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To: Local Elected Officials
From: Mark B. Liedl, Land Services Director
Date: December 29, 2011
Re: Land Services Department – 4th Quarterly Update for 2011

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Below please find our quarterly report to keep you up-to-date on the activities of the Land Services Department. Any questions or suggestions, please let us know. Thank you for your partnership!

County Receives Two State-Wide Awards for Achieving Excellence

2011 County Conservation Award

(St. Paul, MN)— Crow Wing County’s Zoning Ordinance Revision was recognized by Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) during AMC’s Annual Conference December 5 in Minneapolis. The County Conservation Award recognizes leadership, innovation and excellence by counties in protecting or improving their natural resources. By unanimous vote of the County Board on March 8, 2011, Crow Wing County achieved a substantial and unprecedented overhaul of its Land Use Ordinance. Hailed as one of the “most progressive in the state”, the new ordinance establishes innovative performance standards as a regulatory approach to protecting natural resources in one of Minnesota’s premier lake areas. Central to these site-specific performance standards are requirements for managing stormwater runoff on individual riparian lots based on the levels of impervious surface of each lot. With 79 fewer pages than the previous law, the new ordinance also rooted out repetition, ambiguities and gaps in the previous ordinance, making it more reader-friendly to ordinary citizens. Ineffective, unnecessary regulations also were eliminated. The ordinance revision process embraced an unique public comment process established by the County Board in 2008. Over 140 days, more than 100 written comments were submitted by a broad spectrum of interested citizens. The process also included an innovative collaboration with state officials and private sector land use experts.

Innovation Award for Land Services Department Consolidation

The Minnesota Association of Counties also recognized Crow Wing County for Excellence in Government for the consolidation of 5 separate departments into a single Land Services Department. The five former departments - Planning and Zoning, Solid Waste, Lands, Survey and the Assessor’s Office – are now integrated into a single Land Services Department, which has reduced costs and improved efficiencies. One department-head – the Land Services Director – administers the operations of the five former departments, supervising three Land Service Supervisors who manage the program areas of Environmental Services, Public Land Management and Property Valuation and Classification. The primary goals of the consolidation were to improve customer service and coordination among land-related programs and staff. These goals were accomplished at the same time budget challenges required a restructuring of programs and services resulting in a reduction of \$3.4 million in spending and 18 FTEs, including reducing the number of supervisory positions from 8 to 5. Crow Wing County was among 5 counties recognized state-wide for this Innovation Award, which serves as a model for other counties to emulate.

Environmental Services

Chris Pence, Land Services Supervisor

Land Use Map

The County Board approved the revised Land Use Map at the December 27, 2011 regular meeting and is effective immediately. The County will be forwarding a poster size copy of the new map for each township after the first of the year.

The Land Services Department conducted a comprehensive review and proposed revision of the Land Use Map. The County Board opened the 30-day comment period regarding the revisions on September 20, 2011 with it concluding October 28, 2011. More than 200 comments were received on individual parcels of land during the 30-day comment period. Staff has compiled and analyzed the public comments, responded to each one and has included the report as part of this packet. In addition to viewing the proposed changes via the County website and the opportunity to submit comments during the 30-day comment period, the Land Services Department also hosted four Open House Forums to provide a venue for citizens to meet with staff, review maps and address questions.

Ground Water Protection

Crow Wing County is pleased to announce several new initiatives to protect our groundwater resources. Protecting groundwater quality is one of the six priority concerns of the Crow Wing County Comprehensive Local Water Plan, which has action steps that direct the County to offer cost-share to landowners for sealing unused wells as well as to offer nitrate testing.

- **Well Sealing**

Crow Wing County, in cooperation with the municipalities within the County, has received a \$20,000 BWSR grant to establish a well sealing program that would pay 50% of the cost to seal wells up to a maximum of \$1,000 each. Unsealed wells pose a significant threat to our groundwater aquifers as they are a direct, unchecked pathway for contaminants to enter our groundwater. Priority for this grant will be given to wells located near public wells or within the existing wellhead protection areas which have been established in the Brainerd/Baxter, Pequot Lakes, and Crosby/Ironton areas. Eligible entities would be required to contract with a licensed well contractor to conduct the work. Public and private entities are encouraged to apply.

- **Nitrate Testing**

In addition, Crow Wing County plans to offer free in-house water testing in 2012. Based on the success of the well-testing clinic at the Crow Wing County Fair in August of 2011, the goal of this program is to allow landowners to bring in a water sample for instant testing for nitrate and other contaminants. More information on this service will be made available over the next few months and will be posted under the groundwater section of the website: www.co-crow-wing.mn.us

Pharmaceutical Disposal Program

At this time, Crow Wing County does not have a program to address the disposal of old pharmaceutical medications. However, we are in the process of setting up sites at the Crow Wing County Law Enforcement Center, Breezy Point Police Department, and Crosby Police Department. We are also assisting Cass County with 5 sites, and one site at the Aitkin County Sheriff's Department. The order has been placed to construct the pharmaceutical boxes and once we have the installation dates we will have the information available through the Land Services Department, Sheriff Department, Community Services Department and the County Website.

Medicines that languish in home cabinets are highly susceptible to diversion, misuse, and abuse. Rates of prescription drug abuse in the U.S. are alarmingly high--more Americans currently abuse prescription drugs than the number of those using cocaine, hallucinogens, and heroin combined, according to the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Studies show that a majority of abused prescription drugs are obtained from family and friends, including from the home medicine cabinet. In addition, it will remove the possibility of this material from entering the environment through area waste water treatment plants (medicine being flushed away) or entering into the landfill as garbage.

