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ECT'S NATURAL RESOURCES SERVICE LINE ACHIEVES NEARLY 30% GROWTH

Headquartered in Gainesville, Florida, **Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc. (ECT)**, is a thirty-year old, employee-owned firm specializing in the resolution of complex environmental issues through cost-effective project planning, management, applied engineering, and scientific expertise. The company maintains 22 offices in ten U.S. states and employs more than 200 full-time staff, including professional scientists, engineers, planners, landscape architects, and management consultants. ECT offers services in five service lines, including natural resources, water resources, air quality, site assessment and remediation, and performance assurance & compliance.

Bobbi Westerby, newly appointed President & CEO. Ms. Westerby is nationally known for her expertise and advisory role in the renewable energy and power delivery industries.

Sanjiv Sinha, Ph.D., Water Resources National Director. Dr. Sinha is well known specially for his work on the emerging applications of market-based options, including public-private partnerships (P3) within the water infrastructure sector.

EBJ: How has business been for ECT over the last couple of years

Westerby: Our business has been on an upwards trajectory for the last three years. 2018 was one of the firm's top-five most profitable years in our thirty-year history.

At ECT, specifically, the natural resources and water resources service lines, we are seeing significant upswings, while other service lines are growing steadily. Historically, our natural resources team has maintained a national leadership role in the conventional power sector. I am happy to report that this service line has witnessed nearly 30 percent growth in revenues in the last twelve months. We are now working on renewable energy projects in 13 states across the country. Our water resources line is experiencing steady growth due to cutting edge ecosystem restoration, green stormwater infrastructure, municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) stormwater, and public-private partnership advisory related services. We win many awards for our projects and are proud of our staff's good work.

EBJ: What are some highlights of your Natural Resources practice?

Westerby: ECT and its natural resources practice is built on our client-focused approach to business. We consider ourselves a trusted partner to our clients and view their projects and challenges as our own. This team consists of a variety of technical specialists, including ecologists, biologists, environmental engineers, and planners; many have extensive management and permitting experience. Our comprehensive list of natural resources services ranges from specific threatened and endangered species work to routine wetland delineations.

We work with our clients to look at a project from its conception to its completion, providing services needed to build their visions and stay compliant with the necessary permits. We provide ongoing support throughout the life cycle of our client's projects. For example, one development challenge in the Midwest relates to bats and their habitat. Threatened and endangered bat species are a key client concern for many renewable projects. Specific permitted specialists are required to study these species and their habitats. Creative planning, technical expertise to complete field surveys and telemetry work, as well

as risk assessment are all essential to our client's success.

We complete natural resource work, not only because we care for our environment, but also to comply with rules that protect the resources. One of our main objectives is to efficiently guide clients through the consultation and permitting processes. To achieve this goal our building blocks for success include maintaining strong relationships with federal and state agencies. These affiliations help ECT work through challenges and streamline permitting in various industries, including renewable energy, oil and gas, electrical transmission and distribution, as well as public sector assignments with numerous departments of transportation, and municipalities throughout the country.

Natural resource challenges for our clients vary from project to project and by region. ECT's ability to remain flexible and listen to our client's project-specific needs, and then create custom solutions based on our 30 years of industry expertise, has been a hallmark of our success. An example of our ability to tailor solutions is the use of our wide geographical footprint to quickly respond to seasonal field constraints and provide real-time siting assistance. This swift action helps eliminate cost impacts prior to the design of a project. Our engagement and quick response are a cornerstone of our ongoing client satisfaction. These tailored solutions are the reason most of our business is repeat clients.

From a resource perspective, we see a significant increase in concern from both agencies and industry regarding pollinators and pollinator habitat conservation. This has been driven by the listing - and potential listing - of pollinator species like the rusty patch bumble bee and the monarch butterfly. Although small, these types of species have significant implications on agriculture and business as usual for maintenance along corridors. ECT is fortunate to have been involved in prairie restoration

and pollinator studies for years due to relationships with key clients. We are uniquely positioned to discuss and help provide solutions to interested stakeholders.

EBJ: Please provide some industry trends that relate to the following natural resources services such as habitat & vegetation mapping, sampling & surveys, tree surveys, Environmental Assessments & Environmental Impact Statements, land planning, ecological modeling and GIS analysis & mapping.

Westerby: All these services continue to be in high demand. With more buzz around climate change and resilience, most of our industry wants to do the right thing, which often involves all the services above. We find that our client companies are not about the slash and burn method of development. They take time to study and understand the natural conditions - aiding in the site and plan development in a more responsible way. To do that, all of these services are necessary. As we move forward, we foresee this demand to increase with both government and private sectors expected to spend more on environmental permitting. We are excited about some of the improvements to streamline these services including new technologies and processes. GIS and ecological modeling are used more than ever - often weeks or months before the team sets foot in the field. Well prepared ahead of time, our scientists are informed about what necessary data they need to collect once in the field.

