

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2012-2013 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 068-D

Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape: Phase 2

Topic Area: D. Land Acquisition & Restoration

Total Project Budget: \$ 994,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 yrs, July 2013 - June 2016

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 4,000

Summary:

Secure permanent conservation easements on high quality habitat using a competitive process that assures the best financial value and greatest public benefit. Develop land management plans and conduct community education.

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Sponsoring Organization: Saint John's University

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Location

Region: Central

County Name: Stearns

City / Township: Avon, Collegeville, Farming, St. Joseph, St. Wendell, Wakefield Townships

<input type="checkbox"/>	Funding Priorities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple Benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	Outcomes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Knowledge Base
<input type="checkbox"/>	Extent of Impact	<input type="checkbox"/>	Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Scientific/Tech Basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urgency
<input type="checkbox"/>	Capacity Readiness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Leverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	Employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	TOTAL <input type="checkbox"/> %



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2012-2013 Main Proposal

PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape: Phase 2

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre unique natural landscape located in Stearns County just 15 miles west of St. Cloud. The landscape is glacial moraine that rises out of the surrounding farmland; it contains the highest concentration of native plant communities in the county, including oak and maple-basswood forests, tamarack and mixed-hardwood swamps, and wet meadows. It harbors several rare plants and animals, including American ginseng, cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk, Blanding’s turtle, and least darter. The area has been identified as *ecologically significant* by The Nature Conservancy’s Eco-Regional Plan and the MN DNR’s County Biological Survey. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the MN DNR and many others have invested in protection efforts within this landscape, signaling its importance as a priority for protection. This landscape includes more than 1,000 acres of conservation easements, many of which were established using 2008 ENRTF funding.

Using this ENRTF funding, the Avon Hills team developed and tested a novel ranking system dubbed the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPLE) to acquire easements. Under this system, each property is given an Environmental Benefits Score based on available data about its ecological qualities (e.g., shoreline, biodiversity, adjacency to protected properties). For properties meeting the minimum environmental threshold, MMAPLE uses a market-based approach that asks landowners to submit a sealed bid for the lowest price they will accept for a conservation easement. Those properties with the best ratio of environmental benefits to easement cost become the highest priority for acquisition.

Building on the momentum of our previous successes, we propose to implement a second phase of this project that will permanently protect those lands within the Avon Hills that have state-wide significance. Using the MMAPLE approach, we will secure conservation easements on the most strategic and cost-effective properties. In addition, we intend to invest in community outreach and education to ensure that local decision makers, landowners, and others understand the great importance of the Avon Hills landscape and the options that exist for its protection. Finally, we also will ensure that the land eligible for conservation easements will be managed as effectively as possible by developing land management plans for willing landowners.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Complete Conservation Easements using MMAPLE **Budget:** \$941,000
 Help landowners permanently protect land through the use of conservation easements. Saint John’s Arboretum will partner with the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), which will assist in landowner outreach, negotiate conservation easements; prepare documents including easements and baseline reports; secure appraisals, title work, and mapping; and conduct long-term easement monitoring and enforcement. In certain cases, Minnesota Land Trust may work with Stearns County to hold or co-hold easements as appropriate.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Protect approx. 400-700 acres by completing permanent conservation easements: contact landowners, implement the MMAPLE reverse-bidding system, complete all components of conservation easement projects, and dedicate funds for long-term monitoring and enforcement. This will result in the expansion of existing protected areas and will protect working forests, ecological diversity,	6/30/2016

wildlife habitat, and water quality.	
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Activity 2: Community Education and Outreach

Budget: \$47,000

Facilitate communication among landowners, environmental groups, local units of government, and others within the Avon Hills community to promote land-use education, land protection, understanding of ecological principles, and land stewardship.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Increase awareness of the importance of the Avon Hills landscape by hosting three annual conferences and other events to provide education and promote community involvement in its protection.	6/30/2016
2. Represent Avon Hills Initiative and related projects in the community.	6/30/2016

