



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2024 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2024-009

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: June 14, 2024

Project Title: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Project Budget: \$426,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Marty Walsh

Organization: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Office Telephone: (773) 450-2771

Email: mndriftlesshikingtrail@gmail.com

Web Address: www.mndriftlesshikingtrail.org

Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 20, 2024

Reporting Schedule: June 1 / December 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2027

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2027

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2024, Chp. 83, Sec. 2, Subd. 09a

Appropriation Language: \$426,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail to plan, design a route for, secure access for, develop community support for, and begin construction of a backpacking-focused trail across southeast Minnesota's Driftless Area. Construction of trails with this appropriation must occur on public or permanently protected lands or lands secured through long-term agreements as defined in the approved work plan. A trail plan must be complete before money is used for trail construction. Before this appropriation is spent, a fiscal agent for Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail must be approved in the work plan.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2027

Narrative

Project Summary: Building a backpacking focused trail across Southeast Minnesota's Driftless Area.

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

Southern Minnesota is generally lacking in public land relative to many other areas of the state with similarly unique landscapes, and is specifically lacking in long distance hiking opportunities. There is a growing interest in hiking as evidenced by significantly increased demand on trails like the Superior Hiking Trail and in general outdoors activities nationwide.

There are no long distance hiking trails (50+ miles of linear trail) within several hours of southeastern Minnesota. There is demand from both residents as well as the existing outdoor recreation tourism base that comes to the region for biking, paddling, and flyfishing to add backpacking opportunities to the region.

While the region is home to three State Parks and several state forest units, these areas have not been significantly expanded in decades despite a growing population and growing recognition of the globally unique ecology and geology of the Driftless Area.

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.

With this application, we propose to plan a roughly 110 mile backpacking trail across Fillmore and Houston counties in the model of the national scenic and recreational trails and independent trails like the Superior Hiking Trail, operating independently and supported by volunteers. We are seeking funding to employ a Director and to support the work of building and maintaining the trail including but not limited to trail clearing equipment, signage, trail infrastructure construction, and other operational expenses. We will work with partners to secure easements.

By utilizing easements and Minnesota's state statutes supporting recreational access, a long distance backpacking trail would also increase access to the outdoors in spite of the minimal public land in the region, and highlight much of the public land that does exist.

This application does not seek to build the finished trail, but create a plan for a route, construction, and long term maintenance. We aim to complete 25 miles of trail with this project, and designate a publicly accessible route using existing right of ways. We will work with DNR and private groups to develop standards within our trail plan to protect the unique features of the area including coldwater stream crossings and karst.

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?

Hire a Trail Director/Coordinator to manage the trail planning and development process, including community outreach, in a manner that results in protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement.

Develop a plan for the layout, construction, and/or designation of the trail, including a methodology for agreements with MNDNR

Open 5 Miles of continuous designated trail to the public.

Identify an accessible route (including directions to temporary routes and roadwalks) for the entire corridor.

Project Location

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

Region(s): SE

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

Region(s): SE

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Hire Director and Strengthen Trail Organization

Activity Budget: \$300,000

Activity Description:

Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail will hire a Trail Director to lead administrative and planning efforts for the trail project. They will utilize publicly available and internally gathered data to refine the existing trail planning corridor, contract trail building professionals to develop relevant trail building standards, and gather community input to develop a formal trail plan.

The Trail Director will also conduct community outreach within the geographic area of the trail and in the broader backpacking/hiking community to develop organizational partners and grow the volunteer base.

The Updated Trail Plan will include a refined trail planning corridor with areas of focus for initial 5- and 25-mile project areas (selected for existing readiness and owner/partner willingness) as well as trail building standards and land access agreements.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Trail Director	July 31, 2024
Contract Trail Building professional to develop appropriate standards for trail building on this landscape type	October 31, 2024
Refine Trail Planning Corridor Area, including identifying areas of priority development.	October 31, 2024
Make Plan public, submit to LCCMR, including template land access agreements and design standards	July 31, 2025
Attend or Host 12 Community Events to raise local awareness of the trail	July 31, 2025

Activity 2: Designate First Five Miles of Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

The Trail Director and volunteer leadership will work with the DNR to develop and sign long term (10 year, modeled on DNR agreement with Superior Hiking Trail) access agreements for state land required for the trail project. The Director will also work with local units of government for property access, and public rights of way routes where land access cannot yet be secured, again with 10-year agreements.

A five-mile section of existing trail in the planning corridor will be selected for designation based on readiness of existing trail and access to trail and trailheads. This section will be proofed for safety and completeness by on-site volunteers and signed with wayfinding marks per the trail plan. Maps of this section will be developed and made available to the public.

A public event announcing this segment’s designation and openness, and offering a guided hike will be held.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Sign agreement with DNR for 10 yr+ access to State Land	July 31, 2025
Complete work to make 5 mile section ready for designation	August 31, 2025
Designate 5 miles of initial trail with public event	September 30, 2025

Activity 3: Volunteer Training and Development

Activity Budget: \$26,000

Activity Description:

Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail will train volunteers in building trail to the approved trail plan standards with on-site events including but not limited to chainsaw operation, trail bed maintenance, stream crossings, and wayfinding.

Supplies for volunteers include but are not limited to shovels, rakes, pruners, loppers, chainsaws, safety gear and PPE, mowers, and gps equipment. Gear will be owned and held by Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Purchase trail building supplies for volunteers	August 31, 2024
First Volunteer Event	December 31, 2024
Second Volunteer Event	March 31, 2025
Third Volunteer Event	July 31, 2025
2025-6 Volunteer Event	July 31, 2026
2026-27 Volunteer Event	June 30, 2027

Activity 4: Trail Construction and Designation

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

Once the Trail Plan has been approved by LCCMR, Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail will begin building and designating additional segments of trail as described in the plan. Efforts will focus on areas where there are existing quality trails and access is available at both ends of the segment.

