

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

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**Project Title:**

**ENRTF ID: 272-G**

Creating Welcoming Environments at Minnesota State Parks

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**Category:** G. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

**Sub-Category:**

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**Total Project Budget: \$** 2,565,167

**Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested:** June 30, 2023 (3 yrs)

**Summary:**

This project provides Minnesota State Park and Trail (PAT) visitors with an integrated, next-generation information system that creates a positive, safe, and welcoming experience for all users.

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**Name:** Rachel Hopper

**Sponsoring Organization:** MN DNR

**Job Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Department:** Parks and Trails Division

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St. Paul MN 55155

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**Web Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Location:**

**Region:** Statewide

**County Name:** Statewide

**City / Township:**

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**Alternate Text for Visual:**

Map of state park and state recreation area investment groups from the 2015 System Plan

_____ 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:** Creating welcoming environments at Minnesota State Parks

### I. PROJECT STATEMENT

This project provides Minnesota State Park and Trail (PAT) visitors with an integrated, next-generation information system that creates a positive, safe, and welcoming experience for all users. Minnesota state parks and trails are more popular than ever (10M visitors in 2016), providing a statewide outdoor recreation system to visitors with a wide variety of backgrounds, some of whom are familiar with the system and others who have never before visited. Based on a 2014 Metropolitan Council study on Regional Park use, some of the barriers for new users to visiting parks are fear/safety issues, challenges with maps, and lack of awareness of parks. With an increase in new users and changes in the needs and expectations that come with them, establishing an integrated public information package (orientation, kiosks and wayfinding signage) will increase system continuity and provide improved public safety as well as self-direction and wayfinding. Also, by providing clear and concise information and wayfinding signage, visitors will experience more welcoming and understandable information to help them access and connect to all of Minnesota's outdoor recreation system.

This project will improve the orientation and wayfinding information system for 10-15 rustic state park and recreation areas throughout the state. Rustic parks and recreation areas, as defined by the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan (2015), offer basic amenities, including picnic tables, fire rings, and orientation signage. Rustic parks rely on self-directed services such as self-guided interpretation and self-registration. Many park visitors prefer these types of rustic opportunities because they offer a quiet, natural experience.

Creating a welcoming environment is a key aspect of bringing new and under-served audiences into Minnesota's state parks. Under-represented audiences report two key barriers to park visitation: 1) fear of "wild" places and navigating through them (i.e., wayfinding); and 2) lack of knowledge about what to do when they get there. In addition, a survey found that more than 30% of all vehicles that pass through the entrance gate of state parks do so without paying for the required vehicle permit. Our point-of-arrival pilot project has identified needed improvements to state parks to: reduce visitor confusion; provide clear wayfinding signage to help newcomers feel safer and more secure at our parks; and reduce failure to pay fees, which will improve the health of the state park revenue account.

This project proposes to invest in critical site-level improvements that will welcome new visitors and under-served populations into Minnesota's outdoor recreation system by:

- 1) Creating consistent, easy-to-follow guidance for visitors to orient themselves to the state park experience;
- 2) Replacing dilapidated, ineffective signage with consistently easy-to-find, plain-language wayfinding that follows national best management practices and enhances visitor connectedness and satisfaction; and
- 3) Installing user-friendly, secure electronic pay stations at state park entrances that will make compliance with fee requirements fast and easy.

### II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

#### **Activity 1: Planning and design of a welcoming environment**

**Description:** *Building on a recent continuous improvement project, DNR will engage visitors in discussions and planning for a more welcoming and consistent orientation and wayfinding information system for 10-15 geographically dispersed rustic state parks and recreation areas.*

**ENRTF BUDGET: \$282,168**



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

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<i>1. Engage new visitors in design of improved orientation/wayfinding approach</i>	<i>Dec 1, 2020</i>
<i>2. Develop consistent orientation/wayfinding standards and templates</i>	<i>Mar 31, 2021</i>
<i>3. Develop site plans for each project location</i>	<i>Oct 31, 2021</i>

**Activity 2: Implement new orientation/wayfinding plans at 10-15 state parks and recreation areas**

**Description:** *Install orientation and wayfinding information systems so that visitors will be greeted with information that helps them feel welcome, safe and ready to experience their parks.*

**ENRTF BUDGET: \$2,282,999**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
<i>1. Develop and fabricate information systems</i>	<i>Dec 30, 2022</i>
<i>2. Install information systems</i>	<i>Jun 30, 2022</i>
<i>3. Evaluate information systems</i>	<i>Jun 30, 2023</i>

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

The project team consists of DNR Parks and Trails staff. Staff from park units dispersed throughout the state will contribute expertise and time to the success of this project. Only DNR will be receiving project funds. Project staff will include our visitor services supervisor; exhibit specialist; cartographer; and state park consultant. These staff would be responsible for the integrated project design. Several park naturalists and unit supervisors will be responsible for providing site-specific content and coordinating projects on site.

