



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2025 Approved Work Plan

## General Information

**ID Number:** 2025-319

**Staff Lead:** Michael Varien

**Date this document submitted to LCCMR:** July 18, 2025

**Project Title:** Chaska Big Woods Property Acquisition

**Project Budget:** \$529,000

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** Ashley Cauley

**Organization:** City of Chaska

**Office Telephone:** (952) 227-7526

**Email:** [acauley@chaskamn.gov](mailto:acauley@chaskamn.gov)

**Web Address:** <https://www.chaskamn.gov/>

## Project Reporting

**Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR:** June 24, 2025

**Reporting Schedule:** March 1 / September 1 of each year.

**Project Completion:** June 30, 2028

**Final Report Due Date:** August 14, 2028

## Legal Information

**Legal Citation:** M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09n

**Appropriation Language:** \$529,000 the first year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the city of Chaska to acquire property that contains remnant Big Woods to protect Minnesota forests and wetlands and to increase community access to natural areas.

**Appropriation End Date:** June 30, 2028

## Narrative

**Project Summary:** The City of Chaska wishes to acquire property that contains remnant Big Woods for the preservation of its natural resources, including mature stands of trees and wetlands, in perpetuity.

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

There is an existing mature oak savanna landscape, a remnant of the 'Big Woods', currently under private ownership, within the city of Chaska. It is adjacent to existing city property, which is currently undergoing a master planning effort to design an accessible park for children with disabilities through the installation of a Miracle League Field and an inclusive playground. Both the Big Woods properties and the city-owned land for a future park about the site of a future District 112 elementary school. The City of Chaska wishes to acquire property with Big Woods to preserve a majority of the area's mature tree stands and protect existing wetlands in perpetuity south of the future park and school. Given the site's proximity to a future city park and school, the proposed acquisition is a prime opportunity to preserve a natural and scenic resource with social, recreational, educational, and ecological benefits. Acquisition of Big Woods property would occur through parkland dedication resulting from the Highpoint Vistas development on the Frenz Property, MnDNR Natural and Scenic Area Grant funding (awarded in 2024).

**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.**

The city wishes to acquire property to protect and preserve the Big Woods. In June 2024, the city approved the preliminary plat, rezoning, and a variance for Highpoint Vistas, a 162-lot subdivision on approximately 103 acres. In March 2025, the city approved the final plat for the first phase of the subdivision for 56 single-family lots and nine outlots. Roughly 42-acres of remnant Big Woods – trees, bluffs, and wetlands – are located on several newly created parcels and outlots. Nearly half of the 42-acres would be preserved by the city's steep slope and wetlands ordinances. An additional seven acres will be acquired through parkland dedication. ENRTF funds will be used to acquire as much of the remaining Big Woods area as possible. The city prioritizes land within the Highpoint Vistas development due to its proximity to the future school, park, and existing development pressures.

**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?**

First and foremost, the project preserves and protects wetlands and mature trees in perpetuity, allowing Chaska residents and visitors to experience a unique ecosystem close to home. Coupled with its proximity to the future community park and school, preservation of the Big Woods is important in this area as much of the surrounding area is being developed with single-family homes. The proposed acquisition, using ENRTF funds, of 5-10 acres will protect the wetlands and trees from being destroyed in favor of development.

## Project Location

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

City(s): Chaska

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

City(s): Chaska

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Pre-Acquisition Activities

**Activity Budget:** \$5,000

**Activity Description:**

Several tasks must be completed before this portion of the Big Woods property is acquired, as required by the LCCMR, the DNR, and the City's own processes.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Complete Appraisals per ENRTF requirements	December 31, 2025
Finalize purchase price and terms with landowner	January 31, 2026
Contract with city attorney to handle legal aspects of the acquisition	March 31, 2026
Pre-closing documentation to the DNR Grants Unit	August 31, 2026
Obtain DNR commissioner approval and submit to LCCMR at least 10 days before closing.	August 31, 2026
Documentation to LCCMR staff	August 31, 2026
Send LCCMR the Pre-closing information for review at least 10 days prior to closing.	August 31, 2026

### Activity 2: Acquisition of Big Woods Property by the City of Chaska

**Activity Budget:** \$518,000

**Activity Description:**

The City of Chaska will work to acquire the land from the property owner, contingent on city approvals. The city is eager to acquire the unique oak savanna landscape to preserve the scenic, natural resources for passive outdoor public recreation ahead of development. Required LCCMR and DNR administrative and reporting processes will be completed to document the preservation of this land in perpetuity.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Complete land purchase through closing, title transfer and recording	September 30, 2026
Post closing items and payment confirmation to DNR within 10 days of closing	October 31, 2026
Record ENRTF Notice of Funding Restrictions	October 31, 2026
Post closing items, recorded documents, and title to DNR within 60 days of closing	November 30, 2026
Complete and submit to LCCMR a Transaction Cost Report within 60 days after closing.	November 30, 2026
Complete LCCMR Initial Land Acquisition Report within 60 days after closing.	November 30, 2026
NR specialist completes Restoration and Management Plan for Big Woods property	December 31, 2026

### Activity 3: Post-Acquisition Activities

**Activity Budget:** \$6,000

**Activity Description:**

Post-acquisition administration and reporting activities will be completed as required by the LCCMR and DNR. Signage will be posted recognizing the preservation of the woods, wetlands, and unique landscape features was made possible through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Send LCCMR photos showing installed ENRTF acknowledgement signage	July 31, 2026
Develop park signage recognizing LCCMR/ ENTRF funding source	December 31, 2026
Site is open to the public	December 31, 2026
Complete reporting and accounting for LCCMR/ ENRTF, including ongoing annual and final reporting	December 31, 2027

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Katherine Gould	Bolton & Menk, Inc.	Katherine Gould is a professional landscape architect at Bolton & Menk, a design/engineering consulting firm hired to assist with the Chaska Big Woods Property Acquisition proposal.	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.**

The City's creating a webpage for the Big Woods Acquisition project. This webpage will include information about the ENRTF fund and LCCMR recommendation. It will be updated to include activity/ milestone updates throughout the process. Post-acquisition the page will continue to acknowledge and reference the LCCMR and ENRTF but will also include information about the Big Woods preservation area.

Following the creation of the webpage, the city will issue a press release and a social media campaign regarding LCCMR's recommendation for funding. Social media updates will continue with updates on the acquisition process (activities and milestones). Additional information and updates will be provided at City events (farmer's market, festivals, River City Days, Open House, and upcoming community engagement processes for the community park to the north). All displayed and released information will acknowledge the ENRTF.

Post acquisition: Signage will be posted recognizing the preservation of the woods, wetlands, and unique landscape features was made possible through the fund. It is likely that the city would host a ribbon cutting or opening ceremony. The details of which will be planned closer to the event. However, the ENRTF will be acknowledged.

## 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?**

After the acquisition of this wooded part of the Big Woods property, the City of Chaska may install trails, benches, educational signage, or other low-impact improvements to enhance the recreation value of the site. Ongoing maintenance needs will be addressed using existing city resources allocated for park upkeep. The city may seek to acquire additional, adjacent forested land for preservation and public recreation, but the land acquired in this proposal will provide the link from the future school and city park to the unprogrammed, open-ended recreation and enjoyment of nature provided by the woods.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Bolton & Menk or other natural resources consultant	Service Contract	A natural resources consultant will be hired to complete a Restoration and Management Plan to guide the City of Chaska in taking care of the acquisition area and best protecting its beauty and natural resources.				1		\$50,000
Bolton & Menk or other funding consultant	Service Contract	A funding consultant will be hired to assist the City in administering the grant, documenting progress, and completing LCCMR grant reporting requirements.				0.4		\$21,000
Acquisition Services	Service Contract	Legal review of acquisition transactions, documents, and agreements.				0.1		\$10,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$81,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
	Fee Title Acquisition	5.72 Parcels: 1						\$447,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$447,000</b>
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								

							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Three posts and signs acknowledging ENRTF funding source	These three posts and signs will explain that the preservation acquisition was made possible via funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.					\$1,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$529,000</b>

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
<b>State</b>				
Cash	MnDNR's Natural and Scenic Area Grant Program	Funding will be used to acquire 5.72 acres of Big Woods property (shown as Outlot J, Highpoint Vistas).	Secured	\$475,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$475,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	Park dedication fees from developer of outlots adjacent to the outlots identified for acquisition and preservation	The City of Chaska will utilize park dedication fees from the developer of outlots adjacent to the outlots identified for acquisition and preservation to purchase Outlot G without ENRTF funds. Outlot G is 7.64 acres and much of it is buildable, but the City is dedicated to preserving these woodlands for present and future generations.	Pending	\$634,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$634,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$1,109,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,638,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Acquisition and Restoration

### Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Adjacent Property L	Carver	Remanent Big Woods property south of city-owned property	Fee Title	56.97	-	\$475,000	Private	City of Chaska	Has Not Begun
Exception Parcel, Highpoint Vistas	Carver	Remanent Big Woods property between city-owned property for the community park. Parcel contains mature trees, remnant bluffs, and wetlands.	Fee Title	23.94	-	\$475,000	Private	City of Chaska	Negotiations In Progress
Outlot G, Highpoint Vistas	Carver	Remanent Big Woods property immediately south of existing parcel already owned by the city and planned for a park. Outlot G will be obtained through parkland dedication.	Fee Title	7.64	-	-	Private	City of Chaska	Negotiations In Progress
Outlot J, Highpoint Vistas	Carver	Remanent Big Woods property, an oak savanna landscape with several large stands of mature trees, remnant bluffs, and wetlands. The City of Chaska is seeking funds to acquire the additional 5.72 acres of the Big Woods for public passive recreation, wildlife value, scenic value, and educational opportunities. Preservation of natural resources was the top parks and trails-related priority when Chaska residents were surveyed in 2018 for their input on the city's 2040 Comprehensive Plan.	Fee Title	5.72	-	\$475,000	Private	City of Chaska	Negotiations In Progress
<b>Totals</b>				<b>94.27</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$1,425,000</b>			

## Fee Acquisition

**1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.**

Very little of what was the Big Woods remains in Minnesota; however, roughly 42-acres of Big Woods exist on the Frenz-Worm properties. Roughly half of the 42-acres of Big Woods on the Frenz-Worm properties will be preserved through city ordinances. The city intends to acquire additional Big Woods property with ENRTF funds to prevent future privatized development and to increase the amount of scenic and publicly accessible property. Priorization of property is based on proximity to the city's future community park and District 112 elementary school to the north.

**2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.**

While not explicitly identified for city acquisition, the acquisition site is guided as "parks and open space in the 'Parks, Trails, Recreation, and Open Space Plan' chapter of the City of Chaska's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The plan identifies public trail connections to the Future Community Park immediately to the north. Community input, collected for this comprehensive plan update, also supports the acquisition of natural and scenic properties for public use. "Protection of natural resources" was identified as the highest priority among a list of 19 choices for future initiatives, with 44% of respondents agreeing strongly agreeing this should be a priority and 34% agreeing it should be a priority.

**3. For any parcels acquired in fee title, a restoration and management plan must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.**

The city has not yet developed the restoration and management plan but will hire natural resources specialists to complete one should the Big Woods Acquisition project be selected. A quote for the plan development was provided by Bolton & Menk's Natural Resources team. This item is included in the project Budget and will include an inventory of the site, citing existing plant communities and species; guidance to meet LCCMR restoration and management goals and a summary of expected restoration outcomes; a summary of overall strategies for long-term plan implementation; and assistance estimating long-term maintenance and management needs and cost.

**4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.**

Not applicable

**5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.**

This is noted in pre-acquisition activities as a milestone and will be obtained as required.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Map*

File: [bfc8f98b-c6c.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Map*

Map of the Big Woods and acquisition areas and proximity to the City's future community park and future elementary school for District 112....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Signed Chaska Fiscal Agent Letter	<a href="#">9d13b73e-2d0.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Resolution 2024-24, adopted 3-18-2024, Acquisition, Habitat, & Recreation Big Woods at 4250 and 4130 Chaska Blvd	<a href="#">719b0687-a94.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Acquisition Area Photos	<a href="#">c2f3ded1-594.pdf</a>
Figures from Chaska 2040 Comprehensive Plan: Parks, Trails, Recreation and Open Space chapter, supporting acquisition	<a href="#">c85da5e8-dbf.pdf</a>
Developer's proposal: Highpoint Vistas (Outlots G & J)	<a href="#">63c129ae-3c7.pdf</a>
Full parcel appraisal from July 2023	<a href="#">9c4bda4f-55d.pdf</a>
Chaska Park Board: Concept Plan for Southwest Community Park	<a href="#">8577a62b-d05.pdf</a>

### Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

#### *Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage*

All new sections (project locations, status update, and dissemination efforts) were completed. The budget was also updated to reflect the recommendation amount.

## 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 understand that travel expenses are only approved if they 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, 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, City of Chaska

**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?**

No

**Is the purpose of the acquisition for construction of a building(s), trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration, either now or in the future?**

No

**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

**Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:**

Katherine Gould, Bolton and Menk

**Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements**

Yes, I understand