

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
2020 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

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**Project Title:**

**ENRTF ID: 125-C**

Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals

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**Category:** C. Environmental Education

**Sub-Category:**

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**Total Project Budget: \$** 755,544

**Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested:** June 30, 2024 (4 yrs)

**Summary:**

57 diverse young people will work with and learn from USFWS professionals in paid internships and apprenticeships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District.

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**Name:** Deborah Loon

**Sponsoring Organization:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.

**Job Title:** Executive Director

**Department:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** 3815 East American Boulevard

Bloomington MN 55425

**Telephone Number:** (612) 801-1935

**Email** dloon@mnvalleytrust.org

**Web Address:** www.mnvalleytrust.org

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**Location:**

**Region:** Central, Southeast

**County Name:** Blue Earth, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Le Sueur, Ramsey, Rice, Scott, Sibley, Steele, Waseca

**City / Township:** Bloomington, Minneapolis, St. Paul, numerous other

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**Alternate Text for Visual:**

The map shows the boundaries and lands of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District.

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL	_____ %



**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)  
2020 Main Proposal Template**

**PROJECT TITLE: Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT:**

With this grant, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge), its Wetland Management District (District) and the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust (Trust) will build an extensive program of summer internship and full-time apprenticeship opportunities on the Refuge and District. We will engage a diversity of young people in *paid* positions to work side-by-side with and learn from USFWS professionals and other local conservation partners. Some of the participants will experience outdoor activities like fishing, paddling, orienteering, camping and hunting for the first time. Students will design and deliver environmental education programs, plan and co-lead wildlife interpretive and nature-based activities, assist USFWS personnel with habitat restoration and enhancement projects, conduct biological surveys, improve visitor facilities, and explore conservation-related career options. Activities will occur on the Refuge and District, as well as in the urban community through the Refuge's Urban Outreach Program.

These internships and apprenticeships will introduce 57 young people over three years to careers in the conservation field (19 positions per year). This experience will enable them to compete for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. In addition, their 60,000 hours of service will improve the habitat conditions of over 700 acres of prairie, wetland and forest, and introduce thousands of children to the wonders of the natural world through environmental education and nature-based activities.

To ensure we can attract a diversity of young people to these opportunities, all positions will be paid, with the wage ranging from \$12.50 to \$18.00/hour (weighted average of \$16.00/hour). Workers compensation insurance coverage will be provided, along with transportation assistance and free housing, as needed.

The Refuge is a valuable, but under-utilized resource in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Refuge's 14,000 acres stretch from urban to rural along nearly 70 miles of the Minnesota River. Its floodplain forest, river, lakes, prairies, oak savannas and wetlands provide critical habitat for a diversity of waterfowl and other migratory birds, fish, and resident wildlife. In addition, the Wetland Management District managed by the Refuge, is a 14-county district that manages more than 8,000 acres of land critically important to migrating, breeding and nesting waterfowl, as well as grassland birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and other creatures.

The Refuge and District offer vast opportunities for Twin Cities residents to connect with wildlife, learn about their habitats and enjoy wildlife-related recreation. As one of only 14 priority urban wildlife refuges in the 568 National Wildlife Refuge System, this Refuge is charged with engaging the next generation of diverse youth who, for a variety of reasons, are not connected to outdoors and nature. This is critical to ensuring a future constituency passionate about protecting our environment and public lands, as well as encouraging youth to consider conservation careers.

Given its location, size and varied habitats, the Refuge and District are able to serve as a learning laboratory and training site for future conservationists, natural resource biologists and environmental educators. Currently, this is done through a handful of unpaid internships every year. However, with the rising costs of a college education and intransigent economic disparities, many students cannot afford to take on unpaid internships. This is especially true for young people of color and low-income. Students need to take jobs outside of their chosen field to pay for college or even help support their families. Without good internships, they do not gain the experience needed. This grant program will attract students with diverse backgrounds, introduce them to the conservation field and provide mentorship and job skills to these future resource professionals.



