



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-064

Proposal Title: Native Prairie Outreach and Stewardship through Native Prairie

Project Manager Information

Name: Judy Schulte

Organization: MN DNR - Ecological and Water Resources Division

Office Telephone: (507) 637-6016

Email: judy.schulte@state.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Prairie outreach and technical assistance will be provided to landowners, practitioners, and the public. Native prairie enhancement and monitoring activities will be implemented on existing Native Prairie Bank Easements.

Funds Requested: \$650,000

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, NW, SW,

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

Statewide

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.

Native prairie is a fragile, unique natural ecosystem that consists of thousands of different organisms, plants, animals, bacteria and soil fungi. Their complex interactions provide the food, water and shelter required by many of Minnesota's rare, threatened and endangered species. Native prairie provides a multitude of benefits to the citizens of the state, such as water filtration and recharge, pollinator and wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, soil health, erosion control, outdoor recreation, etc. High quality native prairies provide the best available habitat for native prairie pollinators. Restoration efforts aim to meet the standards set by these original native prairies.

The Minnesota Biological Survey has identified about 249,000 acres of remaining native prairie in Minnesota, approximately 1.3% of what once existed in the state. Of these 249,000 acres, approximately 123,000 acres still have no formal protection. Threats to native prairie continue to be widespread including cropland conversion, mining, development, invasive species, woody encroachment, and non-prairie focused land use/management.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

This proposal seeks to provide outreach and technical assistance to private landowners, practitioners, and the public to improve the conservation and management of native prairie. Improved management of these highly complex habitats is necessary to sustain many of the state's rare, threatened, and endangered species, provide functioning native prairie pollinator habitat, and provide a multitude of benefits to the citizens and animals of the state.

Additionally, enhancement and monitoring activities will be completed on existing Native Prairie Bank Conservation Easements. Activities include invasive species prevention and control, woody species removal, prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance, such as haying, mowing, or grazing, where appropriate), and both ecological and compliance monitoring.

Established in 1987 through Minnesota Statute 84.96, Native Prairie Bank (NPB) has a proven track record of working with landowners to enhance and protect high quality native prairie while leaving the land in private ownership. In partnership with landowners, Native Prairie Bank currently manages, with exceptionally high standards, 14,609 acres of native prairie and associated habitat on 165 sites throughout the prairie region of the state. The goal is to expand this partnership and effort through this proposal.

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?

Through this proposal, prairie outreach and technical assistance will be provided to landowners, practitioners, youth, and the public. Native prairie enhancement (~380 acres) and monitoring (~45 sites) activities will be completed on existing Native Prairie Bank Conservation Easements. Activities include invasive species prevention and control, woody species removal, prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance, such as haying, mowing, or grazing, where appropriate), and both ecological and compliance monitoring.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Prairie Landowner Assistance, Prairie Outreach, and Existing Native Prairie Bank Stewardship

Activity Budget: \$284,616

Activity Description:

Private landowners, practitioners, youth, and the general public will increase their awareness and stewardship of native prairie as a result of this project's workshops, field days, presentations, one-on-one technical assistance, online resource development, etc. The Prairie Landowner Network established through the ML18 appropriation will continue to use innovative ways to connect prairie landowners through social media, email, newsletters, training opportunities, etc. This network is aimed at improving prairie quality on private lands by keeping landowners up-to-date on the best management strategies. At least 4 landowners will receive a comprehensive prairie stewardship plan that will provide specific prairie management expertise for their property. About 30 monitoring visits will be completed on existing NPBs to evaluate current conditions and ensure easement compliance.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
~7 workshops/field days for prairie landowners, practitioners, youth and general public (~450 people)	June 30, 2027
consultations, guidance, mgmt. asst., etc. to ~70 landowners	June 30, 2027
700+ prairie stewards participating in the Prairie Landowner Network	June 30, 2027
~4 prairie stewardship plans provided to prairie landowners (~250 acres)	June 30, 2027
monitoring and stewardship of ~30 NPB easements	June 30, 2027

Activity 2: 380 Acres of Native Prairie Habitat Enhancement & Restoration

Activity Budget: \$365,384

Activity Description:

Enhancement activities will be completed on about 380 acres. Activities include invasive species prevention and control, woody species removal, and prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance, such as haying, mowing or grazing, where appropriate). Ecological Monitoring will occur at 15 NPB sites to collect ecological data used to evaluate whether the objectives of management were met, to analyze ecological changes over time and to contribute to future management decisions. Monitoring and enhancement activities will be carried out via landowner agreements, DNR staff, Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI), volunteers, and/or contractors.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
~ 250 acres of prescribed burns (or alternative prescribed disturbance)	June 30, 2027
~130 acres of woody removal & invasive species treatment	June 30, 2027
Ecological monitoring on ~15 NPB sites	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Partners and Local Technical Teams	Teams of staff from SWCD's, NRCS, DNR, USFWS, TNC, Pheasants Forever, etc.	Help create and provide outreach to prairie landowners, youth, and citizens.	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 work be funded?

Without active management native prairie biodiversity declines. This habitat decline means the decline of rare, threatened, and endangered species, Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCNs), and pollinators. The DNR has identified ~249,000 acres of remaining native prairie in Minnesota, of which ~123,000 acres are privately owned with no protection. This proposal's outreach work provides the informational tools and assistance Minnesotans need to improve prairie management.

Native Prairie Bank could utilize ENRTF support on-going to help Minnesotans stay informed on best management practices and to provide technical support for the management of the state's critically imperiled native prairie.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Native Prairie Stewardship and Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 09e	\$2,675,000
Easement Program for Native Prairie Bank	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 09i	\$2,000,000
Private Native Prairie Conservation through Native Prairie Bank	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 09b	\$2,000,000
Native Prairie Stewardship & Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 09h	\$1,341,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Judy Schulte

Job Title: Prairie Biologist

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

The Scientific and Natural Areas Program's mission is to "preserve and perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota's natural heritage, including landforms, fossil remains, plant and animal communities, rare and endangered species, or other biotic features and geological formations, for scientific study and public edification as components of a healthy environment". As the Scientific and Natural Area Program's Prairie Biologist, Judy is responsible for coordinating and administering programs designed to improve native prairie conservation and management and provide oversight of conservation easement stewardship. She provides programmatic direction and management for Native Prairie Bank, Native Prairie Tax Exemption, and Prairie Stewardship Planning Assistance.

Judy has been involved with the implementation and management of 43 previous LCCMR & LSOHC projects, all of which were aimed at the protection and management of Minnesota's most unique and rare remnant native plant communities.

Judy has served as the Prairie Biologist since March of 2015. Other related experiences include:

- Acting SNA Unit Supervisor (May 2018-May 2019), statewide lead for the Scientific and Natural Areas program while continuing to cover Prairie Biologist duties.
- Southern Region Prairie Specialist, MN DNR (2011-2015)
- District Technician, Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District (2009-2011)
- CRP & GRP Program Technician, USDA Redwood County Farm Service Agency (2007-2009)

Education: Graduated from South Dakota State University in 2007 with a Bachelor of Science in Park Management & Horticulture.

Judy will provide overall management to this proposed LCCMR project. She has effectively demonstrated her capacity to manage programs and budgets, maintain accurate records, and direct staff. Judy has experience and has demonstrated the ability to collaborate with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in addressing complicated and contentious prairie protection and management issues. She is organizationally driven and has the knowledge and background to get the work done on the ground.

Organization: MN DNR - Ecological and Water Resources Division

Organization Description:

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Ecological & Water Resources, Scientific & Natural Areas Program

Charged under MS 86A.05 to protect and perpetuate in and undisturbed natural state those natural features that possess exceptional scientific or education value; and under MS 84.96 and 84.961 to acquire Native Prairie Bank easements and work with landowners in conserving native prairie.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Laborers & Seasonal crews		On the ground project implementation			20%	0.22	X	\$16,000
Specialists & Technicians		On the ground project implementation			25%	3.6	X	\$252,000
Management Coordinator and Prairie Biologist		Project management and budget implementation, contract execution, partner coordination			25%	0.32	X	\$28,000
							Sub Total	\$296,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD & Conservation Corp of MN	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Professional/Technical: ecological monitoring and private prairie stewardship plans Conservation Corp of MN: Prairie Landowner Network (1/2 individual placement for 2 years), prescribed burning/disturbance, invasives, and woody removal Service Contracts: prescribed burning, invasives, woody removal, etc.				4		\$199,000
							Sub Total	\$199,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Activity 2: minor equipment for field operations (walk-behind brush mowers, water pumps and tanks, etc.)	Project implementation					\$3,500
	Tools and Supplies	Activity 1: outreach materials and supplies, mailing of Prairie Landowner Network newsletter. Activity 2: herbicide, safety supplies, equipment repair/parts, field tools, enclosure fence for monitoring, etc.	Project implementation					\$18,400

							Sub Total	\$21,900
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	DNR fleet charges (for operation of trucks, cars, & special fieldwork equipment) & instate travel costs (as per state contracts)	Travel expenses needed to complete direct project work					\$80,000
							Sub Total	\$80,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing of outreach materials and Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network Newsletter	Direct printing and mailing for project outcomes					\$8,612
							Sub Total	\$8,612
Other Expenses								
		DNR's Direct and Necessary Costs	(~\$44,488 total) pay for activities that are directly related to and necessary for accomplishing appropriated programs/projects. Direct and necessary costs cover HR Support (~\$7,547), Safety Support (~\$1,521), Financial Support (~\$7,078), Communication Support (~\$7,244), IT Support (~\$17,019), and Planning Support (~\$4,079) that are necessary					\$44,488

			to accomplishing funded programs/projects.					
							Sub Total	\$44,488
							Grand Total	\$650,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Personnel - Laborers & Seasonal crews		On the ground project implementation	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.
Personnel - Specialists & Technicians		On the ground project implementation	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.
Personnel - Management Coordinator and Prairie Biologist		Project management and budget implementation, contract execution, partner coordination	Classified : Consistent with approved work plans for previous ENRTF appropriations for the SNA program, this funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for classified and unclassified staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the ENRTF and other funds. Each year these positions are assigned work based on the particular combination of soft funding available to address priority SNA Program activities.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Native Prairie Banks Statewide		Native prairie and supporting habitats	Restoration	380	-	-	Private	DNR-Division of Ecological and Water Resources	Has Not Begun
Totals				380	0	-			

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 enhancement activities done with this appropriation are on DNR-owned perpetual Native Prairie Bank conservation easements administered by the SNA Program.

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.

Each enhancement project will be based upon a Native Prairie Stewardship Plan (ecological restoration and management plan) and/or project plan with goals for enhancing the native prairie and supporting habitats. Each plan includes an implementation timetable which summarizes ongoing management needs. Each restoration and management plan and project plan is kept by the landowner and in a DNR internal shared electronic filing system accessible to all SNA staff.

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.

The SNA Program follows or exceeds the recommendations found in the BWSR “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines”. NPB restorations typically follow the current BWSR Guidelines, including Project Guidance, Plant Community Restoration, and Temporary Cover. The SNA Program follows the general direction of the BWSR Guidelines for “Recommended Steps for Obtaining Plant Materials”, and has additional and more restrictive requirements for restoration material sources. Restoration and management of DNR lands are governed by DNR Operational Order #124 on “Plant Material Standards for Native Plant Community Restoration” and DNR Operational Order #130 on “Pollinator Habitat” (which include BMPs).

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.

Long-term management costs (e.g. invasive species treatments, prescribed fire, and monitoring/evaluation) will be covered by a combination funding sources, including, but not limited to, the landowner, ENRTF, Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), federal grants, and other funds as appropriated.

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

DNR has a standing general contract with CCMI under which the SNA Program often does project or activity specific agreements. For enhancement projects, CCMI has been and will continue to be used when appropriate for woody and invasive species control and prescribed burning on NPBs.

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.

There is no reconstruction requested in this proposal, just enhancement activities (woody and invasive control, prescribed fire or alternative prescribed disturbance). When NPB does do restoration projects utilizing ENRTF they are evaluated, and a report submitted to the LCCMR to ascertain how well the native plants have been established and non-natives controlled. The evaluation reports include a summary of management plan outcomes, activities completed through the project, map of the project area, time-meander plant surveys, land use cover assessments, %PNV vs CISA graphs, a statement of ongoing management needs and funding, and a summary of the evaluation.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [155e2380-d01.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Enhancement activities (prescribed fire, invasive control, woody removal, etc.) will be completed on permanently protected Native Prairie Bank easements. The attached map shows Native Prairie Bank easement locations across the prairie region of Minnesota....

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

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



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