**PROJECT TITLE:** Crow Wing County Community Natural Area Acquisition

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Crow Wing county acquired the historic Pequot Lakes area fire tower and surrounding 40-acres from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in November of 2018. The county would like to acquire an additional 69-acres in order to manage the forest and provide an interpretive hiking trail that interprets the history of the fire tower and forestry practices in Crow Wing County. Both private land owners are willing to sell their property to the county in the spirit of this area becoming a community accessible historic interpretation site that elevates the role of working forestry in the region. This would be a place where people could see a piece of community history as well as enjoy the natural resources that Central Minnesota has to offer.

The fire tower parcel owned by Crow Wing county is located along State Highway 371 in Pequot Lakes and is an official stop for the Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway bike corridor. This area is easily accessible and connected to other recreational activities. The site is an attraction for tourists who visit lake country, local residents and community groups to utilize as an educational, environmental and historical resource.

The current condition of the property is forested with a mixture of coniferous and deciduous trees including pines, spruce, maple, oak, ash, aspen, and birch, among other species. The site also contains deciduous shrubs such as smooth sumac, dogwood, elderberry, and a wide range of herbaceous groundcover plants. The parcels adjacent are also forested and contain similar species. Pequot Lakes schools use this site for outdoor education and would benefit from a larger interpretive forest outdoor classroom. The recently decommissioned DNR ranger station (tower site) with its local and regional historic value lead to the tower becoming listed on the National Historic Lookout Register.

This site already has a small parking lot and picnic area for visitors to use as well as one maintained hiking trail to the tower. With the addition of 69 surrounding acres of forested land this would become a larger complex to support educational, historic and recreational uses for the community. The timing of the county acquisition and the willingness of neighboring landowners to support this proposal, make this an important window of opportunity to develop on an excellent public asset.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity 1 Title:** Acquire adjacent land  **Description:**An appraisal of the approved parcels will be conducted and negotiations with the two private land owners will be conducted. The property will then be transferred to Crow Wing county and within 60 days of the transaction the county will provide a report to the LCCMR.  **ENRTF BUDGET:** $405,000   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Outcome** | **Completion Date** | | *1. Appraise approved parcels* | *August 2020* | | *2. Transaction of properties* | *December 2020* | | *3. Report provided to the LCCMR* | *January 2021* | |  |

**Activity 2 Title:** Forest management

**Description:**Crow Wing county will conduct a selective timber harvest on newly acquired lands surrounding the Pequot Lakes fire tower for forest management as well as invasive species control if identified.

**ENRTF BUDGET:** $0

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Timber harvest on newly acquired lands* | *Summer 2021* |
| *2. Invasive species control (if identified)* | *Summer 2021* |

**Activity 3 Title:** Develop public use amenities

**Description:** Create interpretive walking trails and install a kiosk near the fire tower with information on the history of the site and post appropriate signage along trails.

**ENRTF BUDGET:** $0

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Create forest interpretive walking trail* | *Fall 2021* |
| *2. Post signage on new county forestry interpretation area* | *Fall 2021* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

* Crow Wing County

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

The funds received from this grant will be used to acquire 69-acres of land around the Pequot Lakes fire tower to create a historic interpretive site. After the land has been transferred to the county, a trail will be created, a selective timber harvest will take place and the county will perpetually maintain this community resource. The perpetual cost of maintenance of the site will be the responsibility of Crow Wing county.

