District created in the State of Illinois on November 4, 1964. A five-member board of trustees the District and these trustees are appointed to serve five-year terms by the Boone County Board. The District has ten full-time employees and several part-time employees. During the summer the district hires seasonal employees to staff camp programs, maintain district properties, and implement habitat restoration projects.

Our mission statement and the state enabling legislation that allowed the creation of the Boone County Conservation District emphasizes the District’s role as an agency devoted to conserving the ecological functions of the land. This is a difficult concept to convey to the general public, political officials, and others who often view these conservation lands simply as recreational amenities.

The BCCD provides opportunities for a mix of passive recreational activities. Admittedly, even these kinds of activities have the potential to adversely affect the land, water, and wildlife resources our district is entrusted to conserve if these uses occur in excess. As such, we strive to meet our public’s expectations to provide:

- Public access to most district sites
- Clean and safe facilities
- Opportunities for passive, outdoor recreation
- Camp programs for youth
- Family programs and activities
- Special programs and events like the Autumn Pioneer Festival, Garden & Holiday Walks, Sylvania Wilderness Program, and much more.
- Educational programming that is integrated with and meets the needs of our schools and professional educators:
 - o The District employs three full-time environmental educators
 - o This last year the District provided educational programs to more than 3399 children in the first through fifth grades with an additional 600 adults accompanying them.

Currently, the BCCD is responsible for preserving, restoring and maintaining nearly 2500 acres of conservation land, over 16 miles of paved recreational paths, 17 miles of mowed hiking trails, and a 4.5 mile equestrian trail, and one 15-acre off leash dog area. We provide a number of other amenities including 10 shelters and two nature centers, and one administration building.

When and how project will be evaluated:

If awarded this grant, we will evaluate our success upon the timely acquisition of fee simple title for this forty-acre property. We will document our efforts to publicize and promote the acquisition and future use of the site.

Plans to publicize the results of the project:

The Boone County Conservation District will distribute a press announcement to publicize this successful effort to conserve natural lands along the Kishwaukee River. The press release will recognize the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Grant award, any grant funds awarded from the IDNR OLT program and the technical assistance provided by CorLands. The District will host an open house type event shortly after the purchase to introduce the property and facilities located there to the public and local media, including the three Rockford television stations. Public access and use of the site will occur as financial resources become available for site improvements such as a public parking area, trail system development, and building modifications to meet current codes for public use & safety. The BCCD will also publish an article (or perhaps a series of articles) in our newsletter, distributed to nearly 5000 addresses, and post these article(s) about the project on our website.

Detailed line item budget:

Narrative description of budget:

- The Boone County Conservation District seeks to acquire a 40-acre property. CorLands has purchased the site with the intent of transferring the land & facilities to the BCCD as a willing seller.

| Line Item Expense | Anticipated Funding Source | Dollar Amount |
|---|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Purchase 40-acres and buildings from CorLands | Grant award from ICECF | \$240,000.00 |
| | OLT Grant from IDNR | \$140,000.00 |
| | City of Belvidere Land – Cash Fund | \$245,000.00 |
| Appraisal costs, closing costs, and other acquisition costs | Grant award from IDNR OLT Program | \$52,418.00 |
| Total Project Cost | | \$677,418.00 |

Total project costs are estimated at \$677,418. These costs include an estimated \$52,418 for appraisal fees and other acquisition & closing costs. The appraisal completed by Frank Harrison provided an estimated value for the buildings (\$270,000) and an estimated value of the land (\$281,000). Based on this, the value of the land accounts for 51% of the site value and the value of the buildings is 49% of the site value. Our actual negotiated purchase price was \$625,000. This grant proposal seeks funding toward the purchase the land and the acquisition costs

associated with purchasing the land. The land portion of this acquisition project is \$318,750 and 50% of the related acquisition costs outlined in the CorLands document attached with this proposal or \$26,209. The total cost associated with the land acquisition portion of this project is \$344,959.

The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Letter of August 11 invited the Boone County Conservation District to submit a full proposal for a grant up to \$240,000. Total funds requested from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation is \$240,000.

Summary / Conclusion:

To summarize, this grant proposal is prepared as a request for funding the purchase of natural lands located along the Kishwaukee River. The project involves the purchase of 40.18-acres of land and will utilize Open Land Trust grant funds awarded from IDNR which were awarded specifically to be used to purchase land in the Crow's Foot Conservation Study Area and BCCD Land/Cash funds as a match to our grant request.

The Boone County Conservation District is grateful for having been provided the opportunity to submit this proposal, and is hopeful that the project will be deemed worthy of your approval for funding. The District will be very happy to supply any additional information or answer any questions you might have about this request.

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