



*Most of the land in Comfort Lake – Forest Lake Watershed District is held in private ownership. As such, the health of the watershed relies on individuals making choices that protect and improve the natural resources on private lands. To incentivize continuing positive land management, CLFLWD provides a Watershed Legacy Payment Program. This program offers annual payments to landowners that meet the program criteria. All residential landowners in the watershed are eligible for the program but must meet program criteria to receive a payment.*

*A residential landowner applies for the program and schedules a site visit with CLFLWD staff. The applicant's property is evaluated using criteria developed by staff to evaluate existing resource concerns, stormwater treatment and storage, native habitat, and other relevant property characteristics. Following the evaluation, the applicant can be enrolled in the program. Program participants who do not meet the evaluation criteria are given specific improvements that must be made to qualify for a payment and have access to CLFLWD's technical and financial assistance. Participants who do meet the criteria qualify for a lower (50% of annual payment) or higher (100%) payment tier. The condition of participants property is documented, and is reinspected the year following enrollment, and then every three years.*

*2023 was the pilot year for the program. Six participants were enrolled as of October, all of whom qualified for the 100% payment tier. These participants will receive \$300 payments in December. The current program is funded from CLFLWD levy dollars. Much of the administration of the program is already accounted for as part of our existing NPS pollution reduction program. The program is easily scalable with additional funding.*

**10) Describe public benefit:**

*There are direct and indirect public benefits to this program. While individual landowners benefit directly from annual payments made to them, depending on the condition of their property, the public benefits from the greater cost-benefit of prevention as opposed to restoration. The cost of shoreline restoration in CLFLWD has ranged as high as \$400 / linear foot. In 2023, the properties of WLPP participants included 620ft of shoreline on priority waterbodies. Over 10 years, the cost of payments to those landowners will total \$15k, as opposed to a highly conservative estimate of \$62k (\$100/ft) to restore the equivalent amount of shoreline.*

*In addition to protected shorelines, the WLPP incentivizes treatment and storage of stormwater runoff on-site, and the establishment and maintenance of natural areas with diverse habitat and food sources. 5.7 acres of natural areas were protected under the program in 2023, much of which included areas in active transition to high quality native habitat. These participants will receive \$18k in payments over 10 years, as opposed to the cost of installation of an equivalent amount of native habitat at approximately \$20k. When looking at strictly the shoreline and habitat cost-benefit, the program demonstrates its cost effectiveness. While a comparison of restoration and protection costs is intrinsically imprecise, over 10 years, the six participants in the pilot program will cost \$18k, while the equivalent restoration cost would conservatively be \$82k.*

*Another significant public benefit is the establishment of model shorelines and properties in high visibility areas and priority waterbodies. Each property in the program provides an opportunity to showcase desirable characteristics and demonstrate watershed friendly landscaping to neighbors and community members.*

- 11) Watershed plan reference** (where is the problem/solution identified in the watershed plan, does it address stated problems, objectives and goals):

*This program addresses two goals of our watershed management plan.*

- 1.) Under our Non-Point Source Pollution Abatement program, our goal is to “promote natural, deep rooted, native vegetation buffers to ensure at least 75% of lakeshore parcels have at least 75% natural shoreline condition.”*
- 2.) Education and Outreach: “...increase target audience’s behaviors that positively impact water resources.”*

- 12) Was project goal achieved? If so, how was the success measured?**

*In year one of our program, we initially hoped to recruit 10 participants. As of October, we have six participants enrolled with an average parcel size of 1.4 acres, and an average 100 feet of shoreline on priority water bodies.*

*As this is a pilot program, we are measuring success by the cost-effectiveness of the initial properties, and by the responses of participants. The cost-effectiveness is addressed above and has been highly successful. The response from participants has also been very positive, with most participants indicating the payments they receive will incentivize additional conservation activities. Future success of the program will also be indicated by behavior modification by the neighbors and local community members of program participants.*

- 13) Watershed or water body name to be protected or improved by project or program** (if applicable)

*Comfort Lake – Forest Lake Watershed District*

- 14) Watershed or water body information** (e.g., size, watershed area, classification, description):

*The Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District covers 49 square miles in Southwestern Chisago County and northwestern Washington County. Surface water resources within the District include three major recreational lakes (Bone Lake, Forest Lake and Comfort Lake), the exceptionally high-quality Lake Keewahdin, as well as 19 other named lakes and several rivers/streams. The CLFLWD is the headwaters of the Sunrise River and ultimately drains to the St. Croix River, a federally protected wild and*

scenic riverway. The District includes 90 miles of watercourses, of which 31% are altered, and nearly 9,600 acres of wetlands. The land use is somewhat evenly distributed, with the most common land use of hay/pasture covering 25% of the total area and the least common land use of cropland covering 12% of the total area. Developed land use covers 14% of the District.

**15) Project partners** (financial or inkind support)

<u>Agency or organization</u>	<u>% Participation</u>
	%
	%
	%
	%
	%
	%

**16) Start date:** 03/2023

**17) Project status:**

On-going Project/Program X

Completed:

Completion date:

**18) Project cost** (this can be provided as total cash cost or a breakdown can be provided to show the cost of various project elements and partners):

*The total project cost for our pilot year is \$3300. This includes six \$300 payments made to participants, and approximately \$1500 of staff time for administration of the program.*

**19) Letters of support:**

Each application may have up to two letters of support. The letters can be from individuals, agencies, organizations, or local units of government. Letters from staff or managers of the sponsoring District will not be accepted. Attach letters to this application as a pdf document.

**20) Photos:**

As noted in the instructions, each nomination must be accompanied by **at least 4 (4) photos**, but no more than eight (8) of the project or program. The photos must be in a digital format.



*Photo 1 - Natural area protected under WLPP*





*Photo 2- Native planting under way at one WLPP property*



*Photo 3- Example of practices the WLPP should incentivize. Two properties on Forest Lake with identical land use, very different management.*





*Photo 4 - Natural shoreline protected under WLPP.*





*Photo 5 - Natural shoreline protected under WLPP*



*Photo 6 - WLPP property (right) on Forest Lake. Note meandering natural areas, shoreline buffer, and woody vegetation. Characteristic Forest Lake property on the left.*





*Photo 7 - Natural shoreline of a WLPP property.*