**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

**ENRTF BUDGET: \$755,544**

<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<i>1. Urban Outreach Apprenticeship – 1 apprentice / year (2-3 total) connects 2,500 urban youth / year with nature-based activities (7,500 youth over 3 years)</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>2. Teaching Practicum Internships – 4 interns / year (12 total) deliver environmental education and lead nature-based activities to 8,000 students / year (24,000 over 3 years)</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>3. Summer Urban High School Internships – 6 high school interns / year (18 total) schedule, plan and co-lead nature-based education and recreation programs at the Refuge and in the community, and participate in career discovery across Refuge programs</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>4. Summer Intern Coordinator – 1 coordinator mentors and guides 6 high school interns per summer (18 interns over 3 years).</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>5. Visitor Services Apprenticeship – 1 apprentice / year (3 total) plans and delivers strategic communications that increase public awareness of the Refuge and drive 20% more visitors to experience the Refuge and engage in nature-based activities.</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>6. Biology Summer Internships – 4 interns / year (12 total) gain natural resources management experience through plant and animal surveys, water monitoring, habitat assessments, invasive species removal and mapping, boundary postings and more on at least 120 acres of Refuge and District habitat.</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>7. Refuge Biology Apprenticeship—1 apprentice / year (3 total) gains skills in biological monitoring, habitat plan design and restoration activities, assists with restoration and enhancement of at least 250 acres of Refuge habitat and learns how to balance habitat and wildlife needs with public access.</i>	<i>June 30, 2024</i>
<i>8. Wetland Management District Apprenticeship – 1 apprentice / year (3 total) gains skills in habitat plan design and restoration activities and assists with restoration and enhancement of at least 350 acres of wetlands and prairies.</i>	<i>June 30,2024</i>

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, USFWS Region 3 Division of Refuges Youth Internship Program, Hispanic Access Foundation, StepUp Achieve (Minneapolis), Right Track (St. Paul), Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, Twin Cities area high schools, colleges and universities, and an expanding pool of nonprofit partners working with low-income students in education and career exploration.

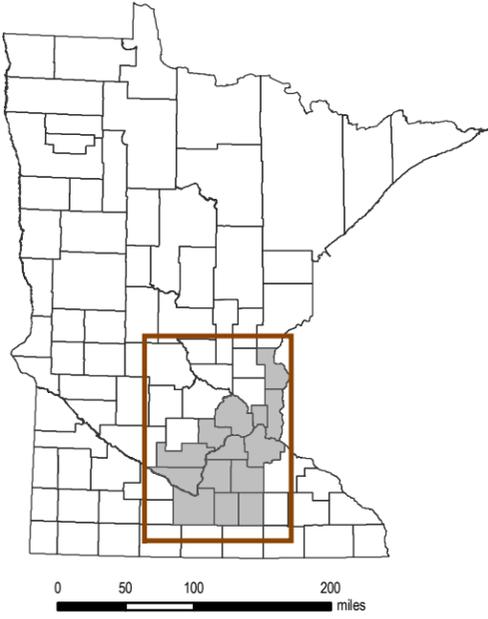
**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:** The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge are committed to maintaining this expanded internship and apprenticeship program for the long-term. Future funding will be sought through philanthropic efforts with foundations, corporations, civic organizations and individuals by the Trust and Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, as well as through other state and federal source of funds (e.g., workforce grant programs).

**Attachment A: Project Budget Spreadsheet**  
**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund**  
**M.L. 2020 Budget Spreadsheet**

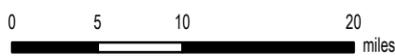
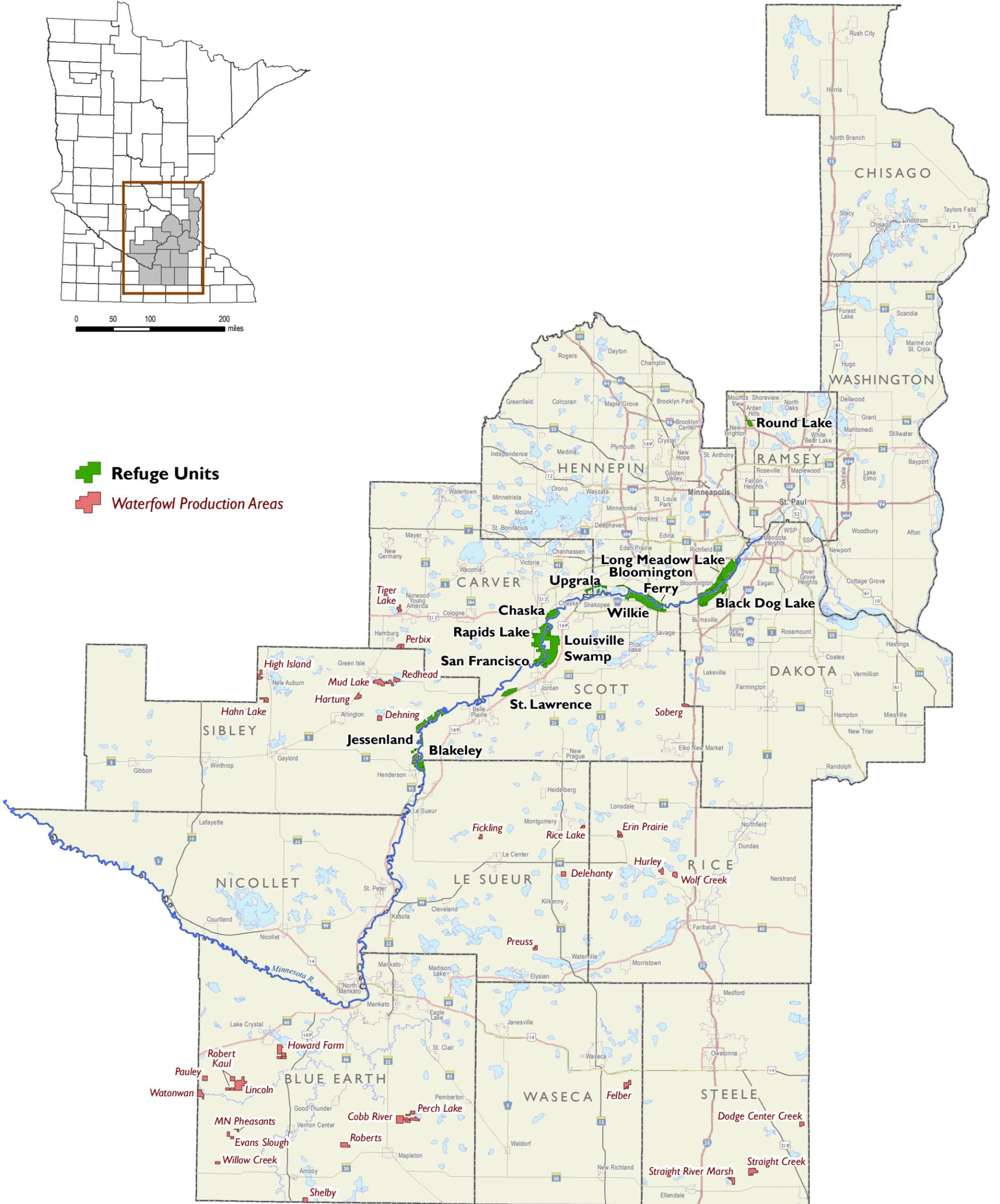


**Legal Citation:**  
**Project Manager:** Deborah Loon, Executive Director  
**Project Title:** Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals  
**Organization:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.  
**Project Budget:** \$755,544  
**Project Length and Completion Date:** 4 years, end June 30, 2024  
**Today's Date:** April 15, 2019

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET		Budget	Amount Spent	Balance
<b>BUDGET ITEM</b>				
<b>Personnel (Wages and Benefits)</b>		\$ 755,544	\$ -	\$ 755,544
Refuge Urban Program Apprentice - 1 full-year apprenticeship for a college student or recent graduate in the Refuge's Urban Outreach program to assist with outreach to urban youth and delivering engaging programming on the Refuge and in the community to connect youth with nature. 1.0 FTE position 12 - 24 months (July - June) located at MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge, \$17/hour, paid time off, worker's compensation, no other benefits.				
Refuge Teaching Practicum Interns - 4 full-year internships for college students or recent graduates to assist Refuge in delivering its environmental education and urban outreach programs. 4.00 FTE for 12 months (September-August) located at the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge. \$17/hour, paid time off, worker's compensation, no other benefits.				
Refuge Summer Intern Coordinator - 1 position for a professional with experience guiding youth to coordinate and mentor the cohort of summer interns. 1.0 FTE at 3 months / 14 weeks (May - August) located at the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge. \$18/hour, worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
Refuge Summer Urban Program High School Interns - 6 interns matched through partner programs (Achieve Mpls, Hispanic Access Foundation, Right Track St. Paul, Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center). 6.0 FTEs at 2 months / 8 weeks (mid-June to mid-August). Wage of \$12.25 to \$15/hour (rate set by partner program), worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
Refuge Visitor Services Apprentice - 1 full-time internship for recent college graduate to increase public use of the Refuge through strategic communications. 1 FTE at 12 months located at the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge. \$17/hour, paid time off, worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
Refuge & District Summer Biology College Interns - 4 internships for high school or college students pursuing a degree and career in natural resources field to assist the Refuge Biology team with species surveys, habitat enhancement work, public access facilities work. 4.0 FTE at 14 weeks (late May - August) located at the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge. \$15/hour, worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
Refuge Biology Apprentice - 1 full-time apprenticeship to gain skills in biological monitoring, habitat plan design and restoration activities, assist with restoration and enhancement of 250 acres of Refuge habitat and learn how to balance habitat and wildlife needs with public access. 1 FTE at 12-24 months located at the MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge. \$17/hour, paid time off, worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
District Biology Apprentice - 1 full-time apprenticeship to gain skills in habitat plan design and restoration activities and assist with restoration and enhancement of 350 acres of wetlands and prairies. 1 FTE at 6 months located at the Minnesota Valley Wetland Management District. \$17/hour, worker's compensation insurance, no other benefits.				
<b>COLUMN TOTAL</b>		\$ 755,544	\$ -	\$ 755,544
<b>SOURCE AND USE OF OTHER FUNDS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROJECT</b>				
	<b>Status (secured or pending)</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Spent</b>	<b>Balance</b>
<b>Non-State:</b> MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc. - 15% of all wages, 100% of wages for 9 positions that start prior to 7/1/20, worker's compensation insurance premiums	Secured	\$ 182,297	\$ -	\$ 182,297
USFWS - Region 3 Division of Refuges Youth Internship Program - Financial support for wages of 2 Urban Summer Interns and 1 Refuge Biology Intern.	Pending	\$ 52,740	\$ -	\$ 52,740
<b>State:</b>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>In kind:</b> USFWS - MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District -- Office space, equipment, local travel, supplies. (In-kind value for supervision of interns by USFWS personnel not calculated and included).	Secured	\$ 97,464	\$ -	\$ 97,464
USFWS - MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge - Housing at intern bunkhouse on Rapids Lake Unit (operating costs only).	Secured	\$ 9,000	\$ -	\$ 9,000
<b>Other ENRTF APPROPRIATIONS AWARDED IN THE LAST SIX YEARS</b>		<b>Budget</b>	<b>Spent</b>	<b>Balance</b>
Metro Conservation Corridors VII, ML2013		\$ 400,000	\$ 246,800	\$ 153,200
Metro Conservation Corridors VIII, ML2015		\$ 500,000	\$ -	\$ 500,000



- Refuge Units
- Waterfowl Production Areas



MATT MILLETT  
UPDATED 6/2018  
SOURCES: MVNWR, MVT, MN DNR, USGS, MET COUNCIL  
UTM ZONE 15N (NAD83)





## PROJECT MANAGER QUALIFICATIONS

### Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.

The Strategic Framework 2019-23 of the Minnesota Valley Trust, Inc. (Trust) states that it “will assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in making the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) a premier urban wildlife refuge that:

- Protects, restores, and enhances large blocks and corridors of habitat to provide sustainable landscapes for people and wildlife and improve water quality in the Minnesota River
- Provides opportunities for Twin Cities residents to access the Refuge and connect with wildlife, plants and the Minnesota River in a diversity of ways meaningful to them
- Increases connections with a diversity of residents in the Twin Cities through outreach programming that meets residents of all ages and backgrounds in their communities, introduces them to the natural world and draws them to visit and experience the Refuge themselves
- Engages a diversity of people as volunteers, interns and employees to improve Refuge habitat, meet Refuge educational objectives and build a conservation ethic throughout the community
- Introduces children to the wonders of the natural outdoors through educational and interpretive programming, thereby building a pool of future conservationists, employees, volunteers, advocates and philanthropists.”

The Trust was established in 2001 to mitigate the impact of the thousands of flights sent over the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge from the new north-south runway at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. The “Mitigation Plan” was completed by the Trust in 2012 and a new Strategic Plan adopted in early 2013. The Trust continues and expands its work in support of the Refuge through the Strategic Framework 2019-23, adopted in March 2019. The document establishes Operating Parameters to guide the Trust’s work over the five years and is available upon request.

A 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization, the Trust works in cooperation with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District. All lands acquired and restored are donated to the USFWS.

The Trust funds its work through government grants and contracts, private donations and investment income. Since 2003, the Minnesota Valley Trust has been appropriated and managed 15 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund grants, as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. It also has been appropriated 15 Outdoor Heritage Funds grants, 8 as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and 7 as awarded by the Conservation Partners Legacy Grants program of the Minnesota DNR.

*The Project Manager’s biography is on the next page.*

Deborah Loon, Project Manager

Deborah Loon has served as the executive director of the Minnesota Valley Trust almost since its inception in 2001. In that role, she is the liaison with the USFWS and is the primary contact with all landowners, local communities and grantmaking organizations. She provides support to the Trust Board of Directors, implements the Strategic Framework and provides overall management of the organization, including grants management.

Loon also serves as the executive director of Minnesota Valley Lands, Inc., the subsidiary to the Trust that holds title to the acquired lands and completes all management and restoration of the lands prior to donation to the USFWS.

Loon brings extensive experience in project management and organizational leadership for both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. She has served on the staff and boards of directors for numerous nonprofit organizations since 1984, including in the executive director role since 1999. Loon holds a BA in political science from St. Olaf College.