Property Valuation and Classification

Gary Griffin, Land Services Supervisor

Quintile and Permit Follow up – the 2012 Assessment

State statute requires us to physically examine all improved property parcels in the County, approximately 41,000 during a five-year period, so each year we examine 20% of the parcels or approximately 8,200 parcels which we call our "quintile" work. We completed the inspections in October which marks the second year in a row this work has been completely tracked and documented. These inspections help ensure property assessments are based on accurate, up-to-date information. Currently we are inspecting properties that have taken out building permits. This year there has been 1,257 permits issued that we need to review compared to last year's number at 2,027. Also we have 900 follow-up

issues that need review from last year. The majority of these are from permits that were issued and not started or construction that was not complete by January 2, 2011. Most of these inspections are complete, but final completion of this work will be during the first two weeks of January 2012.

Homestead Period Ended

Each year Land Services sends out a notice to local papers to encourage property owners to file a homestead application on or before December 15, of that year (per state statute), if one of the following applies: You purchased a property in the past year and you, or a qualifying relative, occupy the property for homestead purposes on December 1, 2011; or You, or a qualifying relative occupy a property for homestead purposes on December 1, 2011, and the property was previously classified as non-homestead. A qualifying relative for homestead purposes depends on the type of property. For residential property, a qualifying relative can be a parent, stepparent, child, stepchild, grandparent, grandchild, brother, sister, uncle, aunt, nephew, or niece of the owner. This relationship may be by blood or marriage. For agricultural property, a qualifying relative can be a child, grandchild, sibling, or parent of the owner or a child, grandchild, or sibling of the spouse of the owner. We sent out 1,213 applications this year compared to sending 1,483 and receiving 1,247 applications last year.

Sales Ratio Study Ended

Each year we review all sales of property in the County and determine which ones are good indicators of the market to be used in our sales ratio studies. State statute requires us to value property at 100% of market value. We can be between 90% – 105% of market and still satisfy this statute. Sales that have occurred October 2010 through September 2011 will be used in the studies that will set values for the 2012 assessment. Crow Wing County had a total of 1,963 sales, of which 724 were accepted for the 2012 assessment. Last year there were 1,945 sales, of which 703 were accepted as appropriate “arms length” transactions and used in the ratio studies. Sales between family members, foreclosures, and payoffs are examples of sales the state requires us to reject.

Public Land Management

Kirk Titus, Land Services Supervisor

Mississippi River Northwoods Project

Crow Wing County Land Services has been approached by the Mississippi River Northwoods Project about the possible acquisition and future management of 1,988 acres located in Oak Lawn Township. The parcel includes 2.7 miles of direct frontage on the southern bank of the river.

The Mississippi River Northwoods Project strategically aligns with goals identified in the Forest Management Plan for the Tax Forfeited Lands of Crow Wing County to:

- Expand and enhance the land base through targeted acquisition and exchange
- Consolidate ownership into larger tracts
- Secure critical resource areas (ex. Riparian Zones)
- Obtain higher quality and more productive lands
- Create large contiguous tracts of Public ownership
 - where larger land blocks contribute to proper forest management
 - where watershed management concerns are especially vital
 - where recreational opportunities can be enhanced

The acquisition of this property offers many public and natural resource benefits.

- Airport and landfill sites buffered
- Recreational access and use maintained
- Diverse wildlife habitats protected and enhanced
- Cultural and historical resources protected
- Forest fragmentation prevented where a large contiguous block of forest is maintained
- Undeveloped Mississippi headwaters shoreline, wetlands and water quality protected

An in-depth analysis determined that Crow Wing County has the available resources to effectively manage the property for multiple uses. The property is a natural fit since the County is managing similar lands to both the east and the west. The property will be incorporated in the County's Sustainable Forestry Management System and become third-party certified. By doing so, the County will ensure sustainable forestry practices are conducted for generations to come.

Recently, the Crow Wing County Board unanimously voted to support County ownership of the property which followed by unanimous approval by the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council of their 2012 Legislative Appropriation Recommendations Bill, which included their recommendation of \$14,040,000 for protection of the Mississippi River Northwoods Habitat Complex property.

The project has local support from the Mississippi Headwaters Board, Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission as well as Delta Waterfowl, Muskie's Inc. (Brainerd Chapters), the Cuyuna Lakes Trail Association, the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and numerous other hunting and outdoor groups.

Pending approval by the Minnesota State Legislature, the project will be funded by a Legacy Grant through the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Comprehensive Recreation Trails Draft Plan

The Comprehensive Recreation Trails Plan focuses on the recreation trails and facilities under the direct management of the County. The document reports the outcomes of the plan development process and focuses on near-term priorities for addressing trail management opportunities on these lands. Components of the plan include establishing a trail proposal and planning process, activities for trail monitoring and enforcement, evaluation criteria for trail review, and strategies for improved trail linkages.

Public comments on the draft Comprehensive Trails Plan were accepted by the County through October. The plan is being revised in response to comments and prepared for review by the County Board in January 2012.

Mountain Biking

While the lack of snow this month has prevented cross-country skiing, many recreation users have been riding their mountain bikes on the county trail system. The Larson Lake trails, especially, has been a popular destination for mountain bikers the past several weeks. The Larson Lake trails are located south of Deerwood on County Road 10.

2011 Tax Forfeited Land Sale

The fall land sale and auction was held on November 4 2011. Of the 39 parcels offered, eight were sold for approximately \$26,000. In 2011, a total of 20 parcels valued at nearly \$230,000 were sold at auction or through direct sale and returned to the tax rolls.

Thank you for reading our Fourth Quarter, 2011 update.
Please don't hesitate to email any feedback you may have to Vickie,
vickie.sullivan@co.crow-wing.mn.us, and she will make sure we hear it.

May you have a wonderful 2012!