Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-230

Proposal Title: Storage: A Real Solution within Production and Conservation

Project Manager Information

Name: Rita Weaver

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

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Email: rita.weaver@state.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Acting almost like rural stormwater management, adding storage basins within drainage systems provide both agricultural drainage and water quality benefits, and are supported by both environmental groups and agricultural producers.

ENRTF Funds Requested: $8,000,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Water (B)

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 and In the Future

Narrative

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

Much of Minnesota has been hydrologically altered, draining upstream wetlands to allow for more productive agricultural lands, resulting in increased downstream flows, which can lead to more erosion, sedimentation, and poor water quality. However, Minnesota's economy depends on agriculture, with approximately $26 Billion in agricultural sales each year. Farmers need adequate drainage to keep their land productive. Many of these systems are over a century old, and with climate change and more intense storm events these systems are no longer effective. It is the responsibility of the farmers to upkeep and pay for (Improve) these drainage systems, however the standard approach to Improvements has been to increase the size of the drainage system, which simply pushes additional water downstream. This approach continues to hydrologically alter our land. It is easy to see how farmers and environmental groups are at odds.

State law does not require farmers to implement best management practices to control runoff from their land and by law, landowners are not allowed to pay more than the Improvement is worth (meaning any improvement must have a positive cost:benefit ratio). Therefore, we look to grants and other incentives to encourage both successful production and environmentally friendly drainage.

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.

Surface Water Storage added to a drainage system is not only a real world solution to improve drainage systems, but is also more environmentally friendly than increasing the size of the drainage pipes and ditches.
Unfortunately, storage is expensive, and almost always puts the cost of Improvement above the cost:benefit ratio. Therefore, it cannot, by law, be paid for by landowners. However, BWSR has worked with several counties to evaluate how funding the addition of storage to a system can change the overall approach to an Improvement, so it is no longer cost prohibitive to the landowners.

Our proposed solution will be to provide pass-through grants to counties and watershed districts to add storage to their drainage systems. This storage will reduce peak flow rates downstream, decreasing erosion and sedimentation (see more benefits under "project outcomes"). Adding storage means can also significantly reduce engineering, legal, and construction costs for the landowners paying for their Improvement.

The grants will fund final design and construction of water storage areas, with each grant resulting in at lease one storge area being constructed. LCCMR funds would not be used for easement payments on the storage areas.

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?

Improvement in water quality will be this project's biggest contribution to conserving and protecting our state's natural resources. By reducing peak flows, and therefore flooding, in our drainage systems, we will be reducing channel sloughing and limiting near-channel erosion. This type of erosion is one of the largest sources of sediment in the Minnesota River Basin and other areas of the state.

Adding storage along our drainage systems also allows water to be retained on the landscape, so a secondary benefit will be to promote groundwater recharge.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Develop Grant Program Details and RFP

Activity Budget: $75,000

Activity Description:
The objective of this task will be to develop a request for proposal (RFP) that can be used to select the storage projects that will be funded with this effort. For this activity, BWSR staff will form a team to refine the details of the grant program and develop the RFP that will be used to solicit projects that will be designed and constructed using these funds.

Since a major advantage of this project is finding a solution that will work for both producers and environmental groups, the grant program and its requirements will be presented and discussed with potential project applicants and other interested parties to ensure needs are being met with the proposed approach of the program.

The budget requested for this activity is small because the majority of the work in this task can be paid for by existing BWSR budgets and current staff duties, as the majority of the work will overlap with current duties such as grant oversight, grant monitoring, and local partner support. Salaries cannot be shown as leverage unfortunately because they are being used as match for a federal grant.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
BWSR Team Develops Program Requirements	October 31, 2025
Program Requirements Discussed with Potential Applicants and Interested Parties	January 31, 2026
RFP Developed and Released	March 31, 2026

Activity 2: Selection of Projects, Final Design, and Construction of Selection Storage Locations

Activity Budget: $7,925,000

Activity Description:
Note that final design and construction is an ongoing process, so only the grant award dates and FINAL completion date are listed as milestones. The objective of this task will be to construct storage projects on drainage systems throughout the state.

As part of this activity, BWSR staff will review applications received from each RFP then score and rank the projects, using processes outlined by the State's Office of Grants Management. The BWSR Board will be asked to approve the selected projects before the awards are presented. Grants will be monitored by BWSR grants staff. Since this work falls under other job duties of BWSR staff, staff salaries are not included in the LCCMR proposed budget.

The largest part of this task be the final design and construction of the storage sites between June 2026 and July 2030. This will be completed by the grantees from the program, overseen by BWSR staff to ensure program requirements and outcomes are met.