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

Connecting people to the outdoors means breaking down barriers that inhibit them. Recreational research demonstrates that people who are new to outdoor recreational pursuits need re-assurance to feel comfortable in the great outdoors. DNR has initiated an effort to establish a consistent self-direction, orientation, wayfinding, and interpretive public information program with a pilot project at our newest state park: Lake Vermilion-Soudan Underground Mine. With this proposal, PAT will expand the learnings from that pilot visual standard to 10-15 additional parks and trails sites. Future plans are to implement these standards statewide. This proposal is an innovative approach to implementing a well-integrated public information system that will benefit all visitors, regardless of background, ability or previous outdoor recreation experience. This project will help DNR meet a long-term goal that State Parks visitation will match the state's changing demographics by creating welcoming environments that will encourage deeper connections to some of Minnesota's most inspiring natural landscapes and outdoor recreation activities.

**V. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:**

**A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet**

**B. Map of Investment Groups from the Minnesota State Parks and Trails System Plan**

**C. Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description**

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

Legal Citation:

Project Manager: Rachel Hopper

Project Title: Creating Welcoming Environments at Minnesota State Parks

Organization: DNR Parks and Trails

Project Budget: \$2,565,167

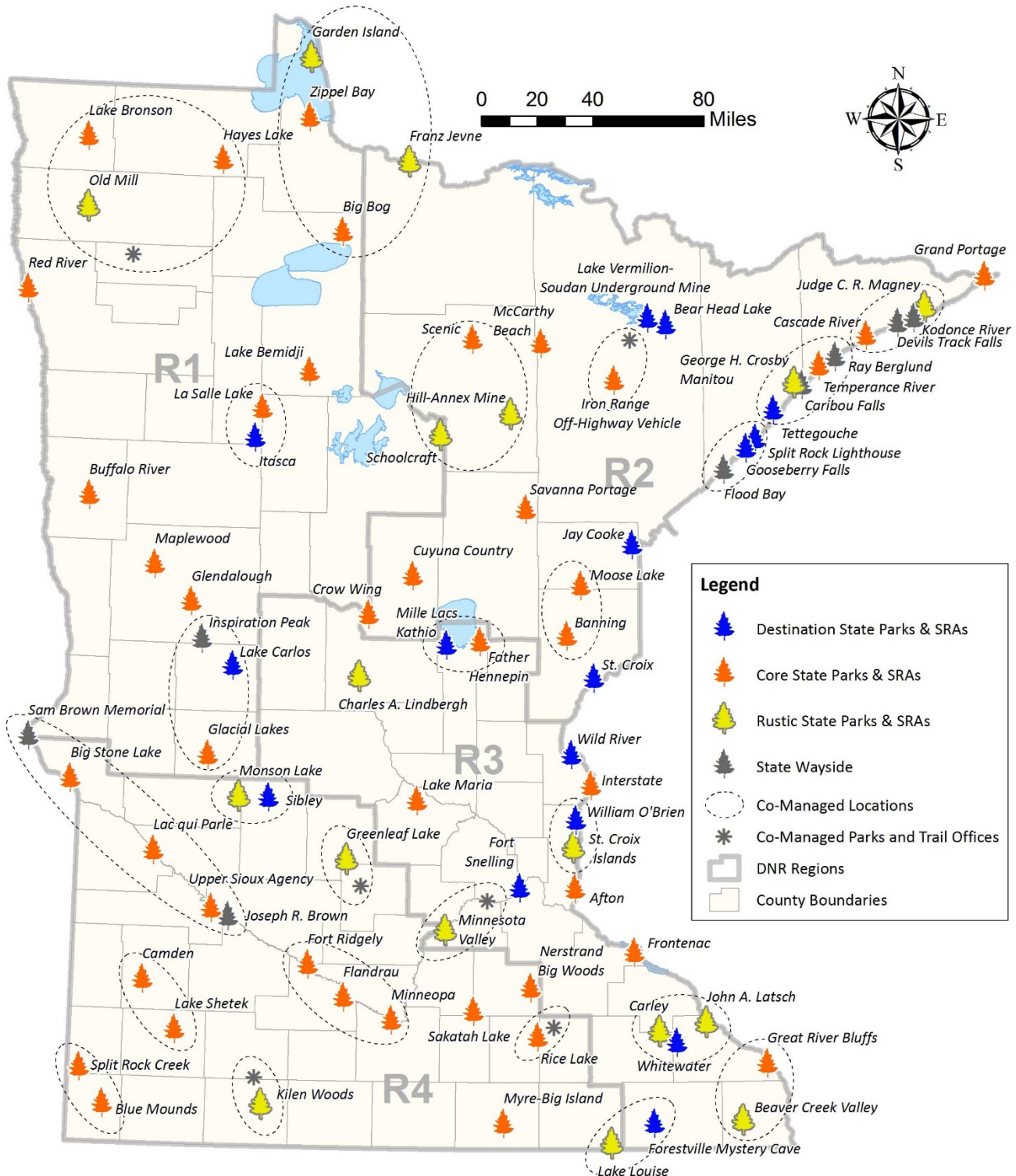
Project Length and Completion Date: 3 years, June 30, 2023

