



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-261

Proposal Title: Thompson County Park Inclusive Outdoor Recreation Enhancements

Project Manager Information

Name: Niki Geisler

Organization: Dakota County

Office Telephone: (952) 891-7088

Email: niki.geisler@co.dakota.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Improvements seek to enhance the educational and recreational value of land situated in an urban area through thoughtful accessibility improvements, strategic interpretive signage, and diverse play opportunities.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$4,000,000

Proposed Project Completion: March 31, 2029

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?

In the Future

Narrative

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

Thompson County Park is a 58-acre park located in West St. Paul near Highway 52 and Butler Ave East and connected to the 7-mile River to River Greenway. The Park serves more than 50,000 residents in the northern part of Dakota County and had an estimated 300,000 visitors in 2022.

Nearly 90% of the park is natural or semi-natural vegetation, which is unusual for a park surrounded by urban development, and presents a unique opportunity to provide access to nature and education to the park's many visitors.

As demonstrated through the accessibility evaluation during the planning process, the park is a destination for those with limited mobility. Active older adult programming occurs at the Activity Center, but inadequate ADA-accessible options exist for outdoor activities, limiting the ability of different park visitors to experience the full range of offerings at Thompson Park.

Given the scale of Thompson County Park in its urban setting, there is a unique opportunity to activate more areas of the park and provide engaging and inclusive access for Dakota County residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to learn more about and interact with diverse ecosystems and natural areas.

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 proposed inclusive improvements activate core areas across the park, enhancing visitors' ability to navigate and engage with a variety of natural areas, gathering places, and play opportunities. With all improvements, native plantings, interpretative signage, and invasive species management are proposed to improve the quality and educational components of the Park's ecosystems.

Improvements (safety signage, seating, and bike amenities) at two park entrances welcome and orient visitors to the park. Complementing the existing inclusive playground, an immersive nature play experience will accommodate individuals on the autism spectrum with a variety of stations, from physically challenging active play to sensory, creative, and imaginative play, to areas for gathering and relaxation.

New ADA-accessible picnic areas and trails will provide visitors and the regional greenway users a place to rest and explore in the south side of the park. A natural surface trail loop will connect the greenway to the new picnic area and a proposed bridge crossing Simon's Ravine.

A proposed gathering area will complement Thompson Park Center, providing space for weddings, park events, and group programming. The ADA-accessible area will have ample seating options from concrete retaining walls to flexible grass areas, and include electrical hookups for lighting and audio.

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?

Through new ADA-accessible trails, gathering areas, and inclusive nature play, improvements will provide park visitors with opportunities to learn about and form meaningful connections with nature, while enhancing the quality of the natural resources in the project areas. The proposed elements will increase the park's accessibility for visitors of all ages and abilities, fostering a curiosity and care for the natural environment. Construction will include installation of native species to enhance woodland habitat and invasive species management. Along and throughout the improvements, interpretation will be provided, satisfying visitors' curiosity about the natural world.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Design Development and Approvals

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to finalize the designs, necessary approvals, and advertise the bid for the various inclusive recreational improvements in Thompson County Park. Tasks include completing design review with the Department of Administration and SHPO, approving final designs, and going out to bid for the project. The improvements identified in this proposal come from the Thompson County Park Master Plan, so this phase of the process will continue design development through construction documents and incorporate community feedback, building on the existing efforts of Dakota County. County Park staff will work with design consultants to finalize design plans and prepare all necessary documentation for reviews and going to bid. Park staff will oversee the advertising of the bid and move the project into the pre-construction phase. The funding for this portion of the project will come from match funds.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Development and approval of final designs (DD-CDs)	June 30, 2026
Design review processes with SHPO, Dept. of Administration, ESA checklist	October 31, 2026
Preparation and advertisement of bid	July 31, 2027

Activity 2: Bidding and Pre-Construction

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

Once the design and construction documents are finalized, the second main activity of this project will bring the inclusive recreational improvements through bidding and contractor preparation for construction. Tasks include contractor selection, acquiring all necessary permits and funding, and construction preparation.

County Park staff will oversee the selection of contractors during the bidding process and help as agreed upon with construction administration and oversight. Contractors will complete pre-construction tasks including site preparation. The funding for this portion of the project will come from match funds.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Selection of contractors for pre-construction and construction of project	September 30, 2027
Pre-construction processes, permit acquisition, all funds secured	October 31, 2027
Construction preparation (RFIs, shop drawings, submittal review)	December 31, 2027

Activity 3: Construction

Activity Budget: \$3,800,000

Activity Description:

This activity brings the proposed improvements through construction to project completion. Tasks include construction, construction oversight and administration, and project close-out.

