**PROJECT TITLE: Making the Superior Hiking Trail A Showcase for Resource-Sensitive Hiking Trail Construction**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Our main goal for this project is to renew and rebuild the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT) to minimize environmental damage, make the Trail safer for users, and make it more resistant to the impacts of increased traffic and climate change. Secondary goals are to meet or exceed expectations of landowners, both private and public, to responsibly manage the SHT on their lands, and enhance users’ experience on the SHT.

Much of the SHT was built well before national trail building standards were established. The SHT is hugely popular and was not built to withstand the impact of an estimated 100,000 users annually. As a result, there is considerable environmental damage to the Trail, and damage caused by users of the Trail.

A 2018 ENRTF grant allowed the Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) to hire trail experts to evaluate root causes of environmental damage and user dangers on the SHT. Their findings were at once sobering and inspiring: the problems on the SHT were not limited to the 30 miles that they evaluated but were in fact endemic along the entire 300-mile length of the Trail. Their advice to the Association: adopt national hiking trail construction standards; change organizational systems and processes to support sustainable trail building; and focus intensely on managing water. This advice dovetailed nicely with the SHTA’s own Trail Renewal Program, launched in early 2018, a commitment to reduce natural resource damage caused by SHT users.

**Outcomes:** Sections of the Trail showing the most environmental damage (mud holes, eroding hillsides) will be repaired. Built structures (e.g. board walks, stairways, bridges) will be constructed to minimize environmental damage and reduce hazards for trail users. Wetlands through which the SHT passes will be far less impacted; erosion-prone slopes and stream banks will be better protected.

**Achieving the Goal:** Commit to environmental responsibility by adopting and implementing national hiking trail construction standards for every project on the SHT; and training staff, volunteers and contractors in those principles and practices.

**Why Do This?** It is simply the right thing to do, by the land and water, to renew the SHT to minimize user impacts. A 2020 ENRTF grant would enable the SHTA to continue the renewal work stemming from a 2019 ENRTF grant that focuses on the “worst of the worst” sections of the SHT. If we fulfill the promise of our Trail Renewal Program, the SHTA can be a showcase for how an “old” hiking trail can be renewed and built to last.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1 Title: Renew and Rebuild the Most Damaged and Dangerous Segments** **Description:**There are countless board walks, stairways, small bridges and other structures – and, conversely, a lack of them – needing reconstruction and renewal. Our focus in this activity will be to replace weak or decrepit built structures, using construction standards for trail structures developed by the National Park Service and used by most other national scenic trail groups. In addition, this activity will include retrofitting the SHT with water management devices (e.g. water bars, drainage dips, swales, ditches) so that water is deflected away from and off the tread (footpath) of the Trail, thereby reducing or eliminating erosion and mud holes.**ENRTF BUDGET: $225,000** |  |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Up to 40 structures will be rebuilt or built anew in areas most in need.*  | *December 2022* |
| *2. Up to 25 miles of the SHT will be retrofitted with water management devices.* | *December 2022* |
| *3. Up to 10 short reroutes totaling up to 2 miles will be completed.* | *December 2022* |

**Activity 2 Title: Renewing the SHT By Making Brand-New Trail**

**Description:** Some segments of the SHT were simply put in the wrong place from the beginning: at the bottom of a slope, through a wetland area, or onto a nearby snowmobile trail for lack of a better route. In this activity, we intend to build entirely new sections of trail (1,000 -10,000 feet), because the existing trail simply can’t be fortified enough to withstand the natural and human forces undermining it. In these cases, starting over is the best course of action. There are many vagaries to getting a “reroute” approved, making it difficult to determine exactly which segments would get rerouted. Those listed below are high-priority candidates for rerouting:

**ENRTF BUDGET: $225,000**

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Soggy segments of Britton-to-Oberg and Lutsen-to-Caribou Trail sections of SHT totaling up to 5 miles, will be rerouted to higher, firmer ground* | *December 2022* |
| *2. A new 2.5 mile segment near Grand Marais will be built to take the SHT off the North Shore State (snowmobile) Trail.* | *December 2022* |
| *3. A new route (about 1.5 miles) will be built to create a second Northern Terminus for the SHT, allowing users to arrive at the Pigeon River (Canadian border)* | *December 2022* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

Minnesota DNR (state parks and forestry) – land access, technical assistance, environmental permitting.
U.S. Forest Service (Superior National Forest) – land access, technical assistance, materials contributions, environmental permitting.

St. Louis County, Lake County (forestry, highways, land) – land access, technical assistance, permitting.

City of Duluth (parks dept.) – land access, financial assistance, technical assistance.

North Country Trail Association – advice and counsel, technical assistance.

Ice Age Trail Alliance – advice and counsel, technical assistance.

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

The Trail Renewal Program has focused the Association’s energy, resources and systems so that the lofty goal of creating and supporting a hiking trail that lasts a century is achievable. The Trail Renewal Program has brought about a significant increase in private donations that will support the operations of the organization. Big trail-building projects will require support from wherever we can get it, including public sources (local governments, IRRRB, ENRTF, Parks Greater MN Parks and Trails Commission) and private sources (private foundations, major donors and investors).