Detroit River Area of Concern : Stony Island Habitat Restoration

Stony Island is part of the "Conservation Crescent" surrounding the lower end of Grosse Ile, Michigan, and is well recognized for its biodiversity, but decades of erosion have greatly reduced the wetlands surrounding the island. Breakwater structures that once protected the Island's north and south bays are nearly eliminated. Funded by the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)**, the project provided ecological outcomes specific to removing fish and wildlife Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) through 1) re-establishment of spawning and nursery habitat for commercial, sport and forage fish species; 2) revitalization of coastal wetlands and 3) protection of terrestrial resources within the watershed. A variety of habitat design elements were incorporated to provide multiple niche habitats in support of existing fish and wildlife species, which include: 1) 92 habitat structures for mudpuppies, turtles and fish including rock piles, basking logs and woody debris bundles; 2) 50 acres of calm backwater for fish spawning and nursery activity; and 3) 10 acres of vegetation management including invasive species control. ECT assisted in the planning, design and engineering process.

We also find that the streamlined National Environmental and Policy Act (NEPA) process requiring Environmental Assessments/Environmental Impact Statements (EA/EIS) helps developers move to market faster and with more efficiency. This encourages other developers - who may have turned away from a project due to the complexity of the permitting process - to move forward. All these services play a role in development. We all need these services to provide energy for our homes and businesses, the houses we live in, and our educational institutions.

EBJ: What are some of the challenges in recruiting employees, particularly for people that will fit into a natural resources practice?

Westerby: The mid to senior level positions have been hard to fill in 2019 and have been for a while. This group who went through the last recession prefer staying at their current place of employment or maybe there are just fewer of us. It is difficult to find a natural resource practitioner with 10 to 20 years of experience in this market willing to make a jump. Conversely, it is often hard to retain the younger generation, employees with 2 to 7 years of experience, for the long haul. The market is currently teeming with available positions at good companies, so firms in 2020 must offer meaningful ownership as well as a salary.

As an Employee Stock Ownership Plan company (ESOP), with a positive ownership culture, ECT has experienced relatively low turnover throughout its history. This stability is a terrific selling point. Our flexible work environment and our firm's size appeals to many candidates as well. Mid-sized companies like ours provide employees a solid career path in addition to engagement on projects with people likely to help advance their careers. ECT continues to look for ways to add value to its employees and encourages a work-life

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balance, which is imperative in today's environment.

EBJ: ECT recently acquired Conservation Design Forum a sustainable design and ecology firm. Why did the acquisition make sense?

Sinha: ECT was looking to expand its geographical footprint into the greater Chicago-land region and an acquisition was the easiest way for us to add a book of business as well as staff. Conservation Design Forum, Inc. (CDF), was a 25-year old company and had been at the forefront of the ecological design movement – valuing water as the most influential element in the landscape. Since its beginning, this understanding guided their site design and resource management methodology. Sustainable landscape architecture — when part of an integrated design process — results in a comprehensive approach to high-performance building and site development that can dramatically reduce water usage and create healthy environments. Although a small team, they had won more than 30 awards for their projects since 2007. They had also worked on several liv-

ing building certified/registered projects, 9 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum projects, 15 LEED certified/silver/gold projects, two LEED for Homes projects, one LEED Neighborhood project, and one Sustainable SITES certified project. Overall, we were really impressed by their story.

EBJ: How will the CDF acquisition accelerate value to clients?

Sinha: Not surprisingly, CDF's extensive track record of helping clients reach their goals and a commitment to design excellence, has attracted a broad base of public and private sectors. Along with acquiring the new clients, the acquisition allowed ECT to integrate CDF's design team of landscape architects, civil engineers, botanists, and ecologists thus significantly expanding our service offerings.

EBJ: Can you tell us about some ecosystem restoration projects in which you've been involved recently?

