**PROJECT TITLE:** Prairie to the People™: Habitat Restoration and Education

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

*Prairie to the People* is a community-based restoration initiative that will permanently restore underutilized municipal green spaces into native prairie and pollinator habitat. The city of Fergus Falls, MN has identified 60 total acres within city limits for native prairie restoration. LCCMR funding would directly support the permanent restoration of multiple sites.

Project details include site preparation, local ecotype seeding and a community engagement and outreach program. Additional outcomes include the development of a *Prairie City Implementation* and Management *Protocol* to ensure long-term success. The impacts of this project will be two-fold. First, restored prairies will provide ecological impacts including diverse pollinator habitat, improved surface water quality though soil stabilization, and improved ground water quality through infiltration and storage. Secondly, we will engage the community with conservation education by hosting volunteer work events to maintain project sites and educate youth about prairie conservation. Signage will be created and posted at restoration sites to educate visitors about the program and benefits to wildlife, water quality and how to implement prairie conservation best practices.

This project has tremendous local support and will be implemented in conjunction with the Fergus Falls Mayor’s Office, Fergus Falls City Council, Fergus Falls Natural Resource Advisory Council, United Prairie Foundation, Prairie Wetland Learning Center, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the MN DNR and others. Locations are highly visible, publicly owned green spaces, ideal locations for public engagement. In addition to local ecotype seeding, the most visible sites will be supplemented with native plugs grown by Fergus Falls’ very own Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. We will include students and community groups to help maintain project sites, providing them with a sense of ownership and involvement. By working collaboratively with community leaders and restoration specialists, we aim to restore habitat and create a model framework and *Prairie City* *Implementation Protocol* benefiting pollinators, wildlife, and ecosystem health and community sustainability.

To maintain long-term sustainability of project sites, a *Prairie City Implementation and Management Protocol* will be developed with restoration experts and community leaders for guidance on site selection, management and maintenance. This guidance will also enable future leaders and other stakeholders access to a framework for adoption in other communities. Protocol documents will include the site preparation needs, planting recommendations and community engagement resources to educate and create public awareness.

The mission of *Prairie to the PeopleTM* is, “Building stronger communities through integrated prairie habitat, conservation best practices and civic leadership.” The program was created out of need to make prairie common again in a region where less than 1% of its original range remains, due to urban development and agricultural land use. This fragmentation has resulted in the drastic reduction and endangerment of wildlife and pollinators that still depend on prairie ecosystems for survival. This model program has tremendous scalability in Fergus Falls and communities throughout Minnesota. Educating youth and others on the project benefits will also enhance greater adoption of prairie and pollinator friendly practices. Through civic leadership and permanently restoring underutilized community spaces into prairie habitats, conservation best practices will become mainstream, creating significant ecological benefits to fish, wildlife and the public.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

**Activity 1 Title:** Prairie Restoration (Up to 79 city owned sites totaling 60 acres)

**Description:** *Step 1: Remove trees, shrubs, and non-native grasses and forbs. Step 2: Prescribed burns will be conducted to remove biomass. All sites will be burned annually to increase native species dominance and discourage woody and non-native encroachment. Burns will be conducted by a certified contractor. The MN DNR will develop the burn plans. Step 3: Native seeding and plug planting to establish diverse prairie vegetation.*

**ENRTF BUDGET: $342,600**

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. To ensure successful establishment of the pollinator habitat, pressure from non-native vegetation needs to be removed.* | *07/01/2021* |
| *2. Conduct annual prescribed burns on each site.* | *06/01/2023* |
| *3. Drill/Broadcast/plant local ecotype seed mixes and plugs.* | *06/01/2022* |
| *4. Host volunteer events to engage youth and community to plant plugs.* | *07/01/2022* |

**Activity 2 Title:** Youth and Community Education

*Highly visible sites within the city will be selected to incorporate volunteer engagement in the planting and maintenance of the restored prairie ecosystem. The Prairie Wetland Learning Center will be a key partner in organizing the “hands-on” learning experience.*

**ENRTF BUDGET: $88,528**

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Create unique kiosks and signage to educate the community about the program and ways to get involved.* | *07/01/2021* |
| *2. Host youth and community engagement events in partnership with the Prairie Wetland Learning Center to provide on-the-ground education and outdoor classroom activities.* | *07/01/2022* |

**Activity 3 Title:** Implementation and Long-Term Management Plan Guidelines

*Work with the city to establish sustainable long-term maintenance and expansion protocols. To include prescribed burn/mowing schedules as well as restoration instructions for future expansion.*

**ENRTF BUDGET: $10,000**

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Create a Prairie City Implementation and Management Protocol* *to inform long-term maintenance of restoration sites.* | *06/30/2023* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

Dane M. Huinker, Wildlife Forever Conservation Program Manager, will serve as project manager. He will be responsible for all reports and deliverables. Chris Johnson, Wildlife Forever Accountant, will serve as project support.

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

The city of Fergus Falls and community partners will be taking on the long-term maintenance of the project. The city leaders not only value the ecological and aesthetic benefits of restoration but also the economics of turning heavily maintained monoculture green spaces into prairie. Frequent mowing, fertilizer and pesticide applications are costly and unnecessary with a restored prairie system. The work done under Activity 3 will provide the framework for the long-term maintenance and expansion of the project. We will work with city leaders to form a management plan to include maintenance schedules for prescribed burning and weeding as well as future expansion. The project does not need additional investment other than funding requested from the ENRTF to be completed.