



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

## 2021 Request for Proposal

### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2021-189

**Proposal Title:** Ag-Urban Partnership Pilot: Accelerating Action in Priority Watersheds

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Kimberly Musser

**Organization:** Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Minnesota State University Mankato

**Office Telephone:** (507) 389-5307

**Email:** kimberly.musser@mnsu.edu

### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** This Ag-Urban pilot project will offer new solutions to improve water quality, reduce flows and invest public funds wisely in some of the most impaired watersheds of the state.

**Funds Requested:** \$199,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** 2023-06-30

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Small Projects (H)

**Secondary Category:** Water Resources (B)

### Project Location

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?**

Statewide

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?**

Region(s): SE, SW,

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Narrative

### **Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

Significant water quality challenges persist in the Minnesota River Basin (MRB). Waterways are polluted with high levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment and many watersheds are listed as high priority in Minnesota's Nutrient Reduction Strategy. Changing precipitation patterns and increasing flow regimes further compound problems raising pollutant levels, increasing flooding and erosion and further destabilizing ecosystem function.

Cities and small towns across the basin are struggling to manage water infrastructure and increasing pressure for more purification as water quality declines. Many small towns don't have the financial resources for upgrades and are further stressed by regulatory and funding uncertainty. Tensions exist in the region between small towns and the farming community and existing policies are not creating the change needed to protect water quality and farm profitability. A meeting of ag and urban leaders (Ag-Urban Partnership Forum, 2019) underscored the urgency to bridge the divide between agricultural and urban sectors and to work collaboratively on solutions.

This project will:

- Support community-based Ag-Urban conservation planning to reduce pollution in impaired watersheds;
- Offer creative strategies to build cooperative partnerships in five subwatersheds;
- Provide innovative case studies of Ag-Urban collaboration that solve persistent basin-wide problems (e.g. upstream BMPs instead of more costly wastewater upgrades or new tools like point-nonpoint nutrient trading).

### **What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and Milestones.**

#### Locally-led Ag-Urban Subwatershed Pilots

"Make a pilot that is smart, simple and easy—just get started, be pragmatic, start small, and try different things." Ag-Urban Forum participants outlined an approach to spur local innovation and problem solving through pilot projects. Collectively, they offered a thoughtful framework to move forward—focusing on a small, subwatershed scale, building Ag-Urban relationships, learning about each other's challenges and developing partnerships across silos to brainstorm together to find locally-driven watershed solutions that use limited funds wisely. This pilot project will support cross sector meetings in five subwatersheds within in the highly-impaired Greater Blue Earth River Basin. Local groups will include agricultural, city, environmental and private industry representation. Meetings will be structured to foster collaboration enabling education of both sides through strong communication and transparency. Groups will strategize how to prioritize resources to solve problems and implement solutions.

#### Cross-Sector Think Tank Spurs Innovation

A group of statewide leaders representing a broad cross section of constituents with regulatory and program development authority will be developed and convened. Local partners will bring their subwatershed case study to these statewide agricultural and urban problem solvers. They will discuss and brainstorm together about ways to move implementation forward.

### **What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

- More wholistic, locally-led, cross sector subwatershed planning in five (5) priority subwatersheds that represent typical challenges in the state's most highly-impaired watersheds;
- Leveraging collaborative partnerships, accelerating implementation, building community capacity and bridging the urban vs. rural divide by bringing stakeholders together to develop clean-up strategies;
- Urgently needed support for small, rural communities struggling to maintain effective drinking, stormwater and wastewater services from local and statewide cross-sector group;

- Innovative ideas and solution strategies generated can be shared and replicated; and
- Policy makers and program developers will have a richer understanding and help to solve water quality challenges outstate

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Facilitate a collaborative stakeholder process to develop 5 locally-led Ag-Urban subwatershed pilots

**Activity Budget:** \$120,000

**Activity Description:**

1. Local partners in the Greater Blue Earth River Basin will decide on five representative subwatershed pilot projects. These pilots will represent key challenges the region faces. Examples will likely include: communities that may need wastewater upgrades in the near future (e.g. Trimont, Waseca); grappling with persistent flooding (e.g. New Richland, St. Clair); facing drinking water dilemmas (e.g. Farimont); as well as cities that are seeking innovative ways to work with upstream farmers to support increased water storage through wetland restoration, multi-purpose drainage management or increased soil health adoption (e.g. Mankato).

2. Host 3-6 meetings in each of the five subwatersheds (15-30 subwatershed meetings total).

Using the approach delineated by stakeholders in the Ag-Urban Partnership Forum meeting, host conversations at the local level with both agricultural and urban attendees to strategize to encourage action. Look at the watershed as a whole, systems approach, not as individual parts. Explain perspectives, each other’s “worlds” and challenges. What are the problems? What are the options?

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
Local partners to identify and recruit 5 representative subwatershed pilot projects	2021-12-31
Local partners develop strategies to drive next steps	2023-06-30
Develop case study summaries and presentations for the “Think Tank ” group	2023-06-30
Plan and host 3-6 meetings per pilot with local partners	2023-06-30

### Activity 2: Innovative Implementation Solutions: Cross-Sector Think Tank

**Activity Budget:** \$79,000

**Activity Description:**

A state-level Think Tank group will be developed with representatives from state agency policy makers, farmers and farm organizations, cities, industry and environmental groups. This project may be a special project of the existing MAWQCP advisory committee. Additional urban and environmental representation would be added to this group of agriculture and industry leaders. Discussions around Ag-Urban collaboration will be broad enough to support innovative ideas that link economic development with conservation improvements and strengthen relationships among farmers, businesses, cities, and conservation partners. Agriculture supply chain leaders will be integrated into discussions to find out where they might have influence and impact (e.g. Land-O-Lakes, General Mills).

The project team will identify a cohort of key stakeholders, design an engagement process, then plan, schedule and facilitate a series of meetings enabling the Think Tank group to learn from local leaders of each case study, brainstorm and problem solve potential next steps. Throughout the process, summary information and discussion papers will be developed to promote dialog among stakeholders. Case study summaries and recommendations for new policy tools and approaches to support development of other Ag-Urban partnerships will be developed to share strategies that reduce flows, sediment and nutrient levels in the MRB. Findings, results and products will be shared across MRB through diverse media venues (e.g. local and statewide meetings, websites, and conferences)

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
Develop stakeholder process and build a network of cross-sector key stakeholders	2021-12-31
Develop case study summaries and recommendations for new policy tools and approaches	2023-06-30
Convene, facilitate and document four (4) to six (6) Think Tank stakeholder meetings	2023-06-30

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Katrina Kessler	MPCA Commissioners Office	Project Team/Advisor	No
Brad Jordahl Redlin	Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program	Project Team/Advisor	No
Alison Zelms	City of Mankato	Project Team/Advisor	No

## Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this be funded?**

Local pilots will continue to be implemented with momentum from new collaborative partnerships and strategies. The project team will build upon and promote the integration of Ag-Urban collaboration into existing planning and regulatory processes such as WRAPs, TMDLs and 1W1P. If the strategies developed include wastewater and/or stormwater infrastructure issues, partners will ensure alignment with the existing regulatory programs. The MAWQCP will continue to partner with urban entities to support implementation in the region. The project team will work to secure additional funding to support Ag-Urban partnerships from national (NRCS), state, and local sources as well as private foundations.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Integrating Targeted Watershed Planning Tools with Citizen Involvement	M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 04v	\$169,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Kimberly Musser

**Job Title:** Associate Director, Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato

**Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.**

As Associate Director of the Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato, Kimberly Musser brings over two decades of project management experience and has coordinated a wide variety of Minnesota River Basin centered projects. She has served as project manager for two LCCMR grants: Integrating Targeted Watershed Planning Tools with Citizen Involvement (LCCMR, 2016) and Minnesota River Experts: An Educational Field Trip Online (LCCMR, 2010). She has a long history of working with teams to distill and disseminate basin-wide information via reports (Minnesota River Basin Trends Report, Minnesota River Basin: Ag-Urban Partnership Forum, State of the Minnesota River Water Quality Monitoring Reports) and coordinates basin-wide data centers (Minnesota River Basin Data Center, Minnesota River Water Storage Forum, Minnesota Nutrient Planning Portal). Musser works with citizens and local conservation partners to support locally-led watershed planning efforts (Le Sueur River Watershed Network, Watonwan Civic Engagement Project, East Fork Des Moines River Watershed, Southwest Minnesota Civic Engagement Cohort on Water Quality).

