



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-267

Proposal Title: LHRP Natural Resources Restoration and Sustainable Trails Improvements

Project Manager Information

Name: Tony Wotzka

Organization: Dakota County

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Lebanon Hills Regional Park Natural Resources Restoration and Sustainable Trails Improvements

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$2,435,000

Proposed Project Completion: May 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?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

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

Lebanon Hills Regional Park is the largest park in the Dakota County parks system at almost 2,000 acres. The park offers more than 50 miles of trails and many lakes for year-round outdoor sports, recreation, and environmental education. Dakota County recently conducted a Sustainable Trails Study, a detailed assessment of existing trail conditions, which identified opportunities for improving the long-term sustainability and compatibility of the trail system. The plan identifies the following issues that the County intends to address through this grant:

- Reduction of trail-related erosion issues
- Elimination of deferred trail maintenance needs
- Minimization of trail use conflicts and safety and risk concerns
- Improved ADA accessibility
- Minimization and mitigation of impacts to natural resources and culturally important sites

The County also has a Natural Resource Management Plan which identified altered natural systems, habitat fragmentation, the spread and proliferation of invasive, nonnative plant and animal species, pests and diseases and impactful recreation as issues within the park. Of particular concern is the Park's West Segment, where the dense encroachment of non-native species has degraded the area and increased fire safety concerns for park neighbors.

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.

Dakota County will implement recommendations from the Sustainable Trails study and Natural Resources Master Plan to make the park's trail system more sustainable and functional, and improve the oak woodland and mixed pine forest in the West Segment. A key recommendation from the Sustainable Trails Study is to decommission highly erodible fall line trails throughout the park. New trails will be constructed in their place that better follow the contour of the landscape. To maximize effectiveness and efficiency, the County is proposing concurrent natural resources restoration in the West Segment. The primary goals will be to manage nonnative species, prepare the site to be managed by fire long-term, thin canopy of non-representative trees to support oak regeneration and support understory plant diversity. This restoration will provide a diverse mosaic habitat for pollinators and wildlife and enable the County to manage the area through prescribed fire.

In addition to trail reconstruction and natural resource restoration, the County plans to:

- Address trail use conflicts by redesignating trails for different user groups
- Add a trail loop around Holland Lake
- