

September 24, 2025

Legislative Coordinating Commission
658 Cedar Street
Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Executive Director Position Interest

Dear Selection Committee,

The potential to serve as the Executive Director for the Legislative Coordinating Commission Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council is deeply intriguing. My career started at the Department of Natural Resources Waters and with this position may bring me back using honed executive skills and decades of experience to, again, serve Minnesotans. My combination of private and public leadership experience, including grant program management, may be the right fit for the position needs.

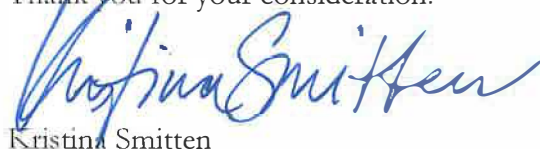
I have been in management positions for over 25 years. I pride myself on excellent communication and organizational skills, and an ability to bring different interests and perspectives together on a common path to achieve outcomes. Working in both the public and private sectors as well as representing nonprofit clients, I have led complex, multi-year projects (and budgets) that often did not have a clear path forward and sometimes included a wide range of stakeholder interests. This is not always easy work, but it is important to be transparent, clear on objectives and hear all voices when making decisions.

I have worked with and served on Councils, Planning Commissions, Advisory Committees, Boards, and nonprofit interest groups. In addition, I have significant grant experience, including overseeing a Metropolitan Council Livable Communities grant program and more recently as a volunteer Project Manager of DNR Conservation Partner Legacy grants. Sitting on both sides of the table, I have experience listening to citizens when making policy decisions and conversely presenting and trying to persuade policy makers. Years past, I provided testimony on bills to the Legislature and worked on bonding proposals.

Growing up and raising my children with hunting and fishing traditions, my appreciation for our natural resources and the outdoors runs deep. At this stage in my career, I feel an obligation to use my skillset in a more purposeful manner. If the selection committee is inclined, I would be interested in sharing specifics of my experiences and learning more about how my skillset may align with the responsibilities for Executive Director of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

With a deep commitment to conservation, a strong track record in public leadership, and a passion for ensuring that Minnesota's natural heritage is preserved for future generations I am interested in further exploring and potentially leading the work of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council to deliver meaningful outcomes for Minnesota's natural resources.

Thank you for your consideration!



Kristina Smitten

Kristina Smitten

Visionary leader with 20+ years of experience at the intersection of environmental stewardship, public policy, and sustainable redevelopment. Proven expertise in managing public-private initiatives, administering grants, and guiding collaborative efforts across state, regional, and local agencies. Deeply committed to Minnesota's outdoor heritage and public lands.

Hillcrest Development, LLLP

July 2014 - present

Director of Sustainability, Development Manager Team leader in acquisitions and construction projects, as well as ongoing operations and management of the portfolio. Create project proformas, oversee due diligence, regulatory compliance and permitting, secure and manage county, regional, state, and federal grants, guide the municipal entitlement process. Sustainability emphasis in the areas of habitat enhancement, energy and water efficiency, waste, and transportation options.

Smitten Group, LLC

July 2005 – July 2014

Principal of consulting practice focused on land use planning and policy serving private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

- Redevelopment expert responsible for environmental team selection and oversight with regards to financing solutions, grants management, site design, planning and zoning approvals, market feasibility analysis, and regulatory compliance. Wrote and administered 30+ County, Regional, State and Federal grants to help bridge project funding gaps.
- Environment Program Manager for Urban Land Institute MN and the Regional Council of Mayors.
- Piloted and managed the inaugural GreenStep Cities program to refine the program prior to statewide launch.
- Former City Planner and Zoning Administrator for two suburban communities. Facilitated community conversations for the Comprehensive Plan Updates, oversaw zoning requests, EAW's and Development Agreement reviews.

Metropolitan Council

November 1999 – July 2005

Program Manager of the Livable Communities Tax Base Revitalization Account (TBRA) grant program. Managed the TBRA program consistent with State Statute, assisted grantees, and oversaw the evaluation and decision-making process to allocate about \$5.0 million (or 20 projects) annually in grant awards. Brought together cities, counties, and state agencies to create Brownfields to Green Space funding sources for statewide restoration of contaminated properties into natural areas.

Senior Planner

Managed the River Corridor Plan updates for 25 cities as a chapter of their Comprehensive Plans ensuring policy compliance per State DNR Mississippi River Critical Areas Act and Federal NPS MNRRA Guidelines. Member of the Regional Administration's policy team. Brought natural area corridors planning into land use policy as part of the Regional Growth Strategy by helping to design and utilize the MN Land Cover Classification System in Comprehensive Planning.

Department of Natural Resources, Waters

May 1996 – November 1999

State Coordinator of the Division's water education program, Project WET. Responsible for program growth and development, the annual budget, statewide trainings, staff supervision, and representation at the national level. Trained 87 Facilitators throughout the State. Represented the Division of Waters in the Agency's strategic planning process.

Education

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| 1996 | St. Cloud State University B.E.S. Major Biology |
| | St. Cloud State University B.E.S. Minor: Environmental Studies/Industrial Arts |
| | Graduate coursework in land use law, sustainability policy, climate change adaptation. I am a lifelong learner. |

Relevant Community Leadership Activities

- Founding Board Member of Minnesota Brownfields, Marine Library Association, Marine Area Community School
- Planning Commissioner: St. Paul Commission (2006-2010) Marine on St. Croix Commission (2010-present)
- Metropolitan Council Land Use Advisory Committee Member and Vice-Chair (July 2011 – 2017)
- Wild Rivers Conservancy Board Member (2017- present)
- Chair of the Jackson Meadow Open Space Committee. Providing prairie and woodland habitat restoration.

Relevant Awards

- Washington County Conservationist of the Year 2022
- Marine on St. Croix Citizen Volunteer of the Year 2013