



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2022 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2022-144

Proposal Title: Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements

Project Manager Information

Name: John Geissler

Organization: Saint Johns Arboretum and University

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Use the MMAPLE reverse-bid and conservation easement ranking system to permanently protect 650 acres and restore/enhance 400 acres of priority permanently protected lands in the Avon Hills area.

Funds Requested: \$2,507,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30 2027

LCCMR Funding Category: Land Acquisition, Habitat, and Recreation (G)

Project Location

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

Region(s): Central

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

Region(s): Central

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.

The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre unique natural landscape located in Stearns County just 15 miles west of St. Cloud. The landscape is glacial moraine that rises out of the surrounding farmland; it contains the highest concentration of native plant communities in the county, including oak and maple-basswood forests, tamarack and mixed-hardwood swamps, and wet meadows. It harbors rare species, including American ginseng, cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and least darter. The area has been identified as a Conservation Focus Area by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) through its Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025 and ecologically significant by The Nature Conservancy's Eco-Regional Plan. The majority of the Avon Hills is privately owned and high development pressure continues to elevate and threaten critical pieces of the existing ecosystem.

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.

Our landscape goal is to permanently protect 70% of the remaining undeveloped landscape, or about 25,000 acres over the next 20 years. The US F&WS, the MN DNR and others have invested in protection efforts, signaling the priority for protection. With the assistance of the ENTRF and conservation minded landowners, 6,647 acres of the Avon Hills have already been protected (over 26.5% of our ambitious goal).

Using ENRTF grants, the Avon Hills team developed and have proven the effectiveness of this novel ranking system for acquiring easements dubbed the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPLE). In the latest round of MMAPLE, the \$1,813/acre average payment represents just 30% of the estimated market value of undeveloped land. MMAPLE emphasizes the best easement value for the ENRTF.

In addition, we intend to invest in community outreach and education to ensure that local decision makers, landowners, and others understand the importance of the Avon Hills landscape and the options that exist for its protection. Finally, we will ensure that the land eligible for conservation easements will be managed effectively by supporting the development of habitat management plans for targeted parcels and supporting enhancement/restoration work.

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?

Permanently protecting 650 acres of habitat and restoration/enhancement activities on 400 acres are critical to maintaining native plant and wildlife biodiversity and the ecosystem services such as clean water and air that these natural systems provide. The projects will reconnect fragmented habitat complexes by restoring native vegetation, and enhance existing natural habitat through activities such as invasive species removal, prescribed burning, and oak regeneration. All of these stewardship activities will benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need such as; red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and four-toed salamander and pollinators such as bumblebees and yellow swallowtail butterflies.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Complete 650 acres of Conservation Easements using MMAPLE Ranking and Reverse Bidding system.

Activity Budget: \$1,817,500

Activity Description:

Help landowners permanently protect land through the use of conservation easements. Saint John’s University (SJU) will partner with Stearns County SWCD, and the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT). SJU will work with experts to “fine-tune” the MMAPLE system and together with SWCD will focus on landowner outreach, the reverse-bid process, and ranking parcels for easement acquisition. MLT will use the ranked parcels to negotiate easements and potential restoration areas; prepare documents including easements and baseline reports; secure appraisals, title work, and mapping; and conduct long-term easement monitoring and enforcement.

The selection of the successful landowners follows the reverse-bid process, so specific parcels will be described and submitted to LCCMR after the bidding. Landowners with completed easements will receive a payment based upon their MMAPLE per acre bid and substantiated by an appraisal.

Activity Milestones:

| Description | Completion Date |
|--|-----------------|
| Provide habitat restoration management plans prepared by private sector natural resource professionals | April 30 2024 |
| Pay landowners to protect ~650 acres by completing 4-10 permanent conservation easements. | June 30 2024 |
| Project partners will promote program and complete all legal components of conservation easements | June 30 2024 |

Activity 2: Avon Hills Community Education and Outreach

Activity Budget: \$33,000

Activity Description:

Facilitate communication among landowners, environmental groups, local units of government, and others within the Avon Hills community to promote land-use education, land protection, understanding of ecological principles, and land stewardship.

