



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-142

Proposal Title: Conservation Cooperative for Working Lands

Project Manager Information

Name: Tanner Bruse

Organization: Pheasants Forever Inc

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Increasing federal conservation dollars coming to Minnesota by expanding technical expertise for working lands programs available to landowners. This project enhances our natural resources providing public benefits for every Minnesotan.

Funds Requested: \$3,174,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2025

LCCMR Funding Category: Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat (F)

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?

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.

Minnesota's 25-million acres of agricultural land play a crucial role in the health of our economy, quality of life, and natural resources. Minnesota's farmers and ranchers have a strong interest in working lands conservation practices such as grassland/wetland restoration, pollinator plantings, grazing, regenerative agriculture, and soil health. These practices often increase farm profitability while providing public benefits of reduced erosion, carbon sequestration, improved water quality, and increased habitat.

With a high demand for voluntary programs from private landowners, Minnesota is well-positioned to increase federal conservation dollars coming to Minnesota that address natural resource concerns. At the current annual rate of \$250 million (NRCS) coming to Minnesota, these conservation programs boost jobs, businesses, and rural economies. In 2017, Minnesota NRCS estimated that program implementation in 2016 contributed \$411,012,678 to Minnesota's economy. The total multiplier for conservation delivery is 1.35 meaning each federal conservation dollar spent generates an additional 35 cents to Minnesota's economy. To maximize investments, it takes boots on the ground delivering technical assistance to landowners. Together, these efforts will help private landowners increase farm profitability, stimulate local economies, and create habitat while providing public resource benefits for every Minnesotan.

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.

We understand that technical assistance to landowners is one of the key limiting factors to USDA conservation program enrollment across the country. To increase federal funding and to address our natural resource concerns in Minnesota, it takes a broad partnership to deploy conservation professionals who provide quality technical assistance to Minnesota's landowners.

In collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), Department of Natural Resources (DNR) we propose to place 40 staff in USDA/SWCD Service Centers to:

- Increase enrollment in federal, state, and local conservation programs.
- Provide technical assistance to Minnesota's farmers, ranchers, and landowners interested in working lands programs that increase grassland, wetland, grazing, soil health and regenerative agriculture practices.
- Leverage and increase federal funding for conservation implementation in Minnesota.
- Increase the quality of grasslands through management practices.
- Use technologies such as precision agriculture for data driven agriculture and conservation.

Collectively, these efforts increase opportunity for farmers to enroll in state programs like the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Last, this proposal provides opportunities for public-private partnerships, making Minnesota a national leader in innovative conservation delivery.

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?

This proposal provides Minnesota landowners access to quality technical expertise to inform land use decisions and meet their conservation goals. The primary outcomes of this proposal will be accelerated program enrollment to impact 150,000 acres working with 10,000 farmers and landowners. This will be accomplished through working lands programs that provide substantial public benefits that include improved farm profitability, a diversified agricultural economy, habitat, cleaner water, and increased carbon storage. Where applicable, the partnership will look for opportunities to use applied science to quantify and explain economic, environmental, and habitat outcomes from acres impacted.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Employ 40 professional FTEs to work with farmers and landowners to implement voluntary conservation practices and increase landscape diversity.

Activity Budget: \$3,174,000

Activity Description:

Adding 40 professional FTEs across Minnesota will result in more acres enrolled in conservation programs. By increasing program adoption, enrolling acres, and showcasing landowner interest, Minnesota will further leverage federal conservation investments. Over three years, the goal of this project, is to impact 150,000 acres working with 10,000 landowners. These staff will use new technologies such as precision agriculture to identify areas that make economic and environmental sense to change land use. By enrolling in regenerative agriculture and soil health practices, grazing and haying plans, grassland management/enhancement practices, wetland restoration, or planting perennial grasses and wildflowers, both producer and resource goals can be met. Staff will deliver USDA farm bill programs that include easements, rental agreements, stewardship payments, cost-share, and technical assistance. Additional federal programs will be recommended and implemented such as the USFWS partners for fish and wildlife program that provides financial assistance for landowners restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat. Staff will also work with state programs including BWSR's Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easement program and the DNR's Native Prairie Bank easement program. An additional public benefit will be promoting and enrolling private lands in the Walk-In Access (WIA) program.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Employ 40 FTE/year conservation professionals to provide technical assistance and conservation enrollment to landowners	June 30, 2025
Employ 1 FTE/year Coordinator to provide field-level leadership, supervision, training, and support.	June 30, 2025
Positively impact 150,000 acres through technical assistance and conservation delivery to landowners	June 30, 2025

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dusty Van Thuyne	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources	BWSR will 1) maintain a position to coordinate with PF on the day-to-day operations, 2) assist PF in soliciting grant interest annually, 3) be involved in the hiring of staff, and 4) provide the partnership with the necessary tools, training, and information.	No
Ryan Galbreath	Natural Resources Conservation Service	NRCS will provide 1) access to federal program tools and delivery process, 2) access to the necessary tools, training, and information and technical certification as warranted, and 3) staff with appropriate technical leadership and other standards for conservation practices.	No
LeAnn Buck	MN Assoc. of Soil and Water Conservation Districts	MASWCD will 1) assist with the ranking, prioritizing, and approval of RFPs submitted, and 2) provide the partnership with the necessary tools, training, and information needed to achieve program goals.	No
Greg Hoch	MN Department of Natural Resources	DNR will provide 1) technical guidance on habitat restoration, 2) training to staff, and 3) coordination with the MN Prairie Conservation Plan, the Pheasant and Duck Action Plans, and Wildlife Action Plan. DNR will coordinate with the Joint Ventures and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Midwest Landscape Initiative.	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?

This proposal enhances existing investments in long-term conservation implementation in Minnesota. It has a positive impact on our natural resources providing a public benefit to all Minnesotans. This project addresses many current and ongoing state priorities geared toward environmental resiliency, and wildlife/pollinator initiatives. As shown with match provided in this proposal, we will continue to pursue other funding sources for the program such as federal grants, private industry, local partners, and foundation funding to keep this program moving into the future. In addition, we will seek a long-term Minnesota investment through legislature and dedicated funding resources.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Minnesota Bee and Beneficial Species Habitat Restoration	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$732,000
Economic Assessment of Precision Conservation and Agriculture	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 08j	\$400,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Tanner Bruse

Job Title: Ag & Conservation Program Manager

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

A.A. General Education – South Central College, Mankato, MN. 2007

B.S. Wildlife & Fisheries Science – South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD. 2012

Tanner has experience working directly with landowners, as a Farm Bill Biologist, helping them with habitat

management and enrolling them in voluntary conservation programs. He has been with Pheasants Forever for over seven years and most recently managing staff and grants over the past six years. As the project manager (Activity 1) Tanner will be tasked with working directly with the staff and partners involved in this project. Tasks involved will be supervision of staff, tracking daily activities, best management practices for working with landowners, coordinating with partners, identifying potential partners, and helping track outcomes. Tanner will be responsible for all required reports for LCCMR.

Organization: Pheasants Forever Inc

Organization Description:

Pheasants Forever (PF) is a non-profit 501(c)3 conservation organization. Pheasants Forever's mission is to conserve pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy. Pheasants Forever has over 130,000 members and 700 chapters nationwide doing grassroots conservation. Historically PF has impacted over 19 million acres, completed 551,000 habitat projects, and permanently protected over 200,000 acres since 1982. PF has invested \$929 million dollars on habitat projects and education programs.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Pheasants Forever Project Coordinator		Supervise and coordinate staff along with grant management.			22%	1		\$100,667
State Programs Coordinator		Provide leadership at the field level in hiring, training, tracking, and reporting all project activities.			22%	1	X	\$100,667
Conservation Cooperative Biologist		Conservation Cooperative Biologists or Specialists located in USDA/SWCD Service Centers. May include certified conservation planners. Positions will leverage federal dollars through in-kind support from NRCS. Position may include subawards to other non-profit or agencies for employment purposes. Subject matter experts/specialists to provide technical assistance to farmers/landowners for work on private lands. In addition, may coordinate with local partners to determine workload needs and ensure project completion.			22%	80		\$2,811,999
							Sub Total	\$3,013,333
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Personal mileage reimbursement at IRS rate per commissioner's plan.	Personal vehicle use for site visits, monitoring, project implementation and landowner meetings.					\$46,083
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Lodging for overnight stays per commissioner's plan.	Overnight stays during work travel for trainings, meetings and work performed outside of normal work territory.					\$22,750
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Meals during work travel per commissioner's plan.	Meals during work travel for trainings, meetings and work performed outside of normal work territory.					\$10,500
							Sub Total	\$79,333
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Staff Training	Understanding Ag Soil Health and Regenerative Ag 101 training. \$1,300 per attendee. Additional cost accounted for potential staff turnover and other in-depth training expenses.					\$50,000
		Cell Phone Plan	\$65/month cell phone allowance for staff over 2 years. Provide a direct line from producers to staff and use for other work functions.					\$31,334
							Sub Total	\$81,334
							Grand Total	\$3,174,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Personnel - State Programs Coordinator		Provide leadership at the field level in hiring, training, tracking, and reporting all project activities.	Classified : This proposal represents a new initiative/program. Project coordinator duties associated with this new program is above and beyond the job responsibilities associated with this classified position.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
Cash	MN DNR Section of Wildlife	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support.	Pending	\$200,000
			State Sub Total	\$200,000
Non-State				
Cash	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support. We anticipate federal match to leverage the LCCMR contribution pending available funds. We will also seek other federal contributions to match and leverage ENRTF dollars.	Pending	\$2,000,000
In-Kind	Natural Resources Conservation Service	In-kind office space, furniture, supplies, computer, network, IT, vehicle use, and associated expenses valued at \$7,400 per person per year. 20 spaces x 7,400 x 2 years.	Pending	\$296,000
Cash	General Mills	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support	Pending	\$200,000
In-Kind	General Mills	In-kind contributions totaling \$100,000 including train-the-trainer workshops and licenses to online resources for conservation technicians, remote sensing and modeling capabilities to assess adoption of conservation practices and associated environmental impact, and communications support to amplify the learnings and resources generated throughout this program to the variety of farmer groups, food industry peers, supply chain partners, and wide variety of other stakeholders we are connected to as a global food company.	Pending	\$100,000
In-Kind	Soil and Water Conservation Districts	In-kind office space, furniture, supplies, computer, network, IT, vehicle use, and associated expenses valued at \$7,400 per person per year. 20 spaces x 7,400 x 2 years.	Pending	\$296,000
Cash	Local Matching Funds (Pheasants Forever, SWCD, Others)	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support.	Pending	\$100,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$2,992,000
			Funds Total	\$3,192,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [93b6d7a3-7eb.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

In 2017 MN NRCS conducted a study using (IMPLAN) software to estimate conservation investment impacts on the state's economy. Conservation implementation in 2016 contributed \$411,012,678 to Minnesota's economy. For each conservation dollar spent it generates 35 cents to the economy plus the conservation benefits for all Minnesotans....

Financial Capacity

File: [5738b934-730.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Resolution Letter	d0bbcd10-081.pdf
CEO Authorization	fa32c1b5-bc3.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
General Mills Letter of Support	fc916208-9d9.pdf
Minnesota Farmers Union Letter of Support	8c5a263e-e99.pdf
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition Letter of Support	4ba6e51b-2a2.pdf
Minnesota Department of Ag (MAWQCP) Letter of Support	1c125986-028.pdf
MN DNR Letter of Support	2c06ee5a-823.pdf
Monarch Joint Venture Letter of Support	a4d6eb86-528.pdf
The Nature Conservancy Letter of Support	ed9efd49-5f3.pdf
USFWS Letter of Support	e909cc85-149.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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?

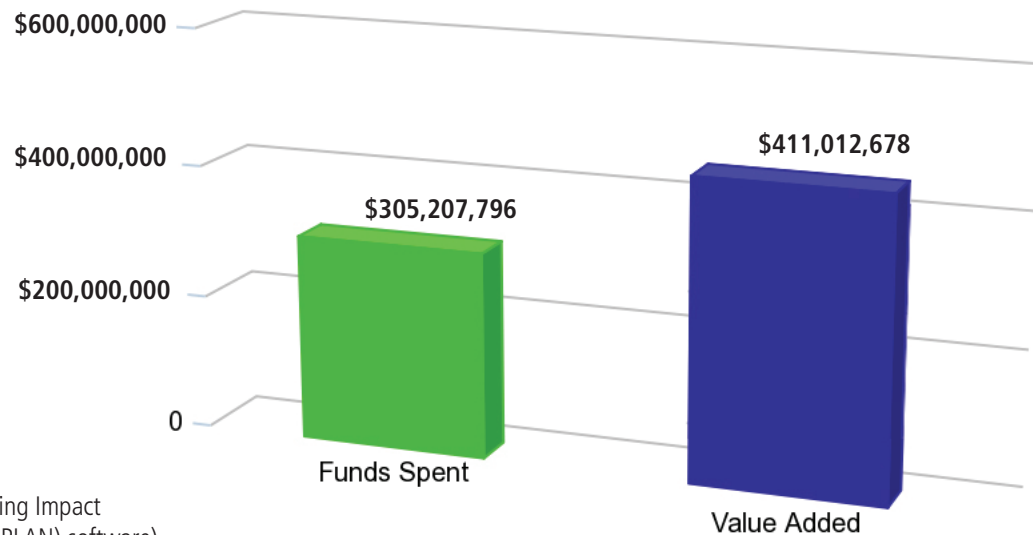
No

CONSERVATION COOPERATIVE

For Working Lands

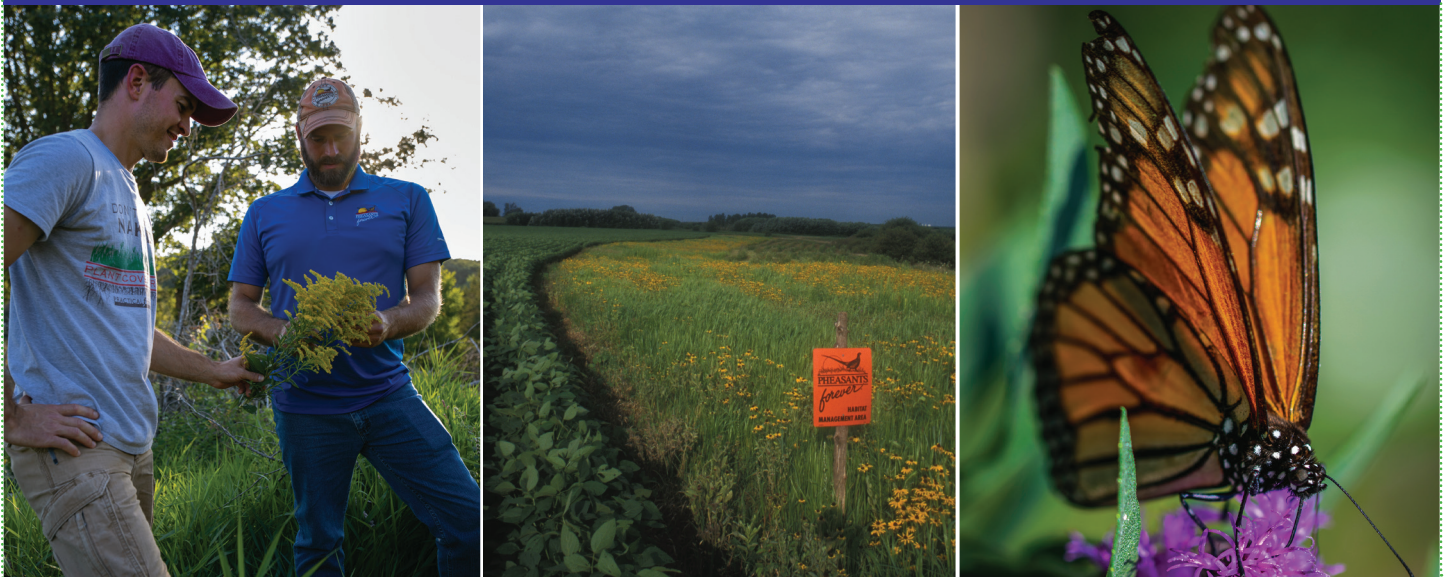
Leverage and Increase Federal Conservation Dollars to Minnesota

Funds Spent
Compared to
Value Added to
MN Economy
(2016)



(2017 MN NRCS data using Impact Analysis for Planning (IMPLAN) software)

Each Federal conservation dollar spent generates an additional 35 cents for Minnesota's economy.



Technical Assistance to farmers and landowners increases voluntary conservation adoption providing multiple public benefits.