Activity 3: Management Plans for Priority Lands

Budget: \$6,000

On lands acceptable for easements, Forest Stewardship or other appropriate management plans will be prepared by a private-sector natural resource professional chosen by the landowner from a MN DNR list. These plans will be based on the terms of the easement, landowner’s goals and the best ecological outcomes. Plan costs are estimated at less than \$9.00 per acre.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Prepare and implement Forest Stewardship Plans on 400-700 acres.	6/30/2016

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Saint John’s Arboretum: Tom Kroll, John O’Reilly, Sarah Gainey, Jenny Kutter, Jeremy Scegura and staff

- Coordinating education and outreach, annual conference, workshops, grant management, budgeting, meeting with landowners, managing bidding process for easements

Minnesota Land Trust: Sarah Strommen, Kris Larson, and staff

- Providing easement education, coordinating bidding process, meeting with landowners, developing easement documents, and monitoring and enforcing the easements.

Avon Hills Initiative: local landowners, citizens, volunteers

- Working with Arboretum and MN Land Trust to achieve project goals

B. Timeline Requirements

All elements of this proposal will be completed by June 30, 2016.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

In 2008 ENRTF supported Phase 1 of the conservation strategy for the Avon Hills, which included community outreach and education, completion of conservation easements on 400 acres, and work with local governments on ordinances. The Avon Hills landscape still faces multiple land-use pressures and many landowners have expressed keen interest in permanently preserving their land. We plan to seek additional easement funding for subsequent phases of this project from multiple sources to establish cost-effective easements on quality parcels throughout the Avon Hills.

2012-2013 Proposed Acquisition List

Project Title: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape: Phase 2

Project Manager Name: Tom Kroll

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund \$ Request: \$994,000

#	Parcel Name	Acquisition Type (Fee Title or Conservation Easement)	County	Ecological Significance	Proposed # of Acres	Proposed # of Shoreline Miles (if applicable)	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)
1	Deerhunter 29	Conservation Easement	Stearns	Over 1 mile of shoreline on the last undeveloped lake in the area. 10 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS). 1/2 mile boundary would be shared with an existing easement.	129	1.2	MN Land Trust
2	Farm Boy	Conservation Easement	Stearns	.84 miles of shoreline on the same undeveloped lake as above. 26 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS). 1/2 mile boundary would be shared with an existing easement.	200	0.84	MN Land Trust
3	Rustic Place	Conservation Easement	Stearns	50 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) - Mesic oak. Nearly 1/2 mile of shoreline.	103	0.46	MN Land Trust
4	Lob Pine	Conservation Easement	Stearns	Wooded land adjacent to existing DNR SNA. 1/3 mile of shoreline.	55	0.36	MN Land Trust
5	Bobolink	Conservation Easement	Stearns	Preserves rural landscape.	61	N/A	MN Land Trust
6	Whats the name	Conservation Easement	Stearns	Adjacent to US F&WS property. Preserves rural landscape.	40	N/A	MN Land Trust

NOTES: This is a list of projects the Avon Hills partnership received in the March 2010 round of MMAPLE bidding, but did not fund due to lack of adequate funding or lower ecological significance. (Easements for two other properties were completed from the March 2010 round of MMAPLE bidding using the remaining 2008 ENRTF funding.) Other projects will be added to the list as new landowners are identified and contacted and a new round of MMAPLE bidding is used to allocate funds. Some projects lower on this list will not be completed as their ranking priority will drop compared to more ecologically significant projects.

2012-2013 Detailed Project Budget

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET: 3 years

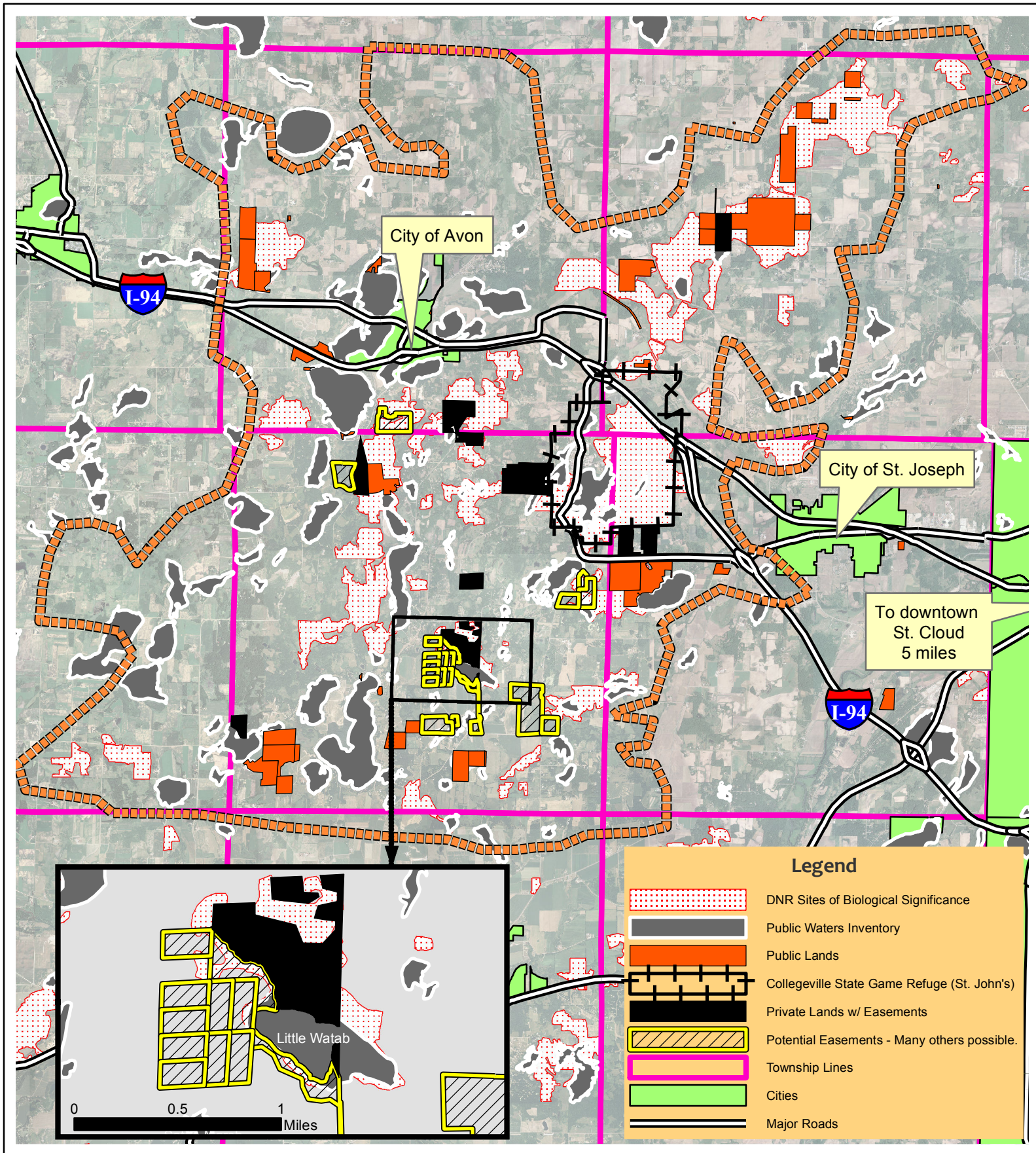
<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Personnel (SJU): Staff expenses include salaries plus 29% for eligible benefits. Staff will be involved for 3 years of grant activity. Estimated annual FTE below. Arboretum Director, T. Kroll, 0.15 FTE: Activities 1 & 2, landowner contacts, conferences, overall grant management & reporting Arboretum Educ. Staff, J. O'Reilly/S. Gainey, 0.1 FTE: Activity 2: education & outreach Arboretum Office Coord., J. Kutter, 0.1 FTE: budget, logistics, activity promotion, etc. SJU Accountant, J. Scegur, 0.1 FTE: budget management & reporting	\$ 24,000
Personnel (MLT): Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 30% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection staff (approximately 20% FTE/yr), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 10% FTE/yr)	\$ 60,000
Contracts (SJU): Nat. Resource Professionals: preparing Forest Stewardship Plans for lands acceptable for easements. Plan costs not to exceed \$9/acre. (\$6,000) Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops. Contract with private sector natural resource professional to contact landowners as needed. (\$3,000)	\$ 9,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies (SJU): Promotion of conferences and workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), printing conference brochures and materials, participant supplies (folders, printed materials, etc.). GIS data layers (not software or hardware) necessary for evaluating properties.	\$ 18,800
Acquisition (Permanent Easements--MLT): Includes purchase price of conservation easements and other acquisition expenses, such as title work, insurance, etc.; GIS services (including project mapping by Community GIS); other (including appraisals, surveys, recording fees, etc.) to protect 400-700 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust or Stearns County.	\$ 790,000
Travel (SJU): Estimated mileage reimbursements for conference speakers, staff, and contractors, to be reimbursed at the current IRS rate (\$0.555 per mile).	\$ 1,200
Travel (MLT): Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 1,800 miles at the current IRS rate (\$0.555 per mile).	\$ 1,000
Conservation Easement Monitoring & Enforcement Fund MLT): Funds dedicated to perpetually monitor, manage, and enforce 6 easements acquired and held by the Land Trust. Estimated at an average of \$15,000 per easement.	\$ 90,000
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 994,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: Contract with local private sector natural resource professional to contact landowners. (up to \$4,000) Initiative Foundation, Little Falls, MN	\$ 4,000	<i>Secured</i>
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period: We anticipate a minimum landowner donation of 20% of the appraised easement values for the overall project. Actual amounts will depend upon the outcomes of the bidding process.	\$ 140,000	<i>Pending based on each bid</i>
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:	N/A	N/A
In-kind Services During Project Period (SJU): Saint John's in-kind: overhead (computer, office space, phones, etc.); volunteer hours and mileage (conferences & landowner outreach)	\$ 11,000	
Funding History: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund 2008 allocation to Saint John's for initial work in the Avon Hills.	\$ 337,000	

Avon Hills of Stearns County - 65,000 acres

with callout example of potential easements on Little Watab Lake (A rare remaining undeveloped lake.)



Organization Description and Project Manager Qualifications

Organization Description

Saint John's Arboretum encompasses the grounds of Saint John's University and Abbey and was designated as a natural arboretum in 1997. Our 2,700 acres of forests, prairies, and lakes are managed with the goal of preserving and restoring the native flora and fauna of central Minnesota, as well as offering opportunities for education and research. Saint John's has a 501 (c)(3) designation.

Project Manager Qualifications: Thomas Kroll

Work	ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY, COLLEGEVILLE, MN
Experience	Land Manager and Arboretum Director
2001 - present	Care for 2,700 acres of forest, lakes, wetlands, and prairies. Manage land base for habitat, recreation, timber, clean water, and educational/interpretive opportunities. Acquired and now maintain "well-managed" rating from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) for all forest management activities, Supervise four staff and budget for the department.
Work	MN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
Experience	State Forest Nursery and Private Forest Management Program Supervisor
1979 - 2001	Private Forest Management Program Coordinator PFM Private Forest Incentives Specialist PFM Staff Forester
Committees/ Organizations	Society of American Foresters - Certified Forester Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) regional standards committee member Society of American Foresters, Minnesota - Treasurer MN Forest Stewardship State Committee - Chair MN Forest Resource Council Property Tax Task Force State Conservation Review Group (SCRG) Committee - Chair PFM Management Information System Task Force - Co-leader Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Technical Committee Forest Wildlife Improvement Program Task Force Minnesota Forestry Association member The Nature Conservancy member Zoning Board, Cities of St. Cloud and Brainerd, MN
Education	UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, ST. PAUL, MN College of Forest Resources, B.S. Forest Management