Activity Milestones:

| Description | Completion Date |
|--|-----------------|
| Increase awareness of the Avon Hills landscape through conferences and other educational programs/workshops. | June 30 2024 |

Activity 3: Easement Site Restoration & Enhancement on 400 acres

Activity Budget: \$656,500

Activity Description:

Based on property quality, restoration will be conducted to enhance water and habitat benefits on eased sites and other permanently protected lands in strategic locations. The projects will reconnect fragmented habitat complexes by restoring native vegetation, and enhance existing natural habitat on eased lands through activities such as invasive species removal, prescribed burning, and oak regeneration. These habitat restoration and enhancement activities will benefit Species of Greatest Conservation Need such as; red-shouldered hawk, Blanding’s turtle, and four-toed

salamander and pollinators such as bumblebees and yellow swallowtail butterflies. Additional funding for restoration assistance on eased lands is concurrently being requested by this partnership from federal funding sources.

Activity Milestones:

| Description | Completion Date |
|---|-----------------|
| Restoration/Enhancement projects selected and designed | June 30 2024 |
| Restoration/Enhancement projects completed on 400 acres | June 30 2027 |

Project Partners and Collaborators

| Name | Organization | Role | Receiving Funds |
|--|---|---|-----------------|
| Nick Bancks, Kathryn Prince, Haley Golz | Minnesota Land Trust | Providing easement education, coordinating bidding process, meeting with landowners, developing easement documents, monitoring and enforcing easements, lead on restoration/enhancement effort. | Yes |
| Nate Hylla, Jason Selvog, Ryan Rothstein | Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District | Meeting and outreach with landowners, managing bidding process for easements, technical assistance and support on restoration/enhancement effort. | Yes |

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?

The past ENRTF supported phases have opened up a new avenue of conservation easement prioritizing using MMAPLE and reverse-bidding. ENRTF funding of MMAPLE has allowed for innovation that is now being promoted statewide and even nationally. In addition to doing another 650 acres of permanent easements and 400 acres of restoration/enhancement in the Avon Hills, the funding will continue to promote MMAPLE as a cost-saving easement prioritization method as a potential tool for the common circumstances found in the Avon Hills and across the state.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

| Name | Appropriation | Amount Awarded |
|--|---|----------------|
| Conservation Easements in the Avon Hills - Phase III | M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c | \$1,300,000 |
| Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements | M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j | \$1,600,000 |

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: John Geissler

Job Title: Director - Saint John's Outdoor University / Land Manager - Saint John's Abbey Arboretum

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

John Geissler has a proven track record managing and successfully delivering on past LCCMR projects - project manager on Phase III and IV of Preserving the Avon Hills through Reverse-Bidding Easements. John was hired as Saint John's Abbey Land Manager and Outdoor University Director starting June 2017. Previously, he served for 10 years as the program director at Boulder Lake Environmental Learning Center in Duluth, MN. Geissler has a bachelor's degree in chemistry from SJU and a master's degree in environmental education from the University of Minnesota Duluth. He also recently completed a master's degree in natural resources science and management from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in December 2018.

Organization: Saint Johns Arboretum and University

Organization Description:

Saint John's Outdoor University is a unit of Saint John's University that provides environmental education programming. Saint John's University has a 501 (c)(3) designation.

Saint John's Abbey Arboretum encompasses the grounds of Saint John's University and Saint John's Abbey and was designated as a natural arboretum in 1997. Our 2,700 acres of forests, prairies, and lakes are managed with the goal of preserving and restoring the native flora and fauna of central Minnesota, as well as offering opportunities for education and research.