Funds will be released yearly to allow drainage authorities to plan their work and to allow preparation of conceptual design work that will be needed to apply for this grant. It will also stagger the workload for BWSR staff.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
First Round of Applications will be Scored and Ranked by BWSR Staff	June 30, 2026
First Round of Grants will be Approved by BWSR Board	August 31, 2026
Final Design and Construction Work will Begin	August 31, 2026
Second Round RFP will be Opened	March 31, 2027
Second Round of Applications will be Scored and Ranked by BWSR Staff	June 30, 2027
Second Round of Grants will be Approved by BWSR Board	August 31, 2027
Third Round RFP will be Opened	March 31, 2029
Third Round of Applications will be Scored and Ranked by BWSR Staff	June 30, 2029
Third Round of Grants will be Approved by BWSR Board	August 31, 2029
Final Construction must be completed and Final Grant Reconciliation	November 30, 2030

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?

We hope that this project will show elected officials and citizens of Minnesota that there is a solution that can benefit both farmers and environmentalists. Agricultural drainage can be such a divisive issue that finding a solution that meets both agricultural and environmental needs will be the best outcome that this project can demonstrate.

Once we show success with this work, we plan to wrap this type of funding into BWSR's Water Quality and Storage Program, so we can continue to implement this approach across the state. That program is currently funded through the state's general fund.

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: Rita Weaver

Job Title: Chief Engineer and State Drainage Engineer

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

Rita Weaver is a Civil Engineer with over 20 years of water resources engineering experience. She has studied the effect of water storage her entire career, starting with modeling storage basins across the Cedar River Watershed to determine how they would reduce flooding in the City of Austin. Other notable projects include working on the team to calibrate the Red River of the North hydrologic model, evaluating flood effects on the Mississippi River as part of a FEMA flood study, and serving on the technical panel for the 2022 LCCMR project "Strategic Framework to Guide Local Water Storage Implementation".

Rita Weaver serves on the Drainage Management Team and works closely with drainage engineers and drainage authorities. Through these relationships, she understands the needs of our producers and the restrictions of working within the drainage law. At the same time, she has worked closely with the Minnesota River Congress and often speaks at their events on the high flow and erosion issues in the MN River Basin. Rita has been working hard to find a solution that will benefit both of these cohorts, and strongly believes storage is the best solution to support agricultural production and also improve our state's water quality.

This proposed LCCMR project will run parallel to, and eventually be incorporated into, BWSR's Water Quality and

Storage Program, which Rita Weaver helped developed and has managed since 2021. The program has received $19 Million in legislative funding. Rita also was successful in receiving a $21.4 Million Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) NRCS grant in 2024 to support the efforts of the Water Quality and Storage Program.

Rita also teaches Hydrology and Eco-sensitive Design to Civil Engineering Technology students at Dakota County Technical College as an adjunct professor.

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Organization Description:
BWSR Mission Statement and Charge: Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. BWSR is the state soil and water conservation agency, and it administers programs that prevent sediment and nutrients from entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; enhance fish and wildlife habitat; and protect wetlands. The 20-member board consists of representatives of local and state government agencies and citizens.

BWSR has a proven history of providing grants to local partners to support their conservation efforts. This proposed project would be consistent with that role and fortunately the staff that are supporting the storage work across the state, such as through grant reviews, grant monitoring, and supporting local partnerships, can be covered by other appropriations. Therefore, only a minimal salary request is being made as part of this proposed project.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		Manage the overall project messaging, marketing, budget, and outcomes. Note that the salary for this staff person is covered under the Water Quality and Storage Budget so additional funds are not being requested for staff time.			0%	1		-
Project Coordinator		Manage the day-to-day activities of the project, including the messaging, marketing, budget, and outcomes. Note the salary requested will be to cover outreach to partners for activity 1 only, the remaining salary will be paid for by the Water Quality and Storage program since the work completed for this project will also support that effort.			0%	2		$75,000
							Sub Total	**$75,000**
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Contract will be paying for final design of the storage area within the drainage system and also construction costs of the storage area, including connecting the storage area to the drainage system.				0		$7,925,000
							Sub Total	**$7,925,000**
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	**$8,000,000**

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	**-**
Non-State				
In-Kind	Required match for BWSR grants	Most BWSR grants require a 10% match, and we plan to have the same requirement under this program. So each successful applicant will be required to provide 10% non-state match to use the funds.	Pending	$792,500
			Non State Sub Total	**$792,500**
			Funds Total	**$792,500**

Total Project Cost: $8,792,500

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: 245365fc-cb0.pdf

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Aerial photo of the first site where BWSR was involved in finding a storage solution for reducing flow rates along a drainage system. The image shows the area that was flooding and the proposed storage location at the upstream end of the drainage system....

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support from ISG	8b69134d-5cf.pdf
Letter of Support from Le Sueur SWCD	0b9e145d-3ea.pdf
Letter of Support from Martin County	2c0271a8-e62.pdf
Letter of Support from Nobles County	2920e7c7-55e.pdf
Letter of Support from The Coalition for a Clean Minnesota River and MN River Congress	7dc7df07-24e.pdf

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?

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:

Suzanne Rhees, BWSR

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