Construction of the inclusive nature play area includes removing invasive species; installing native woodland plantings; constructing ADA-accessible paths; installing interpretive signage; installing play features including natural wood play structures, balance logs and steppers, musical instruments, and other elements; and installing seating.

Construction of entryways, trail improvements, and picnic areas include installing a picnic shelter, picnic tables, and grills; constructing ADA-accessible trails; constructing a bridge over Simon’s Ravine; installing wayfinding signage, benches, and bicycle parking and fix-it facilities; and installing native plantings for the appropriate ecosystems along trail areas.

Construction tasks for the gathering area include re-grading and re-aligning existing trails to make them ADA-accessible; constructing retaining walls as seat walls incorporated into existing grades; constructing the paved plaza at the base of the area; and installing perimeter plantings around the gathering area and surroundings.

County Park staff will help as agreed upon with construction administration and oversight. Contractors will complete construction tasks. The outcomes of this activity include increasing inclusive and accessible outdoor recreation options for park visitors and opportunities for educational engagement and gathering in the park.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Construction, Oversight, & Administration Begins	January 31, 2028
Construction, Oversight, & Administration Ends	January 31, 2029
Trails, nature play area, picnic area, and gathering area are open for public use.	March 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Rita Trap	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Natalie Strait	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Kendra Ellner	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Mia Colloredo-Mansfeld	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Jody Rader	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	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?

The results of the projects identified in this grant include full construction and implementation of each improvement. Additional capital improvements identified in the park master plan will be funded through the annual capital improvement budgeting process. Long-term maintenance and management of these improvements will be performed by the Dakota County Parks and Facilities Department as part of the County's ongoing management program. These activities are funded by tax levy and external grant funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Reintroduction Of Bison To Spring Lake Park Reserve	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08q	\$560,000
Completing the Mississippi River Greenway: Dakota County	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$657,000
Spring Lake Park Reserve Restoration and River Access	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$2,925,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Niki Geisler

Job Title: Dakota County Parks Director

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

As the Dakota County Parks Director, Niki directs and administers all operations, personnel, public relations, policies, and budgets for a nature-based Parks department. Prior to joining Dakota County, Niki served as the Vice President of Camping for YMCA of the North and has 20+ years as a professional in the non-profit sector where she also held positions of Executive Director, Professional Fundraiser, Senior Program Director, and Program Director. She is an accomplished professional in community-based youth development, family camping, outdoor engagement strategy advancement, grant management, and fundraising. She has a passion for connecting communities to nature and a deep commitment to equity in outdoors.

Organization: Dakota County

Organization Description:

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the Dakota County Park System serves the state's third most populous county with more than 400,000 residents, as well as the Region. Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system with more than 6,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways. Dakota County Parks

oversees park development to give residents facilities that enable natural resource-based recreation; operates a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing hundreds of acres of prairie, forest and woodland; and operates a professional outdoor education program that manages and interprets the cultural sites within the Dakota County Park System.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Park design and engineering contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will develop the site design, engineering, and construction specifications.				-		\$200,000
TBD	Service Contract	Contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will prepare the site and construct all features according to the construction plans and specifications. Contractor will provide site preparation, construction, erosion control, and other construction tasks.				0		\$3,800,000
							Sub Total	\$4,000,000
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	\$4,000,000

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				
Cash	State Bonding and Dakota County Parks CIP	Pre-Design/Design, Pre-Construction, & Construction	Secured	\$1,340,000
			State Sub Total	\$1,340,000
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	\$1,340,000

Total Project Cost: \$5,340,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [58426d68-458.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

This map highlights the improvement project site locations within Thompson County Park and includes an inset map of the park location in the broader region including Dakota County and its surrounding counties....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report Dakota County	e335bcf4-283.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Authorizing Grant Submittals to LCCMR for Dakota County	e44352f5-f3a.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Grant Summary	c4df55dc-ee1.pdf
Capital Project Questionnaire	e390b917-df4.pdf
Capital Budget Addendum	017b711d-c3e.pdf
SHPO Project Review Submission Confirmation	64fcc298-bea.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?

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:

Rita Trapp, HKGi

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