



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-223

Proposal Title: Oak Savanna Restoration for Living Landscapes

Project Manager Information

Name: Dan Shaw

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Office Telephone: (612) 236-6291

Email: dan.shaw@state.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This pilot program will restore and enhance oak savannas on local public lands and permanently protected conservation lands strategically located across Minnesota's Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$3,436,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Land (F)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): SE, Central, Metro, NW,

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

Region(s): SE, Central, Metro, NW,

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.

Dramatic population declines of Minnesota's native pollinators and migratory birds that support our ecosystems have been raising significant alarm. Oak savanna systems can host a substantial amount of biodiversity, including many declining species such as the Karner blue butterfly, regal fritillary, monarch butterfly, rusty patched bumble bee, and red-headed woodpecker. Historically, oak savannas covered vast areas across the Midwest. Today, they are considered one of the most threatened plant communities, with less than 0.1% remaining in the state. These transitional ecosystems between prairie and forest capture significant amounts of carbon, withstand drought and intense weather, and are capable of supporting regenerative agroecosystems in a changing climate. Currently, there is no state grant program focused on the restoration or establishment of oak savannas, and innovative management and conservation practices need to be explored, demonstrated, and evaluated in these systems. There is also a need to coordinate ongoing efforts - such as updating state seed mixes specific to oak savannas, developing new approaches and refining existing management methods, and identifying lands that are a high priority for restoration - into a structured oak savanna conservation program with supporting resources.

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.

In support of the Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Living Landscape Initiative, BWSR will build a new program to establish and restore approximately 1,000 acres of oak savanna and supporting woodlands and tallgrass prairie strategically located in the Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province. Project selection, placement and planning will address the habitat needs of a wide diversity of wildlife. Each project will have a customized conservation plan developed in partnership with Xerces Society that will identify target flora and fauna species. These target species - the Karner blue, regal fritillary and monarch butterflies, rusty patched bumble bee, and other valuable native pollinators - will guide the activities and seed mixes used on the project sites. This project will require consideration of specific caterpillar host plants as part of each conservation plan, as well as native plant communities that maximize pollination, food for wildlife and other ecosystem service benefits of invertebrates to adjacent wildlands and farmland. This program will align with the Governor's pollinator executive order (EO 19-28), BWSR's Pollinator Plan, help attain goals of the Interagency Pollinator Protection Team, and Minnesota's Climate Action Framework Initiatives Goal 2: Climate-Smart natural and Working Land and Goal 3: Resilient Communities.

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?

Funding through this new initiative will be distributed through BWSR's Cost-share process or a competitive RFP. Eligible projects will first be prioritized on local public lands followed private lands protected by a contract or easement . Approximately 1,000 acres of quality habitat will be restored. Projects will focus on:

- 1) Reconstructing new oak savannas including supporting woodlands and tallgrass prairies that benefit target species and/or
- 2) Restoring remnant oak savannas including associated woodlands and tallgrass prairies that provide high value habitat. Selected management activities will maximize high value habitat for target species and a variety of other wildlife.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Strategic Program Planning, Monitoring, and Education

Activity Budget: \$276,000

Activity Description:

BWSR will partner with Xerces Society to coordinate this project, develop project selection ranking criteria and review project proposals, produce innovative conservation planning and conservation plan templates, write technical guidance specific to oak savannas for inclusion in BWSR’s Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines, develop a long-term monitoring protocol for program participants, and conduct three regional workshops focused on oak savanna reconstruction and restoration.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Create advisory team to guide program development, ranking criteria, and make decisions about proposed projects.	August 31, 2027
Collaborate with Xerces on three workshops to present BMPs for oak savanna restoration and biodiversity.	June 30, 2029
Collaborate with Xerces to develop new and innovative conservation guides, plan templates, and case studies.	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Habitat Project Planning and Restoration

Activity Budget: \$3,000,000

Activity Description:

Restore and enhance approximately 1,000 acres of oak savanna and supporting tallgrass prairies and woodlands. Each project will have a customized conservational plan that will identify target flora and fauna species. These target species will guide the activities and seed mixes used on the project sites. Priority wildlife species include the Karner blue butterfly, regal fritillary, monarch butterfly, bumble bees including the rusty patched bumble bee, and native pollinator biodiversity in general. Larval host plants, adult pollinator floral host plants (i.e., targeted pollen and nectar sources) considerations will be an important component of each restoration plan.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Conduct site preparation, planting and management of projects with the goal of maintaining diverse plantings.	June 30, 2029
Develop pollinator-beneficial conservation plans and long-term monitoring strategies for oak savanna restorations.	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Project Assessment, Signage and What’s Working Outreach

Activity Budget: \$160,000

Activity Description:

Monitoring and an evaluation of habitat implementation success at each project site will contribute to improved technical guidance for oak savanna restoration and management methods. Monitoring will also create information about the impact of various practices on the presence and abundance of target flora and fauna species. Details on the response of species, such as bumble bees or monarch butterflies, will be incorporated into community science data sets

such as the Minnesota Bumble Bee Atlas. Summarized results will inform updates to conservation planning forms, components of BWSR’s Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines, and the development of case studies highlighting best practices, successful techniques and lessons learned. Technical guidance and outreach products will be developed to support a broad group of stakeholders, including public land managers, farmers, forest and grazing land managers, conservation agency staff, and the public. In order to promote the new program, signage containing the ENTRF logo will be placed at each project.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Document successful planning, design, installation and management strategies and case studies on BWSR's webpage.	June 30, 2029
Assemble the advisory team to discuss results, successes, improvement and next steps in refining program.	June 30, 2029
Add ENTRF signage at all project sites	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Karin Jokela	Xerces Society	Assist with project selection, conservation planning, monitoring, and technical training	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?

This proposal enhances existing investments in long-term conservation as part of a solution to the decline of at-risk species and other important wildlife species. The project will support activities and conservation plans that ensure the long-term management and monitoring. Once the new BWSR program is established BWSR in partnership with Xerces Society and the Living Landscape Initiative Advisory Committee will pursue other funding sources for the program such as federal grants and foundation funding. Lessons learned and technical resources developed with this funding will be used to guide future efforts and the securing of additional funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Strategic Habitat Program	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 08b	\$750,000
Lawns To Legumes Program Phase 2	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08p	\$993,000
Lawns To Legumes Program Phase 2	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 08m & 20b	\$1,040,000
Strategic Framework to Guide Local Water Storage Implementation	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 03o	\$200,000
Watershed and Forest Restoration: What a Match!	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08j	\$3,318,000
Conservation Reserve Program State Incentives	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 10e	\$750,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Dan Shaw

Job Title: Senior Ecologist/ Vegetation Specialist

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

Dan Shaw, is the Senior Ecologist and Vegetation Specialist for BWSR where he works on invasive species, restoration, native vegetation, wetland, agricultural BMPs, stormwater design, pollinator habitat, and climate adaptation programs through conservation partnerships. Dan has also taught classes at the University of Minnesota for the last seventeen years and currently teaches a course on “Ecological Restoration Planning and Management”.

Related projects include:

- Establishment and management of BWSR’s Cooperative Weed Management Area Program
- Establishment and management of BWSR’s Habitat Friendly Solar and Utility Programs
- Establishment of BWSR’s Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program (HELP)
- Coordination of BWSR’s Pollinator Initiative
- Development and updating of BWSR’s Native Vegetation Establishment and Management Guidelines
- Development of BWSR’s Pollinator, Landscape Resiliency and Buffer Toolboxes

- Development of State Seed Mixes
- Author, co-author or contributing author of “Plants for Stormwater Design”, “The Minnesota Wetland Restoration Guide”, “Native Vegetation in Restored and Created Wetlands”, The Blue Thumb Guide to Raingardens”, BWSR’s Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines “Ecological Restoration in the Midwest, Past, Present and Future”

Before coming to BWSR experience included being Conservation Director at Great River Greening, working for environmental consulting firms, restoration companies, native plant nurseries, research at the University of Minnesota and over 20 years of farming experience.