Today's Date: 3/12/19



ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET		Budget	Amount Spent	Balance
<b>BUDGET ITEM</b>				
<b>Personnel (Wages and Benefits)</b>		\$ 570,000	\$ -	\$ 570,000
This project will restore one statewide program FTE on a temporary basis for project management (position was lost during previous budget shortfalls) and will partially fund 4-5 additional project leads to implement needed improvements across field sites (positions were cut back to 75-80% positions previously). Total temporary FTE positions = 2.0 (5-6 staff dedicated to the project at some level).				
<b>Professional/Technical/Service Contracts</b>				
Design, fabricate and install wayfinding and orientation system.		\$ 1,830,000	\$ -	\$ 1,830,000
<b>Equipment/Tools/Supplies</b>				
		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Capital Expenditures Over \$5,000</b>		\$ 100,000		\$ 100,000
Acquire, program and install electronic pay station units.		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Other</b>				
<b>Additional Budget Items:</b> <i>To support the costs related to the program administration</i> <i>*Direct and Necessary expenses: HR Support (~9,196), Safety Support (~1,664), Financial Support (~29,909), Communication Support (~1,388), IT Support (~21,872), and Planning Support (~1,138) necessary to accomplish funded programs/projects.</i>		\$ 65,167	\$ -	\$ 65,167
<b>COLUMN TOTAL</b>		\$ 2,565,167	\$ -	\$ 2,565,167
<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>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>State:</b>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>In kind:</b>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Other ENRTF APPROPRIATIONS AWARDED IN THE LAST SIX YEARS</b>				
	<b>Amount legally obligated but not yet spent</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Spent</b>	<b>Balance</b>
		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

## State Park and State Recreation Area Investment Groups



## Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description

Project Manager: Rachel Hopper  
Title: Visitor Services and Outreach Manager  
Affiliation: Department of Natural Resources, Parks and Trails Division  
Telephone Number: 651-259-5549  
E-mail: [rachel.hopper@state.mn.us](mailto:rachel.hopper@state.mn.us)

### Experience:

Rachel Hopper has worked for the State of Minnesota for over 12 years. She oversees the Visitor Services and Outreach Section for the Parks and Trails Division at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, which includes interpretation, publications, outreach, special events, and media relations. Hopper has extensive project management and budget experience, having managed the policy and planning unit and several major projects for the department-wide office of budget and management. Prior to Hopper's experience at DNR, she coordinated a multi-agency consortium of land grant universities and sustainable agriculture organizations and managed a multi-year Upper Mississippi River Basin project with grant funding from the McKnight Foundation.

### Organization Description:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Parks and Trails Division's vision is to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire the public to pass along the love for the outdoors to the next generation. More information on the Minnesota DNR can be found at [MNDNR.gov](http://MNDNR.gov).