Per the Plan, a 25-mile segment or continuous group of segments will be prioritized and work will begin including mapping, private landowner access agreements, site-specific trail design, trail construction, and trail designation with wayfinding to trail plan standards. This 25-mile section may include roadwalks per the trail plan. Designated Trail will be open and marketed to the public when it meets the trail plan standards to be hiked without direct guidance from the organization.

Concurrent work will be done to secure access to private land beyond the 25-mile focus area per the trail plan, as opportunities become available.

An accessible route including directions to temporary routes and roadwalks will be made available to allow access to the entire planning corridor.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engage professional trail builder to design individual trail segments	January 31, 2025
Begin construction of new trail/designation of existing paths per Trail Plan	May 31, 2026
Secure 10 private landowner agreements within and beyond focus area	July 31, 2026
Designate Access to 25-mile Section of Trail	July 31, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Colleen Foehrenbacher	Eagle Bluff ELC	Fiscal Agency	Yes

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.

Attracting volunteers, supporters, and users will be key to the success of the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail. Currently, we utilize social media, a website, and a email newsletter of over 500 names to disseminate news of our project. We also regularly seek out and participate in media coverage from statewide and regional media channels. All of these methods will continue upon awarding of funds.

Additionally, we will be creating print and digital maps, informational signage, and other media such as videos to demonstrate progress on trail development.

Finally, we will invite local educational institutions and civic groups to participate in trail development, and to use the trail to better access and understand Minnesota's natural resources.

All of this will include acknowledgement of the ENRTF.

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?

Sale of branded merchandise, maps, booklets, and supported experiences.

Personal donations/memberships via a Friends or Supporters group.

Continued grant-seeking, including potentially LCCMR, American Hiking Society, camping and hiking gear manufacturers, and other organizations as appropriate.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Trail Director		Manage all staff duties of the project			30%	3		\$240,000
							Sub Total	\$240,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Technical hiking trail design.				1		\$100,000
Eagle Bluff ELC	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Fiscal Agent				-		\$34,000
							Sub Total	\$134,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Saws, loppers, chainsaws, protective equipment, safety equipment and other trail building gear.	Outfit volunteers for trail construction.					\$12,500
							Sub Total	\$12,500
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	100 miles/weeks x 156 weeks x \$0.60/mile	visiting trail locations, community events, and supporting volunteers					\$9,500

	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Registration (\$500) and travel expenses (\$500 lodging, \$250 food, \$250 travel, \$500 for presentation materials) for at least one in state outdoor recreation conference annually	To raise awareness of the trail project and learn best practices.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$14,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Presentation by staff at an Outdoor Recreation related Conference outside of Minnesota (\$750 registration, \$1000 travel, \$1000 Lodging, \$250 food)	To assure high awareness of the project and increase professional development of staff	X				\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Maps and outdoor signage	Wayfinding and trail education					\$11,500
	Publication	Trail Guides, user maps, and educational materials	educate public about the trail off site					\$11,500
							Sub Total	\$23,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$426,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Travel Outside Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	Presentation by staff at an Outdoor Recreation related Conference outside of Minnesota (\$750 registration, \$1000 travel, \$1000 Lodging, \$250 food)	As a completely new recreational asset dependent on volunteer development, we believe participating in industry events, including conferences, is an important way to maximize exposure to the backpacking population.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [86e40c7f-7af.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of proposed general trail route corridor....

Financial Capacity

File: [04051742-5d7.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Eagle Bluff Board Resolution	4c0c7e74-ca7.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Spring Grove/Norwegian Ridge	de324fd2-4be.pdf
Winona Outdoor Collaborative	a132d6e8-0c7.pdf
Aefintyr	001d2041-8a6.docx
City of Harmony	b98fb510-aa1.pdf
Superior Hiking Trail Association	993e0efe-acb.pdf
Norby	c2676e89-045.pdf
Nichols	b79aca14-a0f.docx
Eagle Bluff Letter of Support	844b8693-215.pdf
Minnesota Land Trust	a9bce339-7f4.pdf
Proposal for accessing DNR Land	d846f757-408.docx
Gaddo	efc1408a-c5b.docx
Eagle Bluff Financials	26f444d9-c4a.pdf
Hildebrand	72d1ed3f-0d7.pdf
Lieb Landowner Commitment	0a3fe33a-177.pdf
Hildbrand-Netzel Landowner Commitment	0e628c5e-f81.pdf
McCallson	c3ebe0f4-6cd.jpe
Trail Presentation	0df03e98-747.pdf
EIN Letter	bf92c23f-db1.pdf
Post Bulletin	4e290f87-e6c.pdf
Fillmore County Journal Article	ae242c1e-ffa.pdf
Tax Info #1	01a96b19-789.pdf
Tax Info #2	68e64ca4-a56.pdf
Focus Area 1 - Potential Pilot Route	c1251259-e5b.jpe
Focus Area 2 - Potential Pilot Route	82ef4de9-7ae.jpe
Parcel Tracking Spreadsheet	ed13ebfe-061.xlsx
Template Fiscal Agent Letter or Resolution	067db89c-3b7.docx
Template Board Resolution or Letter	3eeadd2b-22c.docx

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Conference budget item was clarified to show conference attendance would be to conferences where staff will present on the development of the trail.

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?

Yes, I agree to the Commissioner's Plan.

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

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?

Yes, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

Yes

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

No