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Organization Description:

The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is Minnesota’s state agency dedicated to conserving and enhancing soil and water resources. In partnership with local organizations and private landowners, BWSR implements programs that prevent sediment and nutrient pollution in lakes, rivers, and streams, restore wetlands, and improve fish and wildlife habitats. The agency's 20-member board includes representatives from local and state government agencies, along with engaged citizens, ensuring a collaborative approach to environmental stewardship.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Personnel		Program Coordinator			22%	1.2	X	\$183,000
							Sub Total	\$183,000
Contracts and Services								
Local Government Partners	Service Contract	Local governments or their designees in partnership with Xerces Society develop savanna restoration conservation plan updates for awarded projects on protected lands. Conduct site preparation, planting and management of projects with the goal of establishing and maintaining high quality oak savanna.				0		\$3,000,000
Xerces Society	Subaward	Serve on the project coordinating committee. Support conservation plan development, project monitoring, and species monitoring. Provide ongoing support to habitat partners. Conduct three restoration workshops. Incorporate lessons learned into final guidelines, project planning templates and case studies to disseminate innovative project results.				1.5		\$250,000
							Sub Total	\$3,250,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-

Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	12 trips with two people and 10 overnight motel stays	Project site visits and training local partners					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		80 Project Site Signage	Print and add ENRTF signage at all project sites.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
							Grand Total	\$3,436,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Personnel - Personnel		Program Coordinator	Classified : This position is essential to the new program that doesn't have existing funding to conduct program implementation, and program oversight for funding recipients. ENRTF funds are not being used to supplant other sources of funds traditionally used to pay for that classified staff salary.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
In-Kind	General Fund Appropriation to BWSR	Minnesota BWSR Ecological Science Conservationist (5% FTE) per year of time over three years.	Secured	\$32,400
			State Sub Total	\$32,400
Non-State				
Cash	Public and private landowners	Minimum 25% cost share requirement for public projects and private landowners.	Pending	\$750,000
In-Kind	Xerces Society	Indirect staffing costs associated with Xerces Society program support	Secured	\$53,250
			Non State Sub Total	\$803,250
			Funds Total	\$835,650

Total Project Cost: \$4,271,650

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
				-	-	-			
Totals				0	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 lands to be restored through this project will be completed on public lands and/or lands permanently protected with an emphasis on lands with easements or parks on city, county or state land.

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.

As part of this project templates for project implement and long-term monitoring plans will be developed to be used on all projects. These templates will include detail on project site preparation, installation and management as well as needs for documentation of the restoration process. In addition to being provided to the local project manager, these documents will be provided to landowners to guide long-term management. Ensuring the long-term care of projects will be a key ranking criteria used as part of the project selection process.

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.

Use of the BWSR Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines will be required, as well as the project conservation plans templates that will be used for all projects. There will be an emphasis on protecting the genetic integrity of any remnant plant communities associated with projects.

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.

Ensuring the long-term care of projects will be a key ranking criteria used as part of the competitive project selection process, this will include considerations about future funding availability for management. The project templates developed for all projects will also provide direction for the long-term management and monitoring. The role of landowners to maintain projects into the future will be stressed and local conservation staff will continue working with landowners to provide technical guidance. Program participants will be required to work with BWSR and/or Xerces Society on the development of the project specific conservation plan that will be signed by the landowner. This will include seed mix design, reconstruction or restoration techniques, and long-term management recommendations.

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

The competitive RFP for the program will state that consideration needs to be given to contracting with the Conservation Corps of Minnesota.

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.

Project assessments/evaluations will be completed by local staff working with landowners after completion and three years as a follow-up to ensure that project goals are being met and to document project success that will be a requirement of the grant program (BWSR has routine inspection requirements for conservation projects funded with state dollars). These evaluation will also play a key role in determining if any specific maintenance activities are needed for the project(s).

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [c5d946d6-36f.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

This graphic and map shows the boundary of the proposed project area (MN Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province)....

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Xerces Society Letter of Support	7f9de8bb-558.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:

Karen Jokela, Xerces Society

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