**PROJECT TITLE:** DNR Scientific and Natural Areas

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

The unique and vital role of state Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) will be increased through wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement, increased public involvement, and strategic acquisition. About 1000 acres of native habitat restoration, enhancement, and site improvement activities will be targeted at SNAs threatened by invasive species and lack of natural disturbance regimes and to provide nature-based recreation. In cooperation with Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CCM), outreach and citizen science actions will result in public participation at 80 SNA events and a network of volunteer site stewards at 130 SNAs. About 500 acres will be strategically acquired from willing sellers and designated as SNAs to protect at risk native plant communities and wildlife habitat of state significance identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) and the SNA Strategic Land Protection Plan.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1:****Native Habitat Restoration, Enhancements and Improvements on 1000 acres**  Native habitat restoration and site improvement activities will be completed on about 1000 acres at about 50 SNAs. Management plans will be completed for about 10 SNAs (including sites acquired through these funds). About 50 SNAs will be monitored to improve management and track changes to rare species, imperiled plant communities and other important protected features. SNA staff will provide ecological/technical guidance and on-site verification for 6 projects implemented by partners on SNAs. Restoration and improvement activities will be carried out by DNR staff, CCM, Sentence to Service, volunteers, and/or contractors. Activities include seed collection, site preparation, planting and aftercare, invasive species early detection, control and removal, site clean-up, signing, interpretive kiosks, fencing, and prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance, such prescribed haying, mowing or grazing, necessary where use of fire is limited). This activity includes work to bring acquired parcels up to DNR’s minimum standards and includes restoration and improvements of acquired sites if ecologically advisable and feasible within the appropriation period.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $1,764,045** |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 1a. ~20 acres of restoration of forest, prairie, & outcrop sites | 06/30/2022 |
| 1b. ~380 acres of woody removal & invasive species treatment | 06/30/2022 |
| 1c. ~600 acres of prescribed burns | 06/30/2022 |
| 1d. ~5 SNA interpretive kiosks installed AND development work on ~20 sites | 06/30/2022 |
| 1e. ecological/technical guidance for ~6 partnership projects | 06/30/2022 |
| 1f. management plans completed for ~10 SNAs | 06/30/2022 |
| 1g. adaptive management, ecological & conservation easement monitoring on ~50 SNAs | 06/30/2022 |

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| **Activity 2:****Public Engagement, Outreach & Citizen Science in Natural Areas**  Minnesotans will be involved in volunteer habitat conservation and education activities on SNAs and in the conservation of other key natural areas. A network of 130 SNA volunteer site stewards who help care for SNAs will be sustained and 80+ events organized and executed (volunteer work days, recreation-educational events, guided nature hikes, citizen science monitoring, bio-blitzes, etc.). New and refined electronic/social media communications tools, maps and interpretive information will be developed and disseminated to advance the public’s understanding of Minnesota’s wild places and biodiversity and to enhance nature-based recreational use of SNAs. Natural Area Registry agreements will be established on about 2 biodiversity significance sites to promote conservation of natural areas owned by others.  Minnesota has an opportunity to co-host the 2021 Natural Areas Conference in Duluth. If held in Minnesota, this traveling national conference would bring natural resource professionals from across the nation and globe to Minnesota to share new research, evaluate best management practices and develop on-going connections. The Natural Areas Association (NAA), a national, non-profit dedicated to the support and advancement of the community of natural areas practitioners, would be the fiscal agent and coordinate all logistical needs (DNR would not generate any income). This request would simply allow SNA to provide and present expertise on Minnesota’s natural areas and resources to the NAA and conference attendees.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $728,368** |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 2a. SNA website, e-book, social media, maps & other interpretive info | 06/30/2022 |
| 2b. ~ 80 citizen science & volunteer events (management work days & ed. events) | 06/30/2022 |
| 2c. network of volunteer site stewards at ~130 SNAs | 06/30/2022 |
| 2d. ~2 Natural Area Registry agreements to conserve biodiversity significance sites | 06/30/2022 |
| 2e. SNA sites and rare features highlighted at 2021 Natural Areas Conference through field trips, presentations and displays | 06/30/2022 |
| **Activity 3:****Strategic Acquisition of Sites with Biodiversity Significance – 500 acres**  Acquisition and designation of ~500 acres as state SNAs will protect and buffer the most important MBS sites of biodiversity significance. Proactive landowner contacts will target SNA Strategic Plan priority areas, including MN Prairie Conservation Plan priority areas. Acquired sites must be recommended through an Ecological Evaluation report and numerically evaluated to insure prioritization of MBS biodiversity significance sites that are predominantly MBS native plant communities with habitat for rare, threatened and endangered species and Species in Greatest Conservation Need. Most acquisition will be of fee title, but if more appropriate, acquisition could be a SNA-administered conservation easement with SNA designation. Included on the parcel list, are specific sites currently protected via permanent conservation easements that fall into SNA’s Strategic Plan. The rare features and unique plant communities on these sites would benefit from the protection and management provided by SNA and would add great value to SNA goals and mission. If acquired, an appraisal would be used to find the fair market value including current encumbrances such as conservation easements. New MBS/other scientific data will be incorporated into the SNA Strategic Plan to refine and increase strategic prioritization.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $3,382,587** | |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 3a. acquisition as SNA of ~500 acres of high quality habitat | 06/30/2022 |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS:**

This proposal includes SNA work towards partnership project work on SNAs. Partners will NOT receive ENRTF Funding through this proposal. Partners include entities, such as The Nature Conservancy, Friends of the Mississippi River, Sugarloaf Northshore Stewardship Assn., local units of governments, and other non-profits.

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

Without SNA conservation, habitats for rare species and sites of high biodiversity significance are likely to be lost forever. The SNA Strategic Land Protection Plan targets acquisition (on existing public land/through acquisition) to insure the best ecological value for every dollar spent. Achieving SNA habitat management, public engagement and acquisition goals depends upon ongoing support from the ENRTF of $5M-$10M per biennium. Annual/biennial appropriations will also be sought from the Outdoor Heritage Fund and state bonding.

**V. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:**

**A. Project Budget Spreadsheet, B. Map, C. Parcel List Spreadsheet, D. Acquisition, Easements, and Restoration Requirements, E. Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description**