



SYCAMORE TRAILS

Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.

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Serving Clay, Fountain, Montgomery, Owen, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties

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March 19, 2009

Vermillion County Economic Development Council
Newport Chemical Depot Local Redevelopment Authority
Attn: Susie Jones
2250 N. Main St.
Clinton, IN 47842

NOTICE of INTEREST

Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc. (STRC&D) is interested in owning and assuming stewardship of certain tracts within the Newport Chemical Depot (NeCD) site. STRC&D is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, founded in 1970 as part of a USDA program to provide natural and human resource conservation and development in communities across the nation. STRC&D is an all-volunteer organization, with directors appointed by its sponsors: Soil and Water Conservation Districts, County Commissioners, and the Purdue Extension Service. All activities are accomplished through standing volunteer committees. It enjoys office space and program coordinators provided by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. STRC&D covers Vermillion, Fountain, Parke, Montgomery, Vigo, Sullivan, Clay, Owen and Putnam Counties.

Sycamore Trails RC&D has a history of working with many partners, including governmental agencies, conservation organizations, universities, corporations and other non-profits. Our organization is interested in participating in the stewardship of the NeCD lands, including potential ownership via public benefit conveyance. Our skills and experience could enhance the management of the property's forested land, reconstructed prairie area, agricultural land, and possibly other areas. We are willing to work with partners for the benefit of the local community for the future use of this property. An example of our work with partners on this property is the prescribed fire training that has taken place at NeCD via Sycamore Trails in cooperation with the IDNR Division of Forestry and other sponsors in 2007 and 2009.

STRC&D proposes that the reuse of the NeCD incorporate multiple sustainable uses for the enormous agricultural, forestry and wildlife resources. We recognize that other entities, such as the IDNR Division of Fish & Wildlife, might have a natural resource oriented interest in the property. If so, we would work with such groups to achieve a mutually beneficial agreement including habitat improvement and public access.

STRC&D has several committees that will bring the expertise of their members to the stewardship of the property. These people include professionals in various fields, university professors and other educators, and landowners, all with a passion for the wise use of natural resources. Among these is our **Forestry Committee**, which has worked to educate woodland owners throughout the RC&D area and to promote the sustainability of our woodland resources. The **Invasive Plants Committee** was formed as a spin-off of the Forestry Committee and remains closely affiliated with that committee. Its members are concerned about the negative impact of invasive plants on the health and sustainability of Indiana woodlands. The **Fish & Wildlife Committee** is dedicated to educating the public about habitat management, including providing access to prescribed-burn training. It also sponsors youth hunts and hunter education.

STRC&D has a Land Trust and Stewardship Committee which has recently been incubating a new land trust. The **Ouabache Land Conservancy (OLC)** is currently a Sycamore Trails committee, but will become an independent 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Corporation by the end of 2009. At that time, OLC will manage two properties in adjacent northern Vigo County: Jackson/Schnyder Nature Preserve (which OLC will own) and a Conservation Easement on 250-acres that are being managed for wildlife habitat. OLC's mission is to protect undeveloped land in order to create natural preserves, provide habitat for wildlife, maintain natural scenic beauty, and to improve air and water quality, in accordance with the goals prescribed by the landowner. OLC will also acquire conservation easements on farms and forested lands and will monitor the uses of the land to insure compliance with the restrictions detailed in the easements.

Compatible Uses for the Land

Maintaining Wildlife Habitat

The combination of multiple habitat types at NeCD has made it widely recognized as a local center for biodiversity. This provides a unique opportunity to conserve and expand wildlife habitat in west central Indiana. The first priority must be habitat supporting any endangered, threatened, or unique plant, bird or animal wildlife. The 336 acres of reconstructed prairie is an important local example of this critically endangered habitat. Woodlands, natural wetlands, fens and marshes provide additional biodiversity habitat and protect water quality. Several rare animals that commonly occur on the depot include Henslow's sparrow, the pickerel frog, the Bald eagle and the federally-endangered Indiana bat. There are several locations on this site that could provide habitat for declining populations of pheasant and quail to increase in numbers. In addition to these animals and plants that occur on the site, it is also home to many rare species of plants including both ferns and orchids.

High Quality Natural Communities on the property that need protection include:

- Mesic Floodplain Forest (25 ac.) – critically imperiled in State
- Wet - Mesic Floodplain Forest (35 ac.) – rare in State
- Dry - Mesic Upland Forest (70+ ac.) – widespread and apparently secure in State
- Mesic Upland Forest (115 ac.) - rare in State
- Circumneutral Seep (1 ac.) - critically imperiled in State
- Mesic Prairie (formally 1,900 ac.) – imperiled in State
- 5 Natural Areas also identified (680 acres)

Forest management

All aspects of woodland utilization are valued by STRC&D, including education of woodland owners and the general public, hunting, recreation, habitat restoration, with all these aspects included in a

management plan. STRC&D stewardship of NeCD woodlands would result in a magnificent showplace of sustainable forest management practices on private land in the State of Indiana.

Invasive plants can quickly form monocultures and successfully prevent or inhibit the growth of native species. The result can be the loss of natural habitat for a variety of species as well as lowering or eliminating economic returns on woodlands. By having STRC&D involved in the project area educated eyes would be there to spot invasives early when they are much easier to address, rather than later after they have had a chance to become firmly established and bank more seeds.

Education

A Vermillion County permanent site could be used to host field days to help educate area landowners and managers about fish and wildlife habitat management; sustainable forest management; invasive plants, their impacts, and treatment options. Proximity to high schools and colleges on both sides of the Wabash makes the site ideal for educational & scientific research purposes. STRC&D and OLC will provide access to preserves and property that they might own for educational and recreational use by local schools and the general public.

Recreational opportunities

Various non-destructive and non-intrusive forms of outdoor recreation would be permitted as the seasons change to include bird watching, wildlife watching, hiking, mushroom hunting, wildlife photography, etc. The limited open water resources would be stocked with game fish as needed; and possible ways to increase open water fishing resources would be explored.

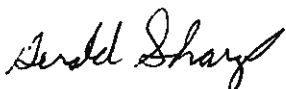
Hunting is a very valuable tool that can help us manage the delicate balance between the diverse ecosystems of the Depot. This would include deer, turkey and small game hunting for the general public, as well as, special youth hunts and hunter education. The hunting could be organized in cooperation with the IDNR Division of Fish & Wildlife in a way that multiple land uses could remain compatible for the agricultural, forested and other wildlife areas.

Income potential

- Sustainably harvesting woodlands
- Hunting/fishing user fees and/or outdoor recreation user fees
- Agricultural land leases

In conclusion, we believe we can work with the Local Redevelopment Authority to develop a mutually beneficial and financially sustainable plan for the future use of the NeCD property. We have Vermillion County citizens who are active in our organization. We offer expertise in multiple areas of natural resource management, and a history of successful partnerships in our projects. Any land managed or owned by STRC&D will have the direct attention of our committees—we will not be managing from afar. We look forward to participating in the next step of this redevelopment plan by adding our resources to the other partners involved, with the goal of giving back to the community.

Respectfully submitted,



Gerald Sharp, President