



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-009

Proposal Title: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Project Manager Information

Name: Marty Walsh

Organization: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Office Telephone: (773) 450-2771

Email: mndriftlesshikingtrail@gmail.com

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Building a backpacking focused trail across Southeast Minnesota's Driftless Area.

Funds Requested: \$426,000

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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

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.

Southern Minnesota is generally lacking in public land relative to many other areas of the state with similarly unique landscapes, and is specifically lacking in long distance hiking opportunities. There is a growing interest in hiking as evidenced by significantly increased demand on trails like the Superior Hiking Trail and in general outdoors activities nationwide.

There are no long distance hiking trails (50+ miles of linear trail) within several hours of southeastern Minnesota. There is demand from both residents as well as the existing outdoor recreation tourism base that comes to the region for biking, paddling, and flyfishing to add backpacking opportunities to the region.

While the region is home to three State Parks and several state forest units, these areas have not been significantly expanded in decades despite a growing population and growing recognition of the globally unique ecology and geology of the Driftless Area.

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 propose to build a roughly 110 mile backpacking trail across Fillmore and Houston counties in the model of the national scenic and recreational trails and independent trails like the Superior Hiking Trail, operating independently and supported by volunteers. We are seeking funding to employ a trail planner/director and to support the work of building and maintaining the trail including but not limited to trail clearing equipment, signage, trail infrastructure construction, and other operational expenses. We will partner with the Minnesota Land Trust to secure easements with landowners.

By utilizing easements and Minnesota's state statutes supporting recreational access, a long distance backpacking trail would also increase access to the outdoors in spite of the minimal public land in the region, and highlight much of the public land that does exist. Our trail is targeted to exist roughly 70% on private land, 20% on DNR land, and 10% on local government land including minimum maintenance roads.

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?

Protection - Focus traffic onto routes that protect the sensitive ecology of the region. Including trail construction, maps, signage, and awareness to increase citizen enforcement.

Conservation - Help raise awareness of the unique geology/ecology of the Driftless Area, driving a desire to conserve and protect it.

Preservation - Preserve the experience of the Minnesota outdoors for all people in all parts of the state by protecting shared access to land.

Enhancement - Add 100+ miles of backpacking trail, increasing: usability of state forest lands, access to trout streams, recreational opportunities for visitors to stay longer/for additional visitors to

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Mapping the Route and Securing Trail Access

Activity Budget: \$218,000

Activity Description:

The trail director will map or coordinate the mapping of existing trails (including on public and private land), identify parcels well suited for trail access, work with landowners to secure trail access to that land, and work with design consultants and landowners to develop trail routing across specific routes.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Trail Manager	July 31, 2024
Designate a Planning Corridor	August 31, 2024
Develop map of existing formal and informal trails and land with access agreements	July 31, 2025
Contract Trail Construction Planner/Consultant	October 31, 2025

Activity 2: Develop Community Support and Partnerships

Activity Budget: \$94,000

Activity Description:

Build the trail as an organization, developing volunteers, increasing awareness in local communities, and formalize relationships with partner intuitions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Trail Manager	July 31, 2024
Sign lease/easement/access agreement with MN DNR for all units needed for access.	December 31, 2024
Form volunteer chapters for all mileage of trail planning corridor.	July 31, 2025
Host 12 Community Awareness Events	June 30, 2027

Activity 3: Enable Volunteers to Begin Trail Building

Activity Budget: \$114,000

Activity Description:

Provide volunteer chapters with equipment and designs to designate and build trail on accessible land.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Trail Manager	July 31, 2024
Purchase trail building supplies for volunteers	August 31, 2024
Complete first 25 mile section of trail for public access	July 31, 2025
Functional Accessibility to 100 miles of trail	May 31, 2027

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?

Sale of branded merchandise, maps, booklets, and supported experiences.

Personal donations/memberships via a Friends or Supporters group.

Continued grant-seeking, including potentially LCCMR, American Hiking Society, camping and hiking gear manufacturers, and other organizations as appropriate.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Marty Walsh

Job Title: Volunteer Lead

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

Mr. Walsh has worked in community and economic development for over 10 years, including over 5 in southeast Minnesota. Mr. Walsh served as the Economic Development Director for Fillmore County, and worked closely with economic development staff in Houston County. In addition to significant recreational backpacking experience, Mr. Walsh led the construction of a short trail in Mason City, Iowa. Professionally, Mr. Walsh has managed numerous projects ranging from \$500k Community Development Block Grants from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to engaging stakeholders on career readiness in Houston and Fillmore Counties as well as the recreational economy of Fillmore County. The Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail is also supported by numerous volunteers on the leadership team including the Director of Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center and finance, communications, and organizational development staff from several regional non-profits.

Organization: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Organization Description:

A private group working to bring a 100+ mile backpacking focused trail to southeastern Minnesota's Driftless Area in the model of the National Scenic and Recreational Trails trails.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Trail Director		Manage all staff duties of the project			30%	3		\$240,000
							Sub Total	\$240,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Technical hiking trail design.				1		\$100,000
							Sub Total	\$100,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Saws, loppers, chainsaws, protective equipment, safety equipment and other trail building gear.	Outfit volunteers for trail construction.					\$12,500
							Sub Total	\$12,500
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	100 miles/weeks x 156 weeks x \$0.60/mile	visiting trail locations, community events, and supporting volunteers					\$9,500
							Sub Total	\$9,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								

	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Professional Conferences, Comparable Trail Visits	Development of highest possible quality trail experience through education on best practices.					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Maps and outdoor signage	Wayfinding and trail education					\$10,000
	Publication	Trail Guides, user maps, and educational materials	educate public about the trail off site					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$20,000
Other Expenses								
		Fiscal Agent Fee 8%	Eagle Bluff's Fiscal Management Fee					\$34,000
							Sub Total	\$34,000
							Grand Total	\$426,000

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
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [86e40c7f-7af.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of proposed general trail route corridor....

Financial Capacity

File: [04051742-5d7.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Eagle Bluff Board Resolution	4c0c7e74-ca7.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Eagle Bluff Letter of Support	844b8693-215.pdf
Spring Grove/Norwegian Ridge	de324fd2-4be.pdf
Lieb Landowner Commitment	0a3fe33a-177.pdf
Winona Outdoor Collaborative	a132d6e8-0c7.pdf
Hildbrand-Netzel Landowner Commitment	0e628c5e-f81.pdf
Aefintyr	001d2041-8a6.docx
McCallson	c3ebe0f4-6cd.jpe
City of Harmony	b98fb510-aa1.pdf
Trail Presentation	0df03e98-747.pdf
Superior Hiking Trail Association	993e0efe-acb.pdf
Minnesota Land Trust	a9bce339-7f4.pdf
EIN Letter	bf92c23f-db1.pdf
Proposal for accessing DNR Land	d846f757-408.docx
Norby	c2676e89-045.pdf
Post Bulletin	4e290f87-e6c.pdf
Nichols	b79aca14-a0f.docx
Fillmore County Journal Article	ae242c1e-ffa.pdf
Gaddo	efc1408a-c5b.docx
Eagle Bluff Financials	26f444d9-c4a.pdf
Hildebrand	72d1ed3f-0d7.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?

Yes, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center

Does your project include the design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

Yes

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services, as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7?

No