**PROJECT TITLE: Turning Back to Rivers: Environmental and Recreational Protection**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Working hand in hand with river communities, The Trust for Public Land (TPL) will protect land through fee title acquisition and increase access on and near Minnesota’s great rivers. Our partnership is based on existing local area plans and we will protect approximately 400 acres of high priority, high quality natural resource land: lands with high recreational value, lands that address access gaps, lands that maximize scenic and habitat benefits, and lands that help to protect from high water and flooding.

Thousands of Minnesotans live within mere miles of the state’s iconic Mississippi, St. Croix, and Minnesota Rivers, and their major tributaries, and cannot access and enjoy the rivers or the land adjacent to them. In the Land of 10,000 Lakes, our rivers are under-valued and increasingly inaccessible natural assets. Historically, these rivers have been predominately used for industry and commerce, and then dumping and waste. Communities viewed these natural amenities as opportunities for commercial development rather than spaces for the public to enjoy. Reality has thankfully shifted. Communities throughout the state now understand the environmental and recreational benefits their rivers offer as nearby natural assets ripe for protection and public enjoyment. Communities are eager to partner to protect these dynamic riverside assets.

These communities have created plans and identified and prioritized opportunities for the protection of public open space, but they lack funding, capacity, and the real estate know-how to effectively achieve their goals. TPL brings expertise in complex real estate transactions, and we have the proficiencies needed to help communities efficiently solve their specific natural resource needs.

In partnership with local and county government, we will protect approximately 400 acres through fee title acquisition of high priority, high quality natural resource land. These properties have been prioritized in state, regional, and local natural resource and recreation plans, reflecting strong community support. Our efforts will focus on river communities throughout the state by protecting land that they are excited to manage and that will provide multiple outdoor recreational opportunities. These lands are not eligible for other protection funding due in large part to hunting requirements.

By permanently protecting these lands, multiple benefits are achieved:

* Protection of high quality natural resource land for community enjoyment, wildlife habitat, and water quality
* Resilience due to improved ecosystem connectivity of native animal and plant populations (including “Species in Greatest Conservation Need”) in the face of climate change and invasive species
* Increased access to various outdoor recreation opportunities along Minnesota’s rivers, improving the connection between people and Minnesota’s natural resources
* Additional buffers from high water and flooding

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

**Activity 1:** *Protect Strategic Lands: Fee title acquisition of high priority lands along the Mississippi, St. Croix, and Minnesota Rivers, and their tributaries*

**Description:** Eligibleparcels (see attached acquisition parcel list) have been identified by communities in local plans as priorities for recreational value, high quality natural resources, lands that address access gaps, scenic qualities, and/or water protection. Not all parcels can be protected at the same time. Prioritization factors include adjacency to already protected land; landowner willingness to sell for conservation purposes; final local decision making on protection; and other due diligence. TPL will conduct all due diligence activities including appraisals, environmental reviews, title investigations, and survey work. Acquired land will be conveyed to our public agency partner (local units of government or MN DNR) for long-term stewardship, maintenance, and if called for, park and trail development. Priority parcels include:

* **Cottage Grove Kiln/Mississippi River**: Adjacent to city-owned Settlers Island, Urmann Ries site, and Moores Park, the acquisition of this parcel would add to the river access trail vision planned by the National Park Service and the City of Cottage Grove. This site is proposed to provide community access to the river for educational and recreational opportunities, and includes the historic Grey Cloud Lime Kiln, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. This is a high priority for Cottage Grove.
* **Byllesby Park Addition/Cannon River:** Located between the main park area and the upper park area, acquisition of these parcels would provide additional riverside protection and access, and nearly double the size of this unique recreational area located on the Cannon River at Lake Byllesby. This is a high priority for Goodhue County.

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| **ENRTF BUDGET:** $3,803,600 |  | | |
| **Outcome** | | **Completion Date** |
| 1. Approximately 400 acres, and 1.5 mile of shoreline, protected for public use and enjoyment through fee title acquisition | | 6/30/23 |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS:**

**A. Partners receiving ENRTF funding**

Agency partners, local and state, may receive land acquisition costs applicable to the real estate transaction, and IDP costs for initial site development.

**B. Partners NOT receiving ENRTF funding**

The Trust for Public Land will partner with cities, counties and the MN DNR to acquire and permanently protect land. Other partners may include shore associations, citizen groups and other NGOs. Partners specifically ask for our help because they lack staff, resources and capacity to conduct this work. Related to this proposal, the likely long term stewards may include: City of Brainerd, City of St. Cloud, City of Cottage Grove, Goodhue County, Rice County, Renville County, Washington County, Chippewa County and the MN DNR.

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:** Strengthening the connection between land and people is vital in ensuring the long-term stewardship of Minnesota’s natural resources. The protection activities included in this proposal are complementary to TPL’s current work in the Mississippi, St. Croix and Minnesota River watersheds to restore, protect, and enhance Minnesota's wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife. The parcels listed in this proposal are generally not a good fit for other protection funding due in large part to hunting requirements. Rather, protecting these parcels for resource based recreational needs, addressing access gaps areas, and inspiring river-oriented communities is a demand that can be uniquely met by ENRTF/LCCMR funding. The Trust for Public Land views this proposal as a long-term strategy, and will continue its work as long as critical habitat and natural resources based recreation opportunities remain unprotected and in danger of degradation and loss. Land protection is not the final step in helping communities turn back to rivers; however, it is a critical early step needed before long-term restoration, stewardship, and programming of these riverfront areas can take place. These activities will be led and funded by the long-term steward of the resource.

**V. TIME LINE REQUIREMENTS:** 3 years; until June 30, 2023

**VI. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS ATTACHED**