# PROJECT TITLE: Minnesota Hunter Walking Trails – Public Land Recreational Access

1. **PROJECT STATEMENT**

Approximately 1,000 miles of hunter walking trails (HWTs) exist on ~250 sites within Minnesota’s public forest lands. They were designed to provide a non-motorized recreational opportunity for that segment of the public that desires a quieter, foot-travel experience. The goal of this grant proposal as sponsored by the Ruffed Grouse Society is to update a significant portion of that system through: 1) restore and upgrade ~200 trailheads and 80 miles of existing trail; 2) development of ~20 miles of new trails; and, 3) updating of maps for both management and public users.

Currently this statewide system of HWTs is located on State Wildlife Management Area (35%), State Forest (30%), County Forest (20%), and National Forest lands (10%). A majority of these trails were developed through efforts funded by MNDNR Wildlife and NGO/conservation organizations like the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS). This HWT system was primarily developed in the 1970’s-90’s as a means to allow hunters to access public land and to improve forest habitats through dispersed timber sales.

HWTs are typically funded by annual operating funds of the controlling land administrator, they do not have a dedicated funding source like other trail users (e.g. grant-in-aid ATV trail fund). This lack of a long-term, dedicated funded source over time has led to a generally degraded system that is overdue for upgrades and improvements. The broad purpose of this request is therefore to ensure that recreational trail opportunities in Minnesota include non-motorized hunter walking trails. These trails will promote the ongoing participation of current hunters, birders and hikers that seek this type of trail experience and also encourage the introduction of new folks to upland hunting traditions while also facilitating forest habitat improvements through access for forest management (timber harvest).

The broad purpose of this request is therefore to ensure that recreational trail opportunities in Minnesota continue to include non-motorized hunters walking trails. The trail will promote the ongoing participation of current users that seek this type of recreational experience, encourage the introduction of new users to upland hunting traditions, and facilitate forest habitat improvements through access for forest management activities (e.g. timber sales).

In preparation for this effort, the Ruffed Grouse Society is currently undertaking a detailed assessment of HWTs across all public forest land administrators in Minnesota. This assessment will serve to provide a single dataset and process to prioritize HWT needs for this grant if funded. Based on this assessment RGS will also be looking at future LSOHC, MNCPL grant proposals to enhance forest habitats (e.g. young forest, within-stand diversity, legacy patches, etc.) within influence areas of these trails.

# PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

**Activity 1: Restore, upgrade existing HWT trailheads and trails.**

# ENRTF BUDGET: $400,000

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 1. *Restore, upgrade ~200 HWT trailhead: Confirm, prioritize HWT trailhead infrastructure needs; bid and contract efforts based on controlling land administrator’s environmental and construction requirements; secure supplies as needed; document and certify successful completions.*
 | *12/31/2022* |
| 1. *Restore, upgrade ~80 miles of existing trails: Confirm, prioritize existing HWT trail needs; bid and contract for the construction of new HWTs based on controlling land administrator’s environmental and construction requirements; document and certify successful completions.*
 | *12/31/2022* |

 **Activity 2: Construct new hunter walking trails.**

# ENRTF BUDGET: $100,000

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Construct ~20 miles of new hunter walking trails: Confirm, prioritize new HWT trail needs; bid and contract for the construction of new HWTs based on controlling land administrator’s environmental and construction requirements; document and certify successful completions.*  | *12/31/2022* |

**Activity 3: Update, improve HWT information necessary for management and public recreational use (~200).**

# ENRTF BUDGET: $45,000

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Ongoing field assessment, information, map updates with respective public land administrators, contracted GIS support.* | *12/31/2022* |
| *2. Finalize and complete information and map updates with respective public land administrators, link all to MNDNR’s HWT webpage for public access.*  | *6/30/2023* |

1. **PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

**Partners receiving ENRTF funding:** *None*

# Partners not receiving ENRTF funding:

# *Project partners include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Chippewa and Superior National Forests; and various Minnesota counties that choose to be involved with this grant. Partner participation will include in-kind assistance through staff efforts, existing trailhead and trail footprints, design assistance, site certification of accomplished work, etc.*

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

*Results from this effort will serve to greatly update and revitalize the current statewide HWT system that exists on Minnesota public forestlands, hopefully also serve as a catalyst that forms long-term solutions for the management and funding of this system by MNDNR Wildlife and public forest land administrators.*

# SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:

* 1. **Proposal Budget Spreadsheet:** See attached, submitted information.

# Visual Component or Map: See attached, submitted information.

# Parcel List Spreadsheet: NA

# Acquisition, Easements, and Restoration Requirements: NA

# Research Addendum: NA

# Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description: See attached, submitted information

# Letter or Resolution: See attached, submitted information.

# Financial Capacity: See attached, submitted RGS 2017 annual fiscal report.