



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2023 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2023-189

**Proposal Title:** Addressing Erosion Along High Use River Loops

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Lisa Luukkala

**Organization:** Superior Hiking Trail Association

**Office Telephone:** (218) 834-2700

**Email:** lluukkala@superiorhiking.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Rehabilitate and renew popular river loops of the Trail for a more resilient future to withstand high visitor use and serve Minnesotans for years to come.

**Funds Requested:** \$379,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** November 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?**

Region(s): NE

**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.**

Popular river trail loops such as those in or adjacent to state parks and waysides have shown the greatest impacts from high visitor use. These are destinations along the North Shore and serve as a connection to nature for thousands of Minnesotans each year. The majority of the SHT north of Two Harbors was built over 30 years ago and is showing its age. Erosion due to natural causes and visitor use has impacted the trail tread. Tight-to-shoreline trail sections create unique maintenance challenges and require attention. Safety is also a great concern, with aging infrastructure and the loops being most popular with more casual and less experienced hikers. The recent flooding events have only exacerbated the situation along these loops. The need to renew and reset the lifespan of these river loops is vital not only to the health and wellbeing of the land and water but also intrinsically tied to the economic and community vitality of the North Shore.

ENRTF is one of the few funding sources available to the Superior Hiking Trail Association to make these large-scale renewal projects possible.

### **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 will renew, rebuild and reinforce the river loops that see the highest use and user impacts. Our staff, lead volunteers and professional trailbuilding contractors will employ modern sustainable trail building practices that will focus on mitigating the negative effects caused by heavy use. One of the keys to successful implementation is to install infrastructures and features to keep people on the trail and water off. Where infrastructure replacement is needed, SHTA will identify and design solutions that maximize user safety and long-term resiliency and minimize environmental impacts.

Working with our project collaborators, SHTA will address the adverse affects of heavily trafficked sections of the Trail and strengthen visitor use management practices in these popular areas to assure the natural resource is protected. The SHTA is committed to providing meaningful connections to nature and public lands of Minnesota to create life-long stewards of our shared natural resources.

Due to the variability of weather in northern Minnesota for construction projects, we anticipate needing two full trail seasons -- typically June to November -- to complete this project.

### **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 our Trail Renewal Program initiative, we will ensure that every mile of this natural footpath along the North Shore is sustainably built sustainably to be enjoyed by tens of thousands of annual visitors for decades to come -- all without causing unnecessary harm to surrounding lands and waters. The SHT is where thousands of visitors start to truly value public lands and commit to conserving and enhancing them. Our efforts to make the SHT resilient to climate changes and increase visitor use will help protect and preserve the sensitive habitats and ecosystems through which the Trail traverses.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Renew the Most Popular Looped Experiences Along the Trail Corridor

**Activity Budget:** \$379,000

**Activity Description:**

The SHT's looped trail experiences are the most popular sections of trail used within the system. Loops are often used by beginner day hikers and offer the greatest accessibility to diverse populations just starting out in outdoor recreation. These trails sections need to be armored to withstand high traffic use and include up-to-date infrastructure to assure visitor safety and adjacent land and water protection. Improvements to the loops have been identified through formal assessments that were funded in part by LCCMR in previous years. These assessments will serve as a blueprint for planning projects. Work will be completed by a mix of volunteer, staff and professional trail building contractors.

Work will include renewing up to 13 miles with tread repair, armoring and retrofitting with drainage management techniques. Up to 3,000 feet of boardwalk, puncheon or steps will be replaced along the two river loops. The current infrastructure has ended its useful life and is made up of outdated trail designs that are no longer up to industry best practices. This project will reset the lifespan of these popular river loop sections of the Superior Hiking Trail.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Completion Date
Reassessment of damaged locations along river loops due to 2022 flooding	November 30, 2023
9 to 13 miles of trail loops will be renewed (tread, armoring, drainage)	November 30, 2025
2,000 to 3,000 linear feet of boardwalk, puncheon or steps replaced	November 30, 2025
One 1-mile wayside spur trail renewed	November 30, 2025
One .8 mile trail section overlook renewed	November 30, 2025

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Mike Young	MN DNR Division of Forestry	Liaison to SHTA from DNR to assist in planning and executing trail projects within northeastern Minnesota forest lands	No
Christa Maxwell	Minnesota DNR Parks and Trails Division	Liaison to SHTA from DNR to assist in planning and executing trail projects within North Shore state parks	No
Jonathan Benson	US Forest Service	Liaison to the SHTA for any work done on the SHTA within the boundaries of Superior National Forest.	No
Cathy Quinn	US Forest Service	Liaison to the SHTA for any work done on the SHTA within the boundaries of Superior National Forest.	No
Matt Davis	North Country Trail Association	Provides advice, counsel, technical assistance.	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?**

Advancements in sustainable trail building techniques will allow SHTA to reset the lifespan of the Trail.

SHTA continues to diversify its funding streams and strengthen partner relationships with land managers to guarantee a high-quality recreational experience now and into the future. SHTA's 2020-2023 Strategic Plan clearly outlines a road map to secure the trail corridor for future generations of users, address emerging needs around visitor use management all while assuring adequate resources are in place to support the longevity of the Trail corridor and support people to safely and respectfully use Minnesota's public lands.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Enhancement Plan for Superior Hiking Trail	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 09f	\$100,000
Restoring Five Sections of the Superior Hiking Trail	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09o	\$191,000
Bioacoustics for Broad-Scale Species Monitoring and Conservation	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 03n	\$305,000
Plumbing The Muddy Depths Of Superior Hiking Trail	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$187,000
Superior Hiking Trail As Environmental Showcase	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 09k	\$450,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Lisa Luokkala

**Job Title:** Executive Director

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

Superior Hiking Trail Association's Executive Director, Lisa Luokkala has over a decade of experience overseeing large-scale recreational infrastructure projects. Luokkala led in the planning, designing, funding and construction of multi-million dollars recreation improvements during her time as the City of Duluth Parks & Recreation. In addition, she holds

over 15 years of managing state and federal grants in the nonprofit sector as well as the public sector. Luukkala is attuned to state environmental and outdoor recreational trends and associated policies. Her expertise has been used, as steering committee member, to help craft the Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2020-2024. She currently sits on the Duluth Tourism Advisory Council and is the new incoming Treasurer for the national nonprofit, Society for Outdoor Recreation Professionals.

**Organization:** Superior Hiking Trail Association

**Organization Description:**

Superior Hiking Trail Association (SHTA) is a nonprofit organization, headquartered in Two Harbors, that manages, renews, promotes and supports the premier footpath in Minnesota -- Superior Hiking Trail. The SHT is a 300-mile long natural footpath running from the Ontario border to the Wisconsin border. Started in 1986, the Superior Hiking Trail features 94 backcountry campsites and several loops and spurs. The Trail is nationally known and recognized as part of the larger North Country National Scenic Trail.

SHTA is committed to connecting people to nature. Usership of the Trail has changed over time and has evolved from backpackers to day-hiker to snowshoers and most recently an influx in trail runners. Fortunately, the Trail was designed to accommodate these diverse user groups and growth in usership has only increased the public's connection and understanding the value of public lands. Along with maintaining the Trail, the nonprofit coordinates land access and easements with over 200 landowners, publishes maps and guidebooks of the Trail, provides education and outreach on Leave No Trace principles, coordinates over 300 volunteers a year and fundraises for the ongoing stewardship of the Trail.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Trail Operations Director		Oversees all trail construction work (planning, design, implementation)			15%	1		\$35,000
Volunteer Coordinator		Oversee volunteer coordination for construction projects			15%	0.5		\$15,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Professional Trail Building Contractor -- TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Trail construction contractors will be experts in recreational trail building. They will be sourced via competitive RFP process. Services would include trail construction, board walk and stairway construction (wood or stone), but could include trail route identification and mapping.				0.6		\$133,100
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$133,100</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Construction materials and tools	This includes lumber, cement, hardware, gravel, metal bog pans and related hardware.					\$194,200
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$194,200</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 to work sites by SHTA staff	Staff supervision and expertise needed on site					\$1,700
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,700</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$379,000</b>

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	SHTA Volunteer Hours	2,700 volunteer hours valued at \$20/hour	Secured	\$54,000
Cash	Donations and memberships	Various related expenses, including: materials, tools, volunteer support, lodging, travel, and other professional services to support this project.	Secured	\$50,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$104,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$104,000</b>

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [6ae6f227-b22.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Photos of existing conditions of deteriorated, poorly design Trail infrastructure and photos of the Association's solutions, including examples of enhancement and renewal recently implemented on other sections of Trail that have successfully addressed comparable problems....

#### *Financial Capacity*

File: [9d44974e-85d.pdf](#)

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
SHTA Board Resolution_May 2022	<a href="#">69d6b7de-42f.pdf</a>

## 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

**The Problem:** Aged infrastructure combined with heavy visitor use on popular sections of the Trail threaten the adjacent land and water, along with creating an unsafe user experience.



### Trailheads & Campsites

Due to compounded deferred maintenance, trailheads and campsites have experienced degradation along with the Trail tread itself. This includes problems such as rutting, widening and pooling as shown here.



### Aging Boardwalk

Dated design with “homegrown” remedies, like chicken wire to help with traction, have led to unsafe boardwalks that need replacement that align with nationally accepted trail structure designs.



### Deteriorated Staircases

Deteriorating staircases with exposed rebar, an old design that has caused erosion of slopes and hillsides when water is not shed properly, as well as safety concerns. Requires an updated design, such as a C-Step.



# **Solution:** Renew and armor the most popular sections of the Trail and its infrastructure to better protect the adjacent land and water and also the users.



*Example: Sawmill Creek, 2020.*

## **Replace Boardwalk**

Replace failing infrastructure and design to modern day standards, using resilient materials like galvanized steel to increase the lifespan and decrease environmental disturbances.



*Example: Crow Creek, 2019.*

## **Armor and Renew Trail**

Renewed tread and stairs will keep people on the Trail and water off to help control erosion. As seen here, updated C-Step design and shoulder armoring.



*Example: Red River Campsite, 2017.*

## **Campsite Rehabilitation & Enhancement**

Conduct assessments and prescribe solutions based on site. Implement rehabilitation using volunteers. These may include solutions like improved campsite furniture, improved tent pads, relocation of a latrines and associated spur trails.

