



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-114

**Proposal Title:** Freeborn County Regional Trail

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Philip Wacholz

**Organization:** Freeborn County

**Office Telephone:** (507) 377-5188

**Email:** philip.wacholz@co.freeborn.mn.us

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** This project is to construct a 6.4-mile-long paved trail in Freeborn County between the cities of Albert Lea and Manchester.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$2,500,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** September 30, 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): 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.**

In 2009, Freeborn County and Albert Lea participated in the Blue Zones Project, a well-being initiative to help make healthy choices easier for everyone. They focused on changing the community's culture and environment through policy, building design, social networks, and built environment. Part of this effort was developing opportunities for outdoor recreation.

In 2023, the city noted there had been drops in the number of people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and those that use tobacco. However, there had not been significant change in the number of people exercising.

Providing free, close-to-home exercise opportunities is important for people that may be considered disadvantaged; the city and county have greater percentages of populations associated with such indicators. Per the U.S. Census Bureau:

- In Albert Lea, 19.1% of the population is not white alone, greater than 17.7% statewide.
- In Freeborn County, 10.5% of the population lives in poverty, and 11.5% in Albert Lea, greater than 9.3% statewide.
- In Freeborn County, 23.8% of people are over 65, and 25.0% in Albert Lea, greater than 17.8% statewide.
- In Freeborn County, people with a disability under age 65 is 9.2% and 10.4% statewide.

**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.**

Residents in Freeborn County seek to expand opportunities for outdoor recreation and exercise by creating a regional trail. This phase will construct a 6.4-mile trail in Freeborn County between Albert Lea and Manchester. The route is along a former Union Pacific Railroad grade, which Freeborn County acquired in 2014. The work includes a 10-foot-wide paved trail surface, rehabilitation of three railroad bridges, replacement of one railroad bridge, and enhancement of street crossings including a grade-separated crossing of Minnesota Trunk Highway 13.

This project is part of a grander vision to extend north along the railroad grade to Hartland and through Waseca County (through New Richland and Waseca), to Waterville to link to the Sakatah Singing Hills State Trail. To the south, the planned trail will continue to the Blazing Star State Trail, ultimately developing 50 miles of trail in Freeborn and Waseca Counties. This vision was documented in The Freeborn-Waseca Regional Trail Plan in 2018.

In 2022-2023, Freeborn County and Albert Lea developed a Trail Action Plan focused on their segments of the proposed regional trail. This planning process resulted in the vision that, "The Freeborn County Trail will provide a scenic and unique experience connecting people and places."

**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 environmental impacts of constructing the rail-trail are anticipated to be minimal. The project engineers commit to a design that avoids or minimizes impacts to creeks and wetlands and use of native plant species for restoration. The bridge work will involve stabilizing the creek banks around the abutments and repairing/replacing abutments. The trail will involve grading to ensure safe slopes along the railroad corridor.

The proposed rail-trail is compatible with adjacent land uses including open space owned by the Shell Rock Watershed District and agricultural fields. There are no historical or archaeological sites within the project area.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: PreDesign/Design (non-ENRTF)

**Activity Budget:** \$1

**Activity Description:**

Freeborn County has already engaged HDR, Inc to complete the design for the trail and preliminary design is nearly complete. This includes Department of Administration Predesign Review, Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, other agency review and permitting, completing the trail and bridge design, approval of plans by the County, and advertising for bids. These milestones will be paid with non-ENRTF funds.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Department of Administration Predesign Review (non-ENRTF)	August 31, 2025
Consultation with SHPO (non-ENRTF)	August 31, 2025
Permitting (non-ENRTF)	February 28, 2026
Final Design (non-ENRTF)	February 28, 2026
All Construction Funds Legally Secured (non-ENRTF)	March 31, 2026
Advertisement for Bid (non-ENRTF)	April 30, 2026

### Activity 2: Trail Construction

**Activity Budget:** \$2,499,998

**Activity Description:**

This activity includes everything associated with a construction contract to build the trail and bridge rehabilitation and replacement. Starting from the pre-construction meeting through project close out. The County will provide construction administration and observation (possibly through a consultant) and manage progress payments to the contractor based upon work completed. The project may include change orders for unforeseen circumstances.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Staking, Mobilization, and Site Preparation	July 31, 2026
Trail Paving	June 30, 2028
Final Grading/Stabilization	July 31, 2028
Punch List Complete	September 30, 2028

### Activity 3: Close-Out (non-ENRTF)

**Activity Budget:** \$1

**Activity Description:**

This includes activities after construction is completed. These milestones would be paid with non-ENRTF funds.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Notice of Funding Restriction Recorded (non-ENRTF)	September 30, 2028
Certificate of Completion (non-ENRTF)	September 30, 2028

ENRFT Signage Installed (non-ENRTF)	September 30, 2028
Open for Trail Use (non-ENRTF)	September 30, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Steven Jahnke, P.E.	City of Albert Lea	City Engineer/Director of Public Works	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?**

Freeborn County and Albert Lea signed a Joint Powers Agreement in 2022 for maintaining the corridor and developing the trail. HDR has been contracted to design the trail. HDR will use the state's design guidance and engage Freeborn County and Albert Lea in reviews at 30%, 60%, and 90% design. HDR will also lead the effort in securing the necessary permits for construction.

