



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2025-213

Proposal Title: Lake Byllesby Regional Park Restoration and Recreation

Project Manager Information

Name: Niki Geisler

Organization: Dakota County

Office Telephone: (952) 891-7088

Email: Niki.Geisler@co.dakota.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Improvements in Lake Byllesby Regional Park will involve natural resource restoration, new natural surface trails, birding and picnic areas; in three areas to enhance the visitor experience and stewardship.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,238,000

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): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Lake Byllesby is a 1,300-acre reservoir of the Cannon River with three parks: the East and West Regional Park owned by Dakota County, and the Goodhue County Byllesby Park. Together, these parks offer a variety of outdoor recreation and nature activities and facilities and natural resources preservation. The project focuses on the West Regional Park, which is an undeveloped, floodplain landscape surrounded by agricultural fields and rural residential properties. With 366 acres, the West Regional Park has a vast natural landscape that annually attracts troves of hikers, nature photographers, water recreationists, bird and nature enthusiasts etc. However, the area lacks access and amenities for visitors. This is creating an unhealthy disruption to the natural environment. People are parking in undesignated areas and exploring unmarked trails, which is disturbing plants and animals and are leaving garbage and waste. These actions have raised concerns for longevity, maintenance, and safety of the West Regional Park. The intent of the project is to provide trailhead facilities in three locations to provide a safer and more enjoyable visitor experience. The project also seeks to restore natural resources which have been impacted by previous property use, invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and stormwater 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.

Efforts to providing an improved experience and environment at the West Regional Park has been underway since the development of the updated Lake Byellsby Park Plan in 2018. The park plan has helped identify opportunities for these new amenities to be offered to maintain visitor activities and access, while also contributing to the preservation of the Regional Park's natural environment. The project proposal seeks to address the currently minimal accommodations within three areas of the park: Cannon Cascades, River Access, and Byllesby Bluff. Improvements will include the construction of new trailheads, birding facilities, boardwalk bridges and trails; the installation of new information and interpretive signage; and visitor amenities including restrooms, picnic tables, and waste receptacles. The proposal also includes natural resource restoration to remove invasive plant species, reestablish prairie areas, woodland enhancement, meadow seeding, and restoration of parts of the Lake Byellsby shoreline. These restoration efforts will decrease the fragmented nature of the park, foster an ecosystem more resilient to pests and non-native species invasions, and improve fish habitat.

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?

The outcomes of the project shall rehabilitate Lake Byllesby Regional Park's natural habitat through restoration for preservation of the natural environment, fostering a more resilient ecosystem for public use. The new facilities for visitors, will create the opportunity to have designated areas for proper area management contributing to safety, maintenance and monitored protection for the environment. These accommodations will be able to sustain increased visitor attendance as nature – based activities trend, bringing awareness to the diversity of natural resources in the region for future generations to enjoy.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Lake Byllesby West Regional Park Priority Facility Establishment

Activity Budget: \$855,000

Activity Description:

The objective of the activity shall create a welcoming experience for visitors, by offering necessary public facilities and information within the park. The activities include a handful of amenities distributed in three areas of the park: Cannon Cascades, the River Access, and Byllesby Bluff. These areas are to be constructed with trailhead amenities, natural surface trails incorporating boardwalk bridges as needed, birding and picnic areas, vault toilets, and signage. There will also be an accessible bird blind to be created at Byllesby Bluff. Dakota County Parks staff will accomplish these tasks by working with design consultants to prepare all necessary documentation for reviews and going to bid. The plans will go through the design review process with the Department of Administration and SHPO, for approval of final designs. Park staff will oversee the advertising of the bids and move the project into the pre-construction and construction phase.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Consultant selection to complete pre-design and get final design approval from the DOA and SHPO.	November 30, 2025
Enroll in B3 program. Advertise project for bid. Select a contractor to facilitate construction.	January 31, 2026
Construction, oversight and administration for the project.	October 31, 2026
Final landscaping and restoration.	March 31, 2027
Inspection, close out and punch list items completed for the project to open public.	April 30, 2027

Activity 2: Natural Resource Restoration

Activity Budget: \$383,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to undergo necessary natural resource restoration to preserve and maintain essential habitat to ensure the park's environment has the opportunity to maintain its natural resilience. Restoration will occur within approximately 53 acres in the West Regional Park and 48 Acres in the East Regional Park. This activity is considered with this project because some habitat has become fragmented due to the influx of invasive species, which is disruptive to the area's ecosystem. The activities will be to remove the invasive woody plants in the floodplain and upland areas, restore areas for wet or dry prairie, undergo soil preparation, seeding, plant installation and long-term vegetation maintenance. The restoration efforts will encourage the return of pollinators, ensure ground stabilization that will also improve the shoreline along Byllesby Bluff. These tasks will be accomplished by Dakota County's dedicated staff that have expertise in natural resource management and programming. Staff will lead implementation of the proposed habitat elements of the project by advertising the project to bid, award the contractor, create a restoration plan and proceed to complete the restoration.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Selection of a consultant to finalize restoration plans for bidding.	November 30, 2025
Bidding and contracting for restoration activities.	March 31, 2026
Restoration efforts according to contract.	November 30, 2026
Outstanding restoration activities and final inspection and close out.	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Mia Colloredo-Mansfeld	HKGi	Planner	No
Rita Trap	HKGi	Associate	No
Jody Rader	HKGi	Planner	No
Kendra Ellner	HKGi	Planner	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?

The long-term implementation of the project will be guided through strategic actions outlined in the 2018 Lake Byllesby Park Plan. Additional capital improvements identified in the park plan will be funded through the annual capital improvement budgeting process. Long term maintenance and management of these improvements will be performed by the Dakota County Parks and Facilities Department as part of the County’s ongoing management program. These activities are funded by tax levy, external grant funding, and are supported through regional parks operations and maintenance funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Reintroduction Of Bison To Spring Lake Park Reserve	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08q	\$560,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Niki Geisler

Job Title: Dakota County Parks Director

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

As the Dakota County Parks Director, Niki directs and administers all operations, personnel, public relations, policies, and budgets for a nature-based Parks department. Prior to joining Dakota County, Niki served as the Vice President of Camping for YMCA of the North and has 20+ years as a professional in the non-profit sector where she also held positions of Executive Director, Professional Fundraiser, Senior Program Director, and Program Director. She is an accomplished professional in community-based youth development, family camping, outdoor engagement strategy advancement, grant management, and fundraising. She has a passion for connecting communities to nature and a deep commitment to equity in outdoors.

Organization: Dakota County

Organization Description:

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the Dakota County Park System serves the state’s third most populous county with more than 400,000 residents, as well as the Region. Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system with more than 6,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways. Dakota County Parks oversees park development to give residents facilities that enable natural resource-based recreation; operates a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing hundreds of acres of prairie, forest and woodland; and

operates a professional outdoor education program that manages and interprets the cultural sites within the Dakota County Park System.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Capital Projects Project Manager		A Dakota County Capital Projects Project Manager will hire consultants through a competitive bid process and oversee the preparation of programming, schematics, and design development.			25%	0.5		\$75,000
							Sub Total	\$75,000
Contracts and Services								
Natural Resources Restoration Contractor	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Natural resources restoration contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will perform all restoration work. Contractor will provide site preparation, planting, erosion control, and other restoration tasks.				0		\$512,000
Park design and engineering contractor	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Park design and engineering contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will develop the site design, engineering, and construction specifications for all recreation features (trailheads, trails, bird blind, etc.)				0		\$176,000
Construction contractor	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will prepare the site and construct all recreation and access features according to the construction plans and specifications. Contractor will provide site preparation, construction, erosion control, and other construction tasks.				0		\$475,000
							Sub Total	\$1,163,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$1,238,000

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				
Cash	Dakota County	25% match for capital construction and natural resource restoration	Secured	\$414,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$414,000
			Funds Total	\$414,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,652,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Lake Byllesby Regional Park East	Dakota	Restoration of this upland savanna site will include removal of non-native trees and shrubs, and establishing a prairie/savanna ecosystem.	Restoration	48	1	\$276,000	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
Lake Byllesby Regional Park West	Dakota	This parcel contains Ferguson Meadow and the Buffer Forest restoration area, which connects between the upper and lower prairie areas. Ferguson Meadow will be restored from former cropland to wet prairie. The Buffer Forest will be restored with focus on invasive species removal.	Restoration	52.6	1.41	\$236,000	Public	Dakota County	In Progress
Totals				100.6	2.41	\$512,000			

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 these funds will occur on land in 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.

For Lake Byllesby Regional Park, the proposal is to restore three different areas: 1) Restore approximately ten acres of a former crop field to wet prairie by removing exotic herbaceous species, preparing the site, seeding with appropriate native species, and establishing that seed; 2) Enhance fifty-five acres of degraded woodland by removing undesirable and non-native trees and shrubs, and 3) Restore forty-eight acres of overgrown savanna by removing overabundant red cedars and other undesirable trees and non-native trees and shrubs, preparing, seeding, and establishing new prairie and savanna plant community. The sum of all proposed sites at Lake Byllesby will be approximately one-hundred-fifteen acres.

Dakota County has a recent Natural Resources Management Plan covering this project area (TCP = 2020, LBRP = 2018). Plans guide restoration priorities and activities and are updated as needed and/or approximately every five to seven years. Plans include sections on: geology and soils, natural and cultural history, an assessment of current conditions, ecological quality, issues and opportunities, water resources, prioritized goals and objectives, and management recommendations. Plans are kept on file electronically and are available to the public on our website. The Natural Resources program includes four full-time restoration project managers who work together to identify and conduct projects based on natural resources management plan priorities.

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.

Dakota County utilizes and follows the guidelines of BWSR’s “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in all of our restoration and enhancement efforts in the County parks, greenways, and conservation easements. County staff will continue to restore and enhance these proposed projects in accordance with these guidelines. For instance, alignment with the guidelines for seed and plant source, diversity levels, cultivar use, protecting plant communities, preventing the introduction of invasive species, and planting and management strategies for climate change.

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.

For all restoration and enhancement projects that are implemented in Dakota County, there is a commitment to long-term maintenance and management. Once the funds from the grant program concludes it is just the beginning of the long-term maintenance and management process. In the following years, special attention is given to make sure that these sites continue to grow well, establish maturely and do not revert to their former degraded condition. The County hires and contracts with professional ecological restoration firms that provide experienced crews to maintain these sites. The County also recruits volunteers and Conservation Corps Minnesota crews to help us with these efforts. Funding for ongoing maintenance and management is done entirely with County funds. Dakota County has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining the restored and enhanced sites within the County over the past several years, and the Dakota County Board is committed to maintaining these sites in perpetuity. The sites proposed in this application are no exception and will be maintained by the County perpetually into the future.

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

Dakota County has an ongoing, multi-year partnership with Conservation Corps Minnesota. The County hosts a full-time

crew to perform project work within all County parks. The approach for these projects will be to include them where the required tasks align with their skills, mission and equipment.

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.

The County has a robust monitoring and evaluation program that utilized for restoration and enhancement project sites. There is consistent monitoring of vegetation on these sites by established scientific methods, including using relevés, transects, and timed meanders. Data is collected and evaluated by the Floristic Quality Assessment method. Each year data is collected for a ten-year time span following initial project completion. In addition, inventory recording is captured for everything accomplished on a site, including site preparation methods, seeding rates, seed mixes/lists, planting methods, watering methods, establishment management efforts during the project, prescribed burning, mowings, etc. There is collaborative evaluation to determine what seemed to work well and what did not, with notes to serve as improvements in the future. The Adaptive Management approach is used for all of County projects, which helps guide implementation work. After the proposed project is completed, the County will make an initial evaluation whether the activity was successful or not. If something was not successful, the County will work to uncover the issue, and then remedy the situation in the future. Three years later, we will continue to intentionally monitor and evaluate the sites annually.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [e153505a-dca.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Map of East Lake Byllesby, Regional Context Map and Map of West Lake Byllesby....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	38081b55-324.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution	efee26c9-37b.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	d2deffb1-3cc.pdf
SHPO Response	3c2cac79-1b2.pdf
Project Summary	7f5a036b-f3b.pdf
Capital Construction Addendum	eb083efa-195.xlsx

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

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

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

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

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 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Rita Trapp and Kendra Ellman from HKGi