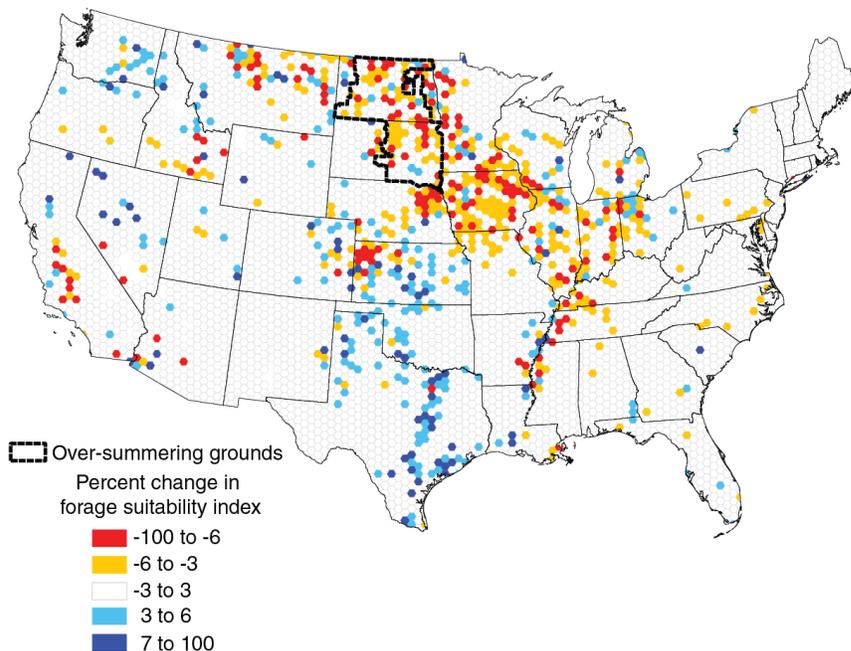
Sinha: Of course! ECT has a top-notch team of restoration experts working on a wide variety of ecosystem projects. One

significant project is located in the middle of the Detroit River and is called Stony Island Restoration Project. This \$15 million restoration seeks to establish over 100 acres of backwater habitat and to build more than 100 habitat structures for a variety of fish, herpetofauna, birds, and pollinators. In 2019, this project won American Public Works Association's national Project of the Year award.

EBJ: Tell us about your project to determine economic benefits and costs of reducing algal blooms in Lake Erie.

Sinha: Over the last several years, harmful algal blooms (HAB) have been occurring annually and getting worse in Lake Erie as well as other large bodies of water across the country. These blooms adversely impact ecosystem health as well as a wide range of human activities, including recreation, commercial fishing, and municipal water systems. In this project, working for the **International Joint Commission (IJC)**, the economic impact on residential property values, recreation (fishing, boating, and swimming), tourism, commercial water use (farms, industry) and water supply (municipal and private) were evaluated

Decline in Pollinator Forage Suitability between 2002 and 2012 Has Been Concentrated in the Midwest



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service analysis using land use/cover data from USDA's National Resources inventory and forage suitability scores from Koh et al. (2016).

across the Canadian and American western portions of Lake Erie.

Key findings of the project included (in 2015 U.S. dollars):

Nearly \$3.5 billion of residential housing stock values on the western basin of Lake Erie shore and within one-half-mile of the shoreline is at risk.

The annual cost of a reoccurrence of the 2011 HAB event would be approximately \$71 million. And if the 2011 event was to recur annually over 30 years, the business-as-usual scenario, the present value of lost benefits would be \$1.463 billion.

Findings such as these are useful for decision makers in prioritizing future policy decisions for a region. This project has been cited in a wide variety of publications across the planet!

EBJ: Can you comment on the demand of ecosystem restoration services? Who pays for them and how much money would you say that has been assigned for such projects?

Sinha: Demand for ecosystem restoration is expected to grow due to the growing public awareness and the changes in climactic conditions. This is definitely the case in the Great Lakes and the southeast regions where ECT maintains significant presence. For example, in the Great Lakes states, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has been a key driver for these services. Since 2010, GLRI has already brought nearly \$2 billion to the region and led successful completion of over 2,000 projects. ECT leveraged its unique service offerings and staffing mix to develop many of these projects. Our work on the Combined Everglades Restoration Program with various water management districts is also experiencing similar growth.

Elsewhere in the country, federal and state government programs provide abundant opportunities for this market. Accordingly, ECT supports larger firms with federal and state contracts within this market.

EBJ: As a new CEO/President, Ms. Westerby, do you have any comments for our readers?

Westerby: I think I will leave you with a Cecil Beaton quote: “Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safer, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary.” Now, of course, as consultants none of us have the luxury of being impractical - but the rest works well. □

ECT Acquires CDF

In August 2019, **Environmental Consulting & Technology** acquired sustainable design and ecology firm **Conservation Design Forum** (CDF, Lombard, IL). The merger has expanded ECT’s presence in the growing Chicago market where CDF is headquartered. Adding to CDF’s strong talent and forward-thinking capabilities, ECT will accelerate the value it drives for its clients. ECT President Bobbi Westerby said: “The ECT and CDF combination bolsters our capabilities to design integrated stormwater and sustainable landscape systems that meet the needs of our changing environment.” CDF’s design team of landscape architects, civil engineers, botanists and ecologists help CDF services integrate civil, landscape, and ecological services. Since 1994, CDF has been at the forefront of the ecological design movement – valuing water as the most influential element in the landscape. This understanding has guided CDF’s approach to site design and resource management. CDF holds that sustainable landscape architecture — when part of an integrated design process — results in a comprehensive approach to high-performance building and site development that can dramatically reduce water usage.