



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-043

Proposal Title: Adopt a Flyway: Enhancing Minnesota's Migratory Bird Pitstops

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Hewitt

Organization: Audubon Upper Mississippi River

Office Telephone: (651) 739-9332

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The Adopt a Flyway pilot will incentivize habitat restoration and enhancement of Minnesota's Mississippi Flyway to support native birds full life cycles. Audubon ecologists will guide participants through bird-friendly practices.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,425,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Land (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

Narrative

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

Minnesota provides key stopover and breeding bird habitat in the Mississippi Flyway, one of four North American flyways. Flyways are habitat ranges used by migratory birds as they move between their wintering and breeding grounds. Round-trip migrations for many species can span thousands of miles, requiring quality connected habitat providing food and rest to ensure their survival. 325 bird species, which is almost half of all North American bird species, call the Mississippi Flyway home during their migration and breeding seasons, making it North America's largest flyway.

A landmark 2019 study showed North American bird populations have declined nearly one-third: a loss of three billion birds since 1970, with most being migratory birds. The 2025 State of the Birds confirms major continuous declines. Despite growth of targeted environmental action, threats like habitat loss, pollution, and changing weather continue to impact natural resources and wildlife. Majority of habitat is in private ownership, limiting action despite landowner desires to support wildlife since knowledge of what actions to take is lacking, as is the financial capacity to pay for the improvements. Audubon seeks to expand its positive impact on Minnesota's natural heritage through growing our working lands programs by piloting Adopt a Flyway.

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.

The Adopt a Flyway program will empower landowners to recognize the value of their land as part of the Mississippi Flyway and encourage voluntary management action to improve migratory and breeding habitat quality. Eligible habitats can be private (including tribal lands) and public (city, county, state, federal) lands. With Audubon's technical assistance, participants will earn public recognition for habitat enhancement and restoration practices rebuilding biodiversity. Land management practices such as native species plantings, invasive species control, prescribed fire, and rotational grazing will be eligible for financial assistance. Autonomous recording units will evaluate impact on bird populations.

Leveraging science and partnerships, Audubon will ensure projects are in the most critical migratory habitat. We will identify priority conservation areas with existing mapped data sources including Audubon's "Mapping Migratory Bird Pitstops in Minnesota", previously funded by LCCMR (July 1, 2023, #243490), Audubon's National Migratory Bird Initiative, the Important Bird Area program, online bird data (eBird, NatureServe), and the DNR Conservation Focus Areas program.

Recognition will be provided through on-site signage, logo use permission on business or personal websites, news releases, and spotlights on Audubon's regional website and social media. Audubon's Communications Associate will build public recognition and program value.

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?

Audubon will work alongside land managers across Minnesota to guide bird-friendly land management practices, with the goal of impacting 1,200 acres through technical and financial assistance, while providing official public recognition for those efforts. By utilizing current migratory and breeding data, Audubon will identify high value acres for targeted conservation action. Autonomous recording units will be deployed to monitor bird population impacts of applied management. Additionally, Audubon aims to improve public knowledge and appreciation for the habitat needs of Minnesota's Mississippi Flyway through a robust communications and workshop strategy to grow awareness of Adopt a Flyway goals.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Participant Enrollment and Habitat Management Plans

Activity Budget: \$325,000

Activity Description:

The Communications Associate will develop a communications strategy to establish indicator and metric baselines around engagement and satisfaction. They will lead the development of AAF recognition materials.

Outcomes include:

Reach: Grow newsletter subscribers by 300 people during project period, social media and digital engagement: Aim to submit 250 social media posts over the project period

Conversions: Grow Audubon social media following/membership by 500 people,

Satisfaction: Receive at least 10 online reviews reflecting experience with Audubon UMR and our programs.

The ecologists will provide technical assistance to at least 15 program participants. Technical assistance will include site visits, building participant relationships, developing habitat management plans (HMP), assisting habitat enhancement activities, deploying autonomous recording units (ARUs), and sharing data with science staff for analysis.