Budget Summary

| Category / Name | Subcategory or Type | Description | Purpose | Gen. Ineligible | % Benefits | # FTE | Classified Staff? | \$ Amount |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---------|-----------------|------------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Personnel | | | | | | | | |
| John Geissler | | Project Manager | | | 29% | 0.1 | | \$11,000 |
| Jenny Kutter | | Office Coordinator - Education event marketing / logistics | | | 29% | 0.1 | | \$4,000 |
| Kyle Rauch | | Education Staff | | | 29% | 0.1 | | \$5,000 |
| Sarah Gainey | | Education Staff | | | 29% | 0.05 | | \$1,000 |
| TBD | | Education Staff | | | 29% | 0.05 | | \$2,000 |
| Jeremy Scegura | | SJU Accountant - Reporting | | | 29% | 0.05 | | \$3,000 |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | \$26,000 |
| Contracts and Services | | | | | | | | |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Professional or Technical Service Contract | Personnel: Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 55% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection/restoration staff (approximately 40% FTE/yr), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 15% FTE/yr) | | | | 1.65 | | \$174,000 |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Acquisition costs | Easement Acquisition: Includes purchase price of conservation easements to protect about 650 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Includes long-term stewardship costs of \$240,000 @ \$24,000 per easement for 10 projects, habitat management plan contracts for 10 projects @ \$6,000 per plan. | | | | 0 | | \$1,500,000 |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Acquisition costs | Professional Services for Acquisition: Includes appraisal costs of \$70,000 @\$7,000 each and \$50,000 for surveys @\$5,000 each for 3-10 easements, title review and closing costs of \$30,000 @\$3,000 each, mineral reports for 2 projects @ \$2,500 each, and mapping costs of \$12,000. | | | | 0 | | \$167,000 |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Professional or Technical | Professional Services for Restoration: Includes mapping costs of \$5,000 to build geodatabase and | | | | 0 | | \$15,000 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|------|------------------|--------------------|
| | Service Contract | track projects and \$10,000 for restoration site plans @\$2,500 each for 5 easements without action plans. | | | | | | |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Professional or Technical Service Contract | Travel expenses in Minnesota - Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 10,800 miles for acquisition and 5500 miles for restoration at the current IRS rate (\$0.56 per mile). | | | | 0 | | \$9,000 |
| Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District | Professional or Technical Service Contract | Professional Services for general outreach, personal landowner contacts, site evaluation and mapping, scoring using MMAPLE, assisting with the bidding process, and assisting with the bid ranking, technical assistance and support on restoration/enhancement efforts. | | | | 0.75 | | \$40,000 |
| Saint John's University | Professional or Technical Service Contract | Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops. | | | | 0 | | \$2,000 |
| Minnesota Land Trust | Professional or Technical Service Contract | Easement Restoration/Enhancement: Includes restoration and enhancement costs on 400 acres of Avon Hills easement land through contracts with USFWS, MN DNR, NPOs and private restoration firms (e.g. area forestry consultants) | | | | 0 | | \$560,000 |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | \$2,467,000 |
| Equipment, Tools, and Supplies | | | | | | | | |
| | Tools and Supplies | Newspaper/social media ads, newsletters, postcard mailings, folders, educational materials | Promotion of easements, conferences, & workshops and supplies to deliver educational offerings | | | | | \$14,000 |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | \$14,000 |
| Capital Expenditures | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| Acquisitions and Stewardship | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--|--|--|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| | Conservation Easement Acquisition | Acres: 650 Parcels: 10 | | | | | | - |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| Travel In Minnesota | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| Travel Outside Minnesota | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| Printing and Publication | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| Other Expenses | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Sub Total | - |
| | | | | | | | Grand Total | \$2,507,000 |

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 |
|------------------|---------------------|--|----------------------------|------------------|
| State | | | | |
| | | | State Sub Total | - |
| Non-State | | | | |
| In-Kind | Landowner donations | We anticipate a minimum landowner donation of 20% of the appraised easement values for the overall project. Actual amounts will depend on the outcomes of the bidding process. | Pending | \$300,000 |
| | | | Non State Sub Total | \$300,000 |
| | | | Funds Total | \$300,000 |

