



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-045

Proposal Title: Cullen Nature Preserve

Project Manager Information

Name: Matt Kumka

Organization: City of Minnetonka

Office Telephone: (952) 988-8444

Email: mkumka@minnetonkamn.gov

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: To complete restoration of the Cullen Nature Preserve (including rare oak savanna habitat) and provide public access highlighting ecological restoration and an opportunity to connect with this unique ecosystem.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$688,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (C)

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?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

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

The City of Minnetonka owns a unique parcel under Minnesota Land Trust easement protection. This former homestead is within the 494 metro area and represents an opportunity for an ecologically restored public site that will showcase plant community diversity, effective restoration techniques (oak savanna), and provide the opportunity to connect with the natural world through observation and experience with natural resources. Despite having significant parkland, the City of Minnetonka, like our other surrounding cities, includes outdoors spaces that are often dedicated to active recreational activities like ballfields, while areas dedicated to experiences in natural resources are often relegated to land that was otherwise undevelopable such as wetlands. Cullen Nature Preserve will represent a highly unique restoration opportunity that will provide engagement with the outdoors for regional west metro residents to see successful plant community restorations including oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and woodland. A partnership with Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary offers a unique engagement opportunity. A park dedicated to natural resources with thoughtful interpretation can serve as a powerful demonstration site within the metro for other cities and residents to understand how to accomplish restoration and why it is critical for our quality of life in Minnesota.

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.

To provide a plant community restoration focused experience within the metro region, the Cullen Nature Preserve will include a modest parking lot and a thoughtfully designed trail network. Through the funding requested in this application, restoration will continue on the half of the site that is not currently under active restoration. This restoration effort will include removal of invasive species and the installation of native plants. Using a combination of city staff, dedicated local volunteers, (Friends of Cullen NP) and contractors the restoration will complete the sitewide effort that has previously exhausted city resources. Installation of a small parking lot and inspiring entrance feature, visitors will be able to engage with interpretive signage focused on the history of the site and why healthy plant communities are critical to our quality of life. Through the installation of a trail network, including ADA surfacing portions and rustic benches, overlooks features, and gathering spaces, the public will be able to see firsthand a diversity of restored plant communities with an emphasis on the creation of pollinator and songbird habitat. This type of high-quality upland restoration is rare and to be locally available within the metro region will be highly valuable for residents.

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?

Specific project outcomes of the Cullen Nature Preserve master plan include protecting and enhancing a rare but historically prevalent habitat in Minnetonka—oak savanna. Additional improvements to oak woodland, mesic hardwood forest, and wetland habitats, along with trails and interpretive features, will help to educate the public on the importance of native plant restoration and climate-resilient landscapes. As one of the few accessible natural spaces in the urban west metro, the preserve will foster awareness of the connections between native plants, soil health, pollinators, and wildlife, strengthening both the ecological and human community for future generations.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Community Engagement, Pre-Design, Design

Activity Budget: \$70,000

Activity Description:

The City of Minnetonka will competitively bid a design package to identify a consultant that will complete final design of the parking lot, entrance features, interpretive signage and wayfinding package, and trail and placemaking amenities based on the City Council approved Cullen Nature Preserve Master Plan. A Master Plan (draft attached) will be complete in spring 2025 and conceptual design will be approved by park board and city council. The consultant hired will be experienced in park design including public outreach, engineering, and landscape architecture. City-wide engagement will occur to inform Minnetonka residents of the park opening and provide opportunities for their input. The design package will include specifications, design plans, and cost estimation. The consultant will assist in competitive bidding to identify a contractor for construction and furnishing of all necessary site improvement elements. All necessary permitting will be completed.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Identify and contract with design consultant	September 30, 2026
Create construction documents, perform community outreach, and create cost estimation	October 31, 2026
Perform competitive bidding to identify installation contractor	January 31, 2027

Activity 2: Ecological restoration and plant community establishment

Activity Budget: \$200,000

Activity Description:

In concurrence with the design and construction of the parking, entrance features, trails, boardwalk, and other park amenities, the city will hire a restoration contractor to continue on-going restoration efforts and expand those efforts to the northern half of the preserve. The new restoration areas have been identified as oak woodland and oak savanna in previously developed restoration plans. The restoration will consist of removal of invasive species and undesirable woody species. Existing soil erosion on site will be repaired and native seed mixes will be installed. Plant community establishment will then take place with the monitoring of seed installation germination rates and the timely treatment of weeds and woody species resprouts. Additional seedings will occur as necessary to ensure complete site restoration. Plant diversity enhancement and site monitoring will continue for three complete growing seasons, 2026 through 2028.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Contracting with restoration specialist	September 30, 2026
Removals of invasives and non-desirable woody species	March 31, 2027
Native seed mix installation and establishment	September 30, 2027
On-going site management and weed control	December 31, 2028

Activity 3: Parking lot, trail system, and preserve amenities construction and installation

Activity Budget: \$418,000

Activity Description:

Following community engagement, pre-design, design and public bidding, the design consultant will oversee the construction of the site access features including the small parking lot, preserve entrance features, green infrastructure, trails network including the boardwalk, overlooks features and gathering spaces on site.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Public Bidding	June 30, 2027
Preserve Access Installation - Parking Lot, Entrance Features	November 30, 2027
Trail, Boardwalk and Preserve Amenities Installation	November 30, 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?

Once funding is received, Minnetonka staff will hire contractors and solicit volunteers to restore habitats and build trails over the next 2-3 years. Beyond that, routine upkeep will be supported by using dedicated park maintenance funds similar to other parks in the Minnetonka system. City staff will partner with the Minnetonka Park Board to promote the preserve and engage visitors. The Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary, a local nonprofit, will help raise awareness, recruit volunteers for restoration work, and support citizen science efforts like plant and bird surveys, along with city staff, over the next 10-20 years.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Matt Kumka

Job Title: Park and Trail Project Manager

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

Lead project contact is the City of Minnetonka park and trail project manager who oversees budgeting, planning, and implementation of a wide variety of park amenities and improvements including but not limited to parking improvements, trail system planning, public interpretation, and restoration. Coordinates citywide ecological restoration efforts including Capital Improvement Plan budgeting and prioritization and oversees large, budgeted items and substantial restoration efforts from complete invasive species removal and introduction of target plant communities. The project manager has been in this role at the city for three years after 15 years with Barr Engineering Co. where he managed a variety of landscape architecture projects including public placemaking, ecological restoration, and green infrastructure. He also helps oversee the volunteer program and has worked for years with local citizen science groups, researchers from the U of M, and Board of Water and Soil Resources. He also works frequently with the local watershed districts and Three Rivers Park District on various efforts.

Organization: City of Minnetonka

Organization Description:

City of Minnetonka Public Works Department. Includes Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources. Mission to provide quality active and passive recreational opportunities for the community.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineli gible	% Bene fits	# FTE	Class ified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Predesign, design, bidding assistance, and construction oversight of the parking lot, crosswalk, entrance features, trail networks including boardwalk and all other park amenities				1,800		\$488,000
TBD	Service Contract	Restoration services related to the design and implementation of native plant community restoration. Work includes removal and disposal of invasive species and installation of native plants including seeding. Native plant community establishment and management work for three years.				1,800		\$200,000
							Sub Total	\$688,000
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	\$688,000

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	City of Minnetonka Park and Trail Improvement Fund	25% In-Kind Match for predesign, design, construction, and restoration services.	Potential	\$233,250
			Non State Sub Total	\$233,250
			Funds Total	\$233,250

Total Project Cost: \$921,250

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
Cullen Nature Preserve	Hennepin	Oak savanna, prairie, wetland, and mixed oak woodland restoration sites. Unique rolling topography with partial site restoration underway. Open to the public for walking trails and environmental education.	Restoration	30	-	-	Public	City of Minnetonka, Title Holder, Minnesota Land Trust - Easement Holder	In Progress
Totals				30	0	-			

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 using LCCMR grant funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement administered by the Minnesota Land Trust (Hennepin County Document Number 8396356, recorded 6/28/2004) and owned and maintained by the City of Minnetonka.

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.

Ecological restoration at the Cullen Nature Preserve will follow the City of Minnetonka Natural Resources Master Plan and the processes laid out through ongoing restoration and maintenance planning and implementation. Through significant budgeting over the last five years, the City of Minnetonka has fully committed to efficient and effective restoration processes including the latest management techniques, strategies, and detailed site management and restoration monitoring. The Cullen Nature Preserve will represent the culmination of the ongoing efforts in other parks throughout the city and utilize our staff expertise and robust local volunteer community to implement and consistently improve restoration effectiveness for pollinator and songbird habitat. All documents related to the Cullen Nature Preserve are managed through the city document retention policy and long-term successful plant community restoration at Cullen Nature Preserve will be a showcase for efforts in the future.

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.

Project Manager Matthew Kumka is a listed contributor to the authoring of the BWSR Native Veg. Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines document. Thorough understanding of the document and its background principles and strategies helps guide all ongoing restoration in the city of Minnetonka and the work will continue at the Cullen Nature Preserve.

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.

The City of Minnetonka Public Works department will budget and perform on-going maintenance on the parking and site amenities. The Natural Resources department will perform and contract out the on-going restoration management in perpetuity. These park improvements have been identified in the City of Minnetonka Parks, Open Space, and Trails Plan from 2021 and will be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Plans moving forward. Additional grants from organizations such as Hennepin County and the Department of Natural Resources may be used in the future for management activities.

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

The City of Minnetonka has worked with the Conservation Corps in the past with successful outcomes and will certainly consider working with them again for restoration activities and implementation of site access and trails as part of this funding opportunity.

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 City of Minnetonka has fully committed to sustainable and effective restoration throughout its community and the Cullen Nature Preserve will follow the institutional experience and techniques in order create a highly resilient and diverse restoration project that will thrive in perpetuity. It's trained staff, connections and experience with restoration

contractors and its well-established volunteer network will continually inspect and apply best management practices to ensure restoration goals are met in not only the first few years of the restoration but into the future including after initial completion and three-year follow-up assessments. Project effectiveness will include analyzing target plant community health and resilience, increasing plant community diversity, limiting soil erosion and eliminating weeds prior to establishment to create habitat for pollinators and birds. The Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary are performing vegetation research plots, bird counts and ongoing pollinator research with results hosting on their website and provided to the restoration community to support similar efforts regionally.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [cd39d694-d1c.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Map attached includes a highlight of the Cullen Nature Preserve parcel southeast of the area where the west branch of highway 494 meets highway 394....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
City of Minnetonka Financial Report	9d80d4ae-46e.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
City of Minnetonka Letter of Authorization	1418a97d-a9c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Media Links - Friends Website Link	f5fe4da9-35c.docx
Capital Project Budget Questionnaire	9b7c35be-78e.xlsx
Cullen Nature Preserve Master Plan Cost Estimate	604daa67-798.pdf
Cullen Nature Preserve Master Plan Draft	d6e3684e-031.pdf
MN Land Trust Letter of Support	ae3e175a-16c.pdf
Friends of Cullen Letter of Support	bb4a4d4b-7a2.pdf
Prairie Enthusiasts _ Letter of Support	a9a63b09-8d2.pdf
Prof. Lee Frelich _ Letter of Support	2af59d0b-2bf.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?

N/A

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:

Leslie Yetka, City of Minnetonka Natural Resources Manager. Friends of Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary.

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