



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2023 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2023-250

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 24, 2023

Project Title: Phelps Mill Wetland and Prairie Restoration

Project Budget: \$974,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Kevin Fellbaum

Organization: Otter Tail County

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Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 22, 2023

Reporting Schedule: April 1 / October 1 of each year.

Project Completion: December 31, 2026

Final Report Due Date: February 14, 2027

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2023, Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08r

Appropriation Language: \$974,000 the first year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Otter Tail County to plan, engineer, and restore wetlands and prairie within the newly expanded Phelps Mill County Park to improve habitat connectivity for wildlife and enhance recreational experiences for users. Up to \$322,000 of this appropriation may be used to plan, engineer, and construct a boardwalk, viewing platforms, and soft trails within the park. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2027, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2027

Narrative

Project Summary: Restoration of 28 acres of prairie and 20 acres of wetland along 3/4 miles of the Otter Tail River.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Minnesota was a wetland- and prairie-rich State. Before European settlement, wetlands (28 percent) and prairies (34 percent) covered 62 percent of the State. By 1984, the wetland area in the prairie region of the State was reduced by 92 percent, and statewide, the prairie area was reduced by 98 percent. The negative impact of lost wetlands and prairie is well documented. This project seeks to convert agricultural lands back to wetlands and native prairie. Recently, Otter Tail County purchased 72 acres of farmland adjacent to the Phelps Mill County Park. The property is situated in central Otter Tail County, just west of Otter Tail Lake in a part of Minnesota that has hundreds of lakes, wetlands and rolling hills, indicative of a landscape shaped by glaciers. A key natural feature of the area is the Otter Tail River, which flows northwest from Otter Tail Lake and forms the western boundary of the park. Like much of Minnesota, agriculture is a prevalent land use in Otter Tail County, including the newly acquired property. This proposal seeks to restore 35 of the recently acquired 72 farmstead acres and an additional 13 acres at the existing Phelps Mill Park.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

This proposal seeks to restore existing farmland for habitat connectivity, the creation of new wildlife habitat, to benefit ground and surface water quality, and to increase public access for outdoor recreational opportunities. Specifically, this proposal would restore 28 acres of prairie and 20 acres of wetland along the Otter Tail River, Minnesota's eighth longest river. The river originates in Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge and winds through southern Becker County and Otter Tail County before depositing in the Red River of the North at Breckenridge, Minnesota. The Otter Tail River is classified as a State Water Trail by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. It is a slow-moving river that is very good for paddling in a canoe or kayak. There are five wetlands that range in size from 0.25 acres to 9.5 acres. Two of the wetlands are situated along the bank of the Otter Tail River and three are in the northern portion of the property surrounded by cropland. Issues include invasion by reed canary grass and nutrient loading. Finally, this project will increase access to outdoor recreational opportunities at Phelps Mill Park by integrating soft trails and boardwalks throughout the restored areas.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

This proposal seeks to restore and protect lands with high-quality natural resources, ecological value, water protection value, and wildlife habitat. More specifically, this project will improve water quality by reducing nutrient loads in the Otter Tail River. It will address several concerns related to soil health and erosion control. It will also create new wildlife habitat, including pollinator habitat. Finally, this proposal will expand outdoor recreational opportunities through additions and connections to local parks and trails. More specifically, soft trails and boardwalks will be incorporated throughout the restored prairie and wetlands expanding recreational opportunities at Phelps Mill Park.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): Central

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Region(s): Central

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Planning, Engineering and Design for Restoration Activities and Construction of Soft Trails and Boardwalk

Activity Budget: \$139,000

Activity Description:

Activity 1 includes hiring a consultant to assist with the following:

Planning & Background Data Collection - Gathering highly detailed drone-based LiDAR with topographic site survey to create a 3D model of the site to be used in design. Wetland delineation as well as a literature review and archeological assessment of the site. The assessment will allow us to determine if a larger archeological review is required.

Geotechnical Investigation - Will conduct soil borings and a subsurface characteristic report with recommendations for the design of the elevated boardwalk.

Phase One Civil Construction Plans - Preliminary layout of the proposed project. Consultant will lay out a soft walking path and elevated board walk within the wetland and proposed prairie areas and have it staked to verify the soft walk alignment and the boardwalk limits. After verification a final site plan will be created for approval. Scope of work includes general site grading and drainage, wetland and prairie restoration plan, erosion control plan, landscape and seeding plan, and boardwalk design.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Execute Contract with Consultant	July 31, 2023
Complete Planning & Background Data Collection	September 30, 2023
Complete Geotechnical Investigation	October 31, 2023
Obtain All Permitting	February 28, 2024
Complete Phase One Civil Construction Plans	December 31, 2024

Activity 2: Restoration of Wetlands, Prairie and Soft Trail Construction

Activity Budget: \$477,000

Activity Description:

Activity 2 includes the hiring of West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District to complete the restoration of 28 acres of prairie and 20 acres of wetland and establish 9,800 linear feet (2.25 acres) of soft trail.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Execute Contract with West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	March 31, 2024
Mobilization and Initiation of Traffic Control Measures	April 30, 2024
Complete Erosion Control Measures	May 31, 2024
Complete Clearing, Grubbing and Tree Removal; Topsoil Strip & Spread; Embankment and Excavation; Install Culverts	July 31, 2024
Complete Leveling and Seeding for Approximately 9,800 Linear Ft. of Soft Surface Trail	August 31, 2024
Complete Upland Seeding	September 30, 2024
Install 2" Class 5 for Connecting Soft Trails to Boardwalk	October 31, 2024

Activity 3: Construction of Elevated Boardwalk through Wetlands

Activity Budget: \$322,000

Activity Description:

Activity 3 includes hiring a contractor to construct a 10' wide and approximately 900 linear ft. elevated boardwalk through the wetlands. The exact location and dimensions will be established based on findings in Activity 1, specifically, the archeological assessment and geotechnical investigation.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Execute Contract for Construction of the Boardwalk	April 30, 2024
Complete Mobilization and Erosion Control Measures	July 31, 2024
Complete Construction of Boardwalk	November 30, 2024

Activity 4: Site Management, Monitoring and Evaluation

Activity Budget: \$36,000

Activity Description:

Contract with West Otter Tail County Soil and Water Conservation District to control weeds and promote the establishment and growth

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Execute Contract with West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	March 31, 2025
Year 1 Establishment, Aftercare and Monitoring	December 31, 2025
Year 2 Establishment, Aftercare and Monitoring	December 31, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Howard Fullhart	MN Department of Natural Resources	Assisting with possible fish passage around dam.	No
Louise Mauldin	US Fish and Wildlife Service	Assisting with possible fish passage around dam.	No
Darren Newville	East Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	Assist with restoration planning.	No
Brad Mergens	West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	Assist with restoration planning.	No
Chris Schuelke	Otter Tail County Historical Society	Assist with master planning.	No
Greg Wagner	West Central Initiative Foundation	Assist with master planning.	No
Jeff Wiersma	MN Department of Natural Resources	Assist with master planning.	No

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

We will be sharing news about funding and project progress via press releases and social media. We will acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications and outreach.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

The ability to complete and maintain the project long-term is of utmost importance. Per the attached resolution, the Otter Tail County Board of Commissioners have approved this grant application for the Phelps Mill Wetland and Prairie Restoration. Once the project is completed, Otter Tail County will assume financial responsibility for the ongoing protection and maintenance of the natural resources within the park.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Planning, Engineering and Design for Restoration Activities and Construction of Soft Trails and Boardwalk.				0		\$139,000
West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	Professional or Technical Service Contract	The restoration of 28 acres of prairie and 20 acres of wetland and establish approx. 9,800 linear feet (2.25 acres) of soft trail.				0		\$477,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Construct a 10' wide and approximately 900 linear ft. elevated boardwalk through the wetlands.				-		\$322,000
West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Site management, monitoring and evaluation to control weeds and promote the establishment and growth.				0		\$36,000
							Sub Total	\$974,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$974,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
Cash	Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission	Construction of Boardwalk in Wetlands	Secured	\$366,000
			State Sub Total	\$366,000
Non-State				
Cash	Otter Tail County	Construction of Boardwalk in Wetlands	Secured	\$435,000
Cash	Otter Tail County	Acquisition of 72 Acres of Farmstead	Secured	\$285,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$720,000
			Funds Total	\$1,086,000

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
38000260189000	Otter Tail	Prairie Grassland and Deciduous Forest	Restoration	48	0.75	\$974,000	Public	Otter Tail County	Has Not Begun
Totals				48	0.75	\$974,000			

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

All restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

All wetlands and tillable cropland will be restored to pre settlement conditions. Operation and maintenance agreements for both practices will be developed. Otter Tail County will develop monitor and implement both short and long term management plans.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

The project will be implemented by experienced contractor with consultation from Otter Tail County SWCD offices and all practices will follow Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines.

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

The ability to complete and maintain the project long-term is of utmost importance. Per the attached resolution, the Otter Tail County Board of Commissioners have approved this grant application for the Phelps Mill Wetland and Prairie Restoration. Once the project is completed, Otter Tail County will assume financial responsibility for the ongoing protection and maintenance of the natural resources within the park.

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

The Conservation Corps of Minnesota and they will be given strong consideration for restoration activities.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations will analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [27136b55-caf.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Master plan map that depicts the proposed restoration areas as well as the soft trails and boardwalk within those restored areas....

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board of Commissioner Resolution	e2a6aa5d-6f1.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Background Check Certification	11e55439-d96.pdf

Media Links

Title	Link
Phelps Mill Park Master Plan	https://ottertailcountymn.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/PhelpsMill_MasterPlan_04-22-2021.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Updated narrative, activities and milestones, and budget to address comments/questions and per conversation with LCCMR staff.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you agree travel expenses must follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

N/A

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No