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

| Name | County | Site Significance | Activity | Acres | Miles | Estimated Cost | Type of Landowner | Easement or Title Holder | Status of Work |
|----------------------|---------|--|-------------|-------|-------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Avon Hills (Dwyer) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands, and grasslands. Enhancement of hardwood forest, including selective thinning of understory species and removal of woody invasives planned for Spring 2020. Additional enhancement of grasslands through prescribed fire and overseeding planned. | Restoration | 61 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Goerger) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested and open wetlands, and grasslands. Restoration of formerly cultivated lands to tallgrass prairie and oak savanna planned for Spring 2020. | Restoration | 25 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Kern) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of sedge meadow and forested wetlands, and upland mesic hardwood forest. Includes quarter mile of frontage along Little Watab Lake, 25 acres of habitat of moderate biodiversity significance, and is adjacent to another perpetual 156-acre conservation easement. | Restoration | 180 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Maney) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 191 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Manion) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of forested wetlands and upland mesic hardwood forest. Includes frontage along Schuman Lake, Schuman Lake Road (a designated scenic byway), 6 acres of habitat of outstanding biodiversity significance, and is adjacent to Schellinger Scientific and Natural Area. | Restoration | 7 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------|--|-------------|-----|---|---|---------|----------------------|---------------|
| Avon Hills (Riesner) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands, and grasslands. Enhancement of hardwood forest, including selective thinning of understory species and removal of woody invasives planned for Spring 2020. | Restoration | 170 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (St. Joseph Greenhouse) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 11 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Thomsen) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 33 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Avon Hills (Wood Trust) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of sedge meadow and forested wetlands. Includes frontage along Lake Wobegon Trail, a state designated trail, and 135 acres of habitat of moderate biodiversity significance. | Restoration | 161 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Highland Crossing (ATC) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 155 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Sand Lake (Lindell) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 43 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| St. Wendel Tamarack Bog (Pierskalla) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 41 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| St. Wendel Tamarack Bog (Schug - Rule) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory | Restoration | 56 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------|---|-------------|--------------|----------|---|---------|----------------------|---------------|
| | | (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | | | | | | | |
| Stumpf Lake (Eich) | Stearns | Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Potential for enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning). | Restoration | 215 | - | - | Private | Minnesota Land Trust | Has not begun |
| Totals | | | | 1,349 | 0 | - | | | |

Conservation Easement Acquisition

1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.

We will continue to use Minnesota Multi-faceted approach for prioritizing land easements (MMAPLE) which a free market-based approach to acquire conservation easements. It is driven by the highest ratio of environmental benefits to easement cost, ensuring that easement acquisitions are the best ecological impact for the least amount of money. How does MMAPLE actually work? First, the land's features establish the environmental benefits looking at factors such as: size of parcel. (Bigger is better!); Biological significance. (DNR SOBS); Shoreline, wetlands, waterways to be protected; Adjacency to public lands or other protected parcels; Documented cultural resources protected; Public access allowed; Building entitlements to be extinguished; All of the environmental benefits can be scored in an office using GIS. Second, the landowners establish their minimum acceptable easement price (\$ per acre) through a sealed bid. Third, the Conservation Value Rating combines the above factors and is used to compare and rank all the properties. (Environmental Benefits ÷ Price). As you can see, ecological and fiscal factors are both considered in the ranking. Landowners themselves are intrinsically involved and donate some level of matching funds. In the latest round of MMAPLE, the \$1,813 /acre average payment represents just 30% of the estimated market value of undeveloped land.

2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.

Stearns County 2040 Comprehensive Plan <https://shapestearns.com/>

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025 <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mnwap/index.html>

Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area Program Strategic Land Protection Plan
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snap/plan.html>

The Nature Conservancy's Eco-Regional Plan

https://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPlanning/SettingPriorities/EcoregionalReports/Documents/PrairieForestBorder_FINALREPORT_wExhibits.pdf

3. For any conservation easement acquired, a restoration and management plan must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.

Comprehensive habitat management plans are structured to assess property conditions and provide management prescriptions to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. These management plans are kept on file by the Land Trust for each separate property under easement. The Land Trust (as easement holder) will work with landowners in an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement and ongoing management of these properties.

4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.

All parcels to be acquired under this proposal are intended to remain in private ownership under a conservation easement conveyed to and held by the Minnesota Land Trust.

5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.

Written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.

6. Provide a statement addressing how conservation easements will address specific water quality protection activities, such as keeping water on the landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, protecting groundwater, and not permitting artificial hydrological modifications.

Water quality protection is addressed in multiple locations within the easement document, across a range of activities that are either permitted, restricted or prohibited by the easement terms. No activities on or uses of the easement property are allowed that impair water quality. Activities permitted under the conservation easement are specifically designed to ensure surface and subsurface water quality and quantity by keeping water on the landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, protecting groundwater and preventing artificial hydrological modifications.

7. Describe the long-term monitoring and enforcement program for conservation easements acquired on parcels by your organization, including explanations of the process used for calculating conservation easement monitoring and enforcement costs, the process used for annual inspection and reporting on monitoring and enforcement activities, and the process used to ensure perpetual funding and implementation of monitoring and enforcement activities.

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in cases of a true violation. Easement monitoring occurs on an annual basis and completed by staff or trained volunteers. Landowners are contacted well in advance of the easement monitoring and offered the opportunity to accompany the monitor during the site visit. In analyzing conservation easement protection costs, the Land Trust estimates the recurring annual costs associated with monitoring, managing and enforcing perpetual conservation easements. These costs can vary depending upon a number of factors, including location, the nature of the restrictions and number of reserved rights. The Land Trust uses the amount of stewardship needed for a “typical” project as the amount generally requested for stewardship funding. However, the format allows for tailoring this request when a project’s elements depart significantly from the norm.

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

All restoration activities completed with funds appropriated from the ENRTF will occur on land permanently protected by perpetual conservation easement or public ownership.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

Comprehensive restoration and management plans are structured to provide specific and detailed management prescriptions to restore and/or enhance the land to help ensure provision of wildlife and water quality benefits. These management plans are kept on file by the Land Trust for each separate property under easement. To support implementation the Land Trust provides technical and financial assistance to landowners, including leveraging of available cost-share programming and working in partnership with other conservation organizations.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

All restoration activities are done in consultation with the BWSR Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines. The guidelines are used as a basis underpinning the design and activities utilized for each restoration or enhancement effort using these funds. Additionally, any seed or planting established on these tracts will be acquired from local vendors to ensure local ecotype as required by Minnesota statute for state grant funds. Seed selection will be of a diverse mixture of site-specific appropriate cover type to provide high quality habitat for migratory birds, pollinators, and resident wildlife.

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

The Land Trust (as easement holder) will work with landowners in an ongoing basis to provide restoration maintenance and management resources and technical expertise to support private landowners in their ongoing management of these properties. The Land Trust oftentimes leverages available cost-share programs, along with drawing upon conservation partners, with federal and other state funding to support management needs and maintenance.

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

CCM is included and contacted as part of the bid and vendor selection process for any planned restoration activities.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Site evaluations will be completed on each parcel, both after completion of initial restoration activities, and three years after initial activities have ceased to provide the best possible outcomes. Adaptive management will be utilized as part of the site evaluation process to ensure sustained efficacy of restoration efforts.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [2b893bde-585.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Map of the 65,000 acres of the Avon Hills in Stearns County. The map illustrates MN DNR Sites of Biological Significance overlaid with private easements/public lands that are permanently protecting these critical habitats and beginning to connect critical components of the ecosystem....

Financial Capacity

File: [c0d61c15-5fe.pdf](#)

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration, Conservation Easement Acquisition,

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Avon Hills of Stearns County - 65,000 acres

Amazing open space and biological significance within 5 miles of St. Cloud and 60 miles of the Twin Cities

03/2021