Once designed and funded, Freeborn County will advertise the project following state statutes including posting in a trade publication or county newspaper, county website, and SALT's eAdvert webpage. HDR may be contracted to administer construction and provide

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Philip Wacholz

**Job Title:** Freeborn County Engineer/Director of Public Works

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

The project manager has been the County Engineer and Director of Public Works for Freeborn County since 2020 and has been a professional licensed engineer in the state of Minnesota since 2010.

Mr. Wacholz has experience on a variety of projects including highway paving, municipal street reconstruction, bridge replacements, preventative maintenance work, building improvements, utility construction, equipment procurement, and supervision of 30 staff and an annual budget of \$20,000,000.

Mr. Wacholz has extensive experience with the administration of state and federal grants and is supported by a staff of technicians and accountants who also have experience in these areas and with the requirements of grants.

Mr. Wacholz also has experience with the administration of construction contracts, change orders, addressing concerns from the public.

**Organization:** Freeborn County

**Organization Description:**

Freeborn County is a county-level unit of government. The County Administrator's Office is the administrative center of the county. Under the direction of the Board of Commissioners, the administrator exercises general supervision over all county institutions and agencies. The Public Works Department is leading this application effort with support of the County Administrator and Board of Commissioners.

The Public Works Department strives to serve the public by providing a transportation system and services that emphasize quality, safety, cost effectiveness, economic vitality, and sensitivity to the environment. The duties of this department include:

- o Contract administration
- o Fiscal programming and cost accounting

- o Highway traffic safety
- o Maintenance of highways, rights of way, county parks, and bridges
- o Management of the county motor pool
- o Materials design and testing
- o Planning and design
- o Property acquisition
- o Public transportation planning
- o Snow removal

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
TBD	Service Contract	Constructing the trail				18		\$2,500,000
							Sub Total	\$2,500,000
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							Sub Total	-

Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$2,500,000



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
<b>State</b>				
Cash	MnDNR Regional Trail Grant (RTG)	Rehab of three bridges in county	Potential	\$300,000
Cash	MnDNR Local Trail Connections (LTC)	Replacement of bridge in Albert Lea	Potential	\$250,000
Cash	MnDOT Active Transportation Infrastructure (ATI)	Trail development	Pending	\$1,000,000
Cash	Local Partnership Program (LPP)	Grade-separated crossing of TH-13	Pending	\$1,600,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$3,150,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Freeborn County	full trail project	Secured	\$850,000
Cash	City of Albert Lea	full trail project	Pending	\$291,000
Cash	GMRPTC Parks and Trails Legacy	full trail project	Potential	\$1,500,000
Cash	Freeborn County and City of Albert Lea	Trail and bridge design	Secured	\$299,976
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,940,976</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$6,090,976</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$8,590,976**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [64f3084f-252.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Map of trail project in Freeborn County and Albert Lea....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Freeborn County Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	<a href="#">6d09c56d-ef2.pdf</a>
Independent Auditors Report	<a href="#">c7923aca-954.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Resolution_Freeborn County	<a href="#">fe261236-a38.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Capital Project Questionnaire - Freeborn	<a href="#">a674dafb-e66.pdf</a>
Capital Construction Budget Addendum	<a href="#">0d43c0bf-ce4.xlsx</a>
Support Letter_MnDOT	<a href="#">6ce9a7e4-d34.pdf</a>
Freeborn County and Albert Lea Trail Action Plan	<a href="#">4cec9ed7-86a.pdf</a>
Support Letter_CVB	<a href="#">b034ff3f-002.pdf</a>
Support Letter_ALCyclists	<a href="#">2f94d53f-65e.pdf</a>
Support Letter_TrailAssociation	<a href="#">4e94c2c6-c99.pdf</a>
Support Letter_BlueZones	<a href="#">ff1f5da8-e5c.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**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:**

Mindy Moore, HDR and Steven Jahnke, City of Albert Lea City Engineer and Director of Public Works

**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