She enjoys the challenge of taking complex technical and scientific information and making it understandable to broader audiences to help inform planning and decision making. Over the years, she has developed and taught a dozen different courses at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the Geography and Urban and Regional Planning departments. She serves on the board of the Minnesota River Congress, Friends of the Minnesota Valley, and Friends of Minneopa State Park. She holds a Master's degree in Community and Regional Planning from the University of Oregon and a Bachelor's degree in Geography from the University of California at Berkeley.

**Organization:** Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Minnesota State University Mankato

**Organization Description:**

Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University, Mankato (WRC-MSU, Mankato)

Since 1987 the WRC-MSU, Mankato has served as a regional center for gathering, interpreting, and distributing data of environmental significance. Faculty, staff and students provide applied research, educational programming, technical assistance, and water resource planning. GIS staff provide training and support for array of sophisticated GIS analysis and maps to help support conservation planning and targeting. Using the latest data, the WRC-MSU, Mankato works with citizens and conservation partners across the Minnesota River Basin to help improve the quality of regional lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater.

Since its beginning, the WRC-MSU, Mankato has participated in over 100 research, educational, and planning projects in partnership with dozens of public and private organizations. These projects range from groundwater, lake assessment, and TMDL studies to citizen engagement and water quality workshops, to the development of watershed-based plans for surface water quality protection. Long-term partnerships with counties, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies have resulted in many far-reaching land and water resource initiatives. We have a dedicated staff that is committed to enhancing the public's understanding, connection and capacity to improve water resources in the region.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Associate Director		Project Manager			13%	0.82		\$80,000
Outreach and GIS Specialist		Assistant Project Manager			38%	0.76		\$40,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Jim Klang	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Water Quality Trading Specialist				0		\$10,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Project Advisor/ Economic Analysis Specialist				-		\$5,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Meeting facilitator for think tank and other large group meetings				0		\$4,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Local partner pilot leaders and facilitators. Funding for staff at city, SWCD or County who would be willing to take a leadership role in subwatershed planning and strategy development and continue implementation. Assume 4 out of 5 case studies at \$9,000 each = \$36,000				0		\$36,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$55,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Room rentals, meeting supplies, food	Room Rental, food, supplies for 4 -6 Think Tank meetings Meeting					\$19,000



			supplies: 3-6 meetings in each of the 5 subwatersheds=30 meetings					
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$19,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel Expenses 3-6 meetings in each of the 5 subwatersheds=30 meetings; stakeholder meetings for Think Tank	4-6	Traveling to work with stakeholders, hosting meetings in subwatersheds, and Think Tank meetings				\$3,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Printing meeting agendas, maps, and case study overviews and summary documents		Printing for subwatershed planning and meeting facilitation				\$2,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$199,000</b>

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
In-Kind	Minnesota State University, Mankato	Administrative Assistance	Secured	\$5,000
Cash	MPCA, Le Sueur River Watershed, WRAPS II Civic Engagement	Supporting engaging with citizens in the Le Sueur River Watershed, where there are 2 potential case study pilots.	Secured	\$44,400
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$49,400</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	This would be donated time from city, county, state sources as well as private sources (companies and individuals)	We envision that the Think Tank Advisory Group would donate time to help local partners brainstorm subwatershed solutions. We assume 4 half-day meetings with 30 people would be in-kind donation of roughly \$48,000. We have talked to MAWQCP program director about having this project be a special project of their existing advisory committee.	Pending	\$48,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$48,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$97,400</b>

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [64774683-1ee.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

An overview of the Ag-Urban Partnership Pilot: Accelerating action in priority watersheds project proposal. The graphic depicts the group that came up with the vision for the pilot program that emerged from the Minnesota River Basin: Ag-Urban Partnership Forum. It describes the process for developing subwatershed strategies including advice from a statewide think tank group.

### Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**Does your project have patent, royalties, or revenue potential?**

No

**Does your project include research?**

No

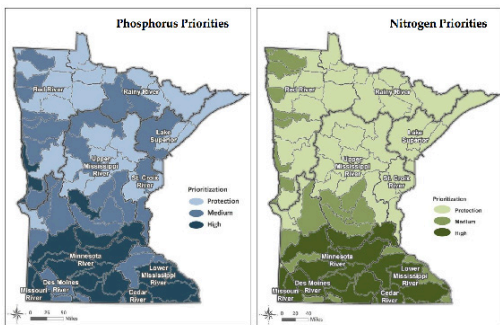
**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

No



# AG-URBAN PARTNERSHIP PILOT

Accelerating locally-driven water quality solutions in Minnesota River priority watersheds



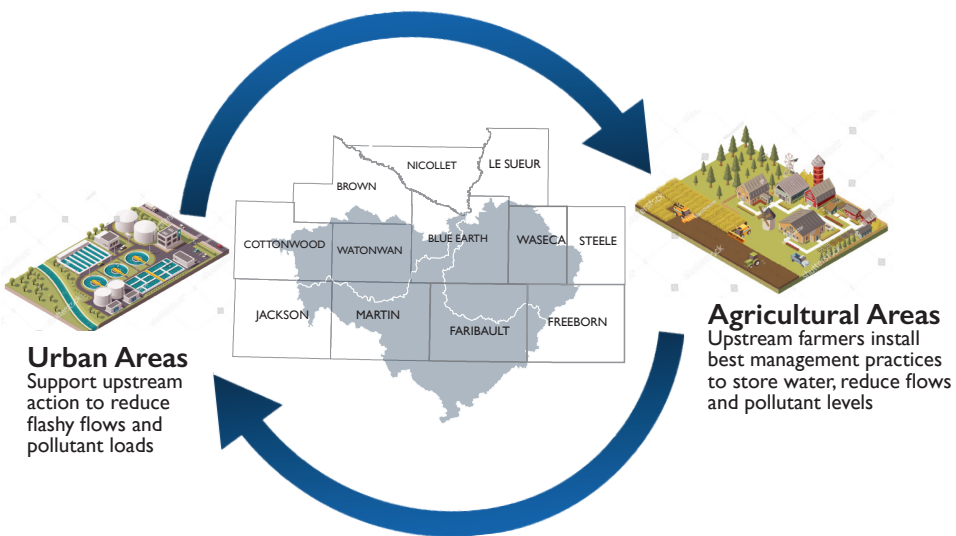
High Priority Watersheds:  
The Minnesota Nutrient Reduction Strategy

“We’ve been working in silos for too long. We need to get out there and work together, develop relationships and trust. We need to collaborate. Working in our own silos we don’t really understand what is possible cross sector.”—Ag-Urban Forum Participant

**Conservation Planning in High Priority, High Loading Watersheds**  
Agricultural and urban leaders underscored the urgency to bridge the divide between agricultural and urban sectors and to work collaboratively towards water quality and infrastructure solutions ([Minnesota River Basin: Ag-Urban Partnership Forum](#), pictured above).

## Five Ag-Urban Subwatershed Pilot Projects

Local partners in the high-loading Greater Blue Earth River Basin will decide on five subwatershed pilot projects that represent typical challenges the region faces (e.g. flooding & infrastructure challenges). They will develop locally-led clean-up strategies through a collaborative Ag-Urban stakeholder process.



## Cross Sector Think Tank

Each case study will have the opportunity to brainstorm solutions with a cross-sector Think Tank that has representatives from state agency policy and program developers, farmers and farm organizations, cities, industry, and environmental groups.



The project will result in urgently needed support for small, rural communities struggling with flooding or maintaining effective drinking, stormwater and wastewater services. Leveraging collaborative partnerships to develop innovative watershed clean-up strategies will accelerate implementation and build community capacity to bridge the urban vs. rural divide.