The HMPs developed by the ecologists will comply with ENRTF's habitat plan requirements and will address the following elements: historic habitat conditions, current management, desired flyway habitat conditions, recommendations to achieve desired conditions, and targeted bird species. The HMP is an adaptive management plan revisited between the participant and Audubon ecologist on an annual basis. An annual HMP update will ensure adjustments are implemented to achieve intended outcomes for targeted bird species and associated habitat.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Development and Deployment of Communications Plan	July 31, 2026
Enrollment and Habitat Management Plan Development	December 31, 2029

Activity 2: Flyway Habitat Enhancement

Activity Budget: \$955,000

Activity Description:

Audubon will provide technical assistance to participants interested in to improving the bird-friendliness of their land. Recruitment efforts will be focused on high use areas of migratory and breeding birds, which will be identified by Audubon's conservation and science staff utilizing existing mapped data sources. Direct communications to potential participants will be led by the Communications Associate, Conservation Manager, and Ecologists through direct mailings, online engagement and partner coordination (local SWCDs, NRCS, Ducks Unlimited).

Participants will have access to financial assistance options for bird-friendly land management practices. Minimum project size is 10 acres, while smaller acreage projects will be guided to the BWSR Lawns to Legumes program. Audubon will provide 90% cost-share for bird-friendly practices while participants will cover 10% of project costs. On average, Audubon will provide \$600 per acre for practices, including grassland seedings, tree plantings, brush management, and grazing infrastructure installation. Exact practices to improve bird-friendliness will be determined by an Audubon

Ecologist alongside the participant. The actual project cost per acre will depend on practices adopted and will vary across projects. Audubon will coordinate necessary contracts, ensuring prevailing wage rates are applied. Through technical and financial assistance, Audubon will influence at least 1,200 acres.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Identifying Priority Adopt a Flyway Regions	August 31, 2026
Complete 1,200 Acre of Habitat Enhancement in Priority Flyway Regions	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Partnership Workshops

Activity Budget: \$55,000

Activity Description:

To further promote bird-friendly land management practices and aid statewide adoption, Audubon will support partner workshops. First, Audubon has partnered with the Board of Water and Soil Resources to develop specific bird-friendly planting guidelines for the Lawns to Legumes program, which will be integrated into urban conservation workshops led by the Urban Bird Collective. Also, the guidelines will be promoted in workshops hosted by the Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association that connect directly with private landowners. Audubon will promote landowner adoption of the Forestry for Minnesota Birds (FMNB) Conservation Guide, (March 2025). The FMNB initiative serves to advance conservation priorities and goals identified in the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, while incorporating best management practices for at-risk birds and additional conservation guidance from state and regional plans. These forestry-based workshops will be hosted by American Bird Conservancy to support natural resource professionals and private landowners through a coordinated outreach and education effort. These collaborative workshops will ensure natural resource managers provide technical assistance and planning support to private landowners while also promoting public awareness on the importance of diverse and resilient forest bird habitat. A total of 12 workshops will be hosted with an outreach goal of 320 attendees.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Support and Assist Planning on Partner Workshops	June 30, 2030

Activity 4: Bird Monitoring and Analysis

Activity Budget: \$90,000

Activity Description:

To monitor and analyze the bird population impact, Audubon will deploy autonomous recording units (ARUs) at project sites to record bird songs in the spring migration and breeding seasons before and after applied management. ARU placement will follow recommendations from most recent scientific research and will be completed using ArcGIS. The science of utilizing ARUs for tracking birds is new and evolving, therefore, Audubon commits to adopting recommended protocols that are available at the time of funding.

Installation will be completed by April 15th (during years 2027-2030) to ensure migratory and potential lekking species are recorded. Recording timeframes will be dependent on geography and will reflect migratory and breeding windows—for example, South Central MN will have ARUs deployed between April 15-July 5th, and North Central MN will have ARUs deployed between April 15th and July 15th.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Annual Deployment of ARUs for Bird Monitoring	June 30, 2030
ARU Data Analysis Completed	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Monica Bryand	Urban Bird Collective	Coordinating and hosting 4 workshops to engage at least 100 attendees on bird-friendly land management practices.	Yes
Star Nelson	Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association	Coordinating and hosting 4 workshops to engage at least 125 attendees on bird-friendly land management practices on privately owned land.	Yes
Peter Dieser	American Bird Conservancy	Coordinating and hosting 4 workshops to engage at least 100 attendees on bird-friendly forestry management practices on private land.	Yes

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?

Concept receptiveness and participation will be evaluated by Audubon leadership to inform how the Adopt a Flyway pilot can be integrated into Audubon's national programming to further our hemispheric conservation goals. Evaluation will take the following results into consideration: level of recruitment effort, participation numbers, acreage impact, impact to bird populations, and sustainability of conservation participation. If Adopt a Flyway encourages rapid enrollment and sustained bird-friendly conservation action from participants, Audubon will grow this pilot nationally. To expand the program nationwide, Audubon will prioritize securing financial support from federal, foundational, and regional funding opportunities.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Habitat Associations of Mississippi Bottomland Forest Marsh Birds	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$275,000
Mapping Migratory Pitstops in Minnesota	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 03c	\$340,000
Conservation Grazing for Birds, Beef, and Better Soil	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08f	\$342,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sarah Hewitt

Job Title: Senior Conservation Manager

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

Sarah Hewitt has spent the last 9 years with the National Audubon Society organization, and joined the Audubon Upper Mississippi River team in September 2023 as the Senior Conservation Manager. Her responsibilities include supporting and expanding the region's bird habitat conservation efforts with concentration on expanding Working Lands program throughout MN, IA, and MO, partnership development, and grant management. Sarah has strong experience with strategic development, fundraising, and implementation of multiple conservation programs focused on collaborating with private producers and urban municipalities. She holds a Bachelor's of Liberal Arts degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Minnesota Morris and a Masters of Natural Resources Management from North Dakota State University.

Organization: Audubon Upper Mississippi River

Organization Description:

Audubon Upper Mississippi River is the regional office for Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri of the National Audubon Society, one of the oldest conservation organizations in the world. While we are one of 23 Audubon regional offices, we establish our own regional conservation projects, generate our own funding, and have an 11-member state Board of Directors who meet quarterly. Our mission is to protect and restore habitat for birds, today and tomorrow. There are 24,000 Audubon members in Minnesota and 13 geographically-based chapters from the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Chapter in Bemidji to Zumbro Valley Audubon Chapter in Rochester.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Senior Conservation Manager		Project development and management			27%	1.08		\$80,330
Science Associate		ARU data analysis and result distribution			27%	0.8		\$56,088
Forest Ecologist		Provide technical and financial assistance to participants			27%	0.6		\$48,137
Conservation Manager		Project management, promotion, and enrollment			27%	2		\$178,425
Communications Associate		Develop communications plan, grow programmatic recognition value, and promote program			27%	1		\$89,000
Grassland Ecologist		Provide technical and financial assistance to participants			27%	2		\$109,020
Science Coordinator		ARU data analysis and result distribution			27%	0.4		\$15,000
Grant Specialist		Grant expense management and reporting.			27%	0.2		\$16,980
Senior Office Manager		Project agreement development and execution, invoice processing, prevailing wage tracking.			27%	0.2		\$20,020
							Sub Total	\$613,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Habitat enhancement and restoration work contracts aimed at improving bird habitat through practices such as (but not limited to) prescribed fire, grassland restoration, tree plantings, invasive species control, and brush management.				0		\$720,000
Urban Bird Collective	Subaward	Four public education workshops on bird-friendly management in urban settings will be held in 2027 and 2028, to provide outreach to at least 100 attendees. Expenses include facility rental in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, meeting supplies, and staff time for event coordination by the Urban Bird Collective.				0.2		\$10,000
Minnesota Grazing Land	Subaward	Four public education workshops/field days for bird-friendly land management will be held in 2027				0.4		\$18,000

Conservation Association		and 2028 to provide outreach to 120 attendees. Events will take place across the state and coordinated by MNGCLA staff. Associated costs include staff time, travel, speaker honorariums, facility rental, and catering expenses.						
American Bird Conservancy	Subaward	Two public education workshops, and two professional forester training events on bird friendly forestry in 2027 and 2028, to provide outreach to at least 100 attendees. Events will take place statewide and coordinated by ABC. Associated costs include two staff time, travel (two staff), facility rentals, printing, and catering expenses.				0.4		\$24,000
							Sub Total	\$772,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Autonomous Recording Units + Analysis Software, field safety equipment	Monitoring bird response to applied practices					\$30,000
							Sub Total	\$30,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 meetings per year for 2 people over 4 years	We will share with conservation partners and do public outreach to grow the impact of the program.					\$5,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Conservation staff will travel to workshops and to meet with land owners and managers to develop HMPs	HMPs will guide habitat enhancement and workshops will educate public and professionals on bird-friendly land management					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000

Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$1,425,000

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				
In-Kind	We will require a 10% match for all habitat projects. This could be cash or in-kind match from public or private land owners.	Cash or in-kind match will support completing of enhancement project.	Pending	\$72,000
In-Kind	Audubon UMR	Audubon in-kind match for staff, ICR, and monitoring supplies	Secured	\$266,824
			Non State Sub Total	\$338,824
			Funds Total	\$338,824

Total Project Cost: \$1,763,824

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
Minnesota	Statewide	Grassland, Forests, Wetlands	Restoration	1,200	-	\$720,000	Private	NA	Has Not Begun
Totals				1,200	0	\$720,000			

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.

Audubon will offer technical and financial assistance on both public and privately owned land. On private land, Audubon will enter into a landowner agreement that will hold a 10-year protection on the project acres. Additionally, Audubon's ecologists will encourage private landowners to enroll in permanent easement programming and will provide guidance through enrollment.

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.

Audubon will lead the contracting of restoration projects, which will include native grassland plantings, native tree plantings, and invasive species management. We expect to see the abundance and diversity of native bird species return and utilize project sites following practice implementation. An Audubon Ecologist will develop a habitat management plan in collaboration with the participants. This habitat management plan will be adapted annually during the project period, in response to bird data collected at each site to ensure management continues to benefit target birds. These plans will be securely filed within Audubon's database and provided to each participant. Beyond the project implementation period, the participant will be responsible to maintain the improved bird habitat for the life of the landowner agreement of 10 years. Audubon will maintain providing technical assistance to participants throughout this period.

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.

Audubon will promote BWSR's "Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines" for each restoration project by providing the guidelines to contractors and program participants. Additionally, Audubon's ecologists will reference the guidelines for project planning integrated in the habitat management plans, where appropriate, while managing contracted plans to ensure efforts follow the guidelines.

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 actions to maintain each parcel's enhanced habitat integrity will be guided with the habitat management plans written by Audubon's ecologists. Audubon's ecologists will be responsible for providing technical assistance through annual check-ins and site visits when grant funded practices are completed to ensure long-term management outlined in the habitat management plans are accomplished by the participants. When necessary, ecologists can assist with identifying additional financial assistance to complete key management practices.

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

Audubon will send all Requests for Bids to the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa for consideration.

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.

A key aspect of the Adopt-a-Flyway pilot program is the technical assistance offered to participants from Audubon's ecologists. The ecologists will be responsible for evaluating each project's completeness and compliance with the enhancement plans detailed in the habitat management plan, and will enforce adjustments if goals were not originally met. Audubon and the participant will enter into an agreement that commits the participant to maintaining the project acres in the desired condition for a ten-year period with Audubon's assistance. The ecologist will be responsible for

conducting annual check-ins with the participant to ensure compliance with the agreement and provide any technical assistance to maintain management integrity of the site for that ten-year period.

Additionally, Audubon will be conducting bird monitoring before and after practices are implemented to determine impact on the target bird populations. Monitoring results will help inform the adaptation of the habitat management plan.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [2ad4e446-646.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Adopt A Flyway 1-Pager with Map of Priority Conservation Areas...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Audubon Audited Financial Statements 2024	2dd3a738-09c.pdf
Audubon Form 990	70dbe889-3a9.pdf
Audubon Certificate of Good Standing	2c22a4ba-ff0.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Audubon Advisory Board Authorization Letter	afda525c-d85.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Urban Bird Collective Support Letter	f3feb4c6-10b.pdf
American Bird Conservancy Support Letter	e485c83a-a0f.pdf
MNGLCA Support Letter	c53d5764-bdd.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

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?

No

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:

Dale Gentry, Director of Conservation, Audubon UMR

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

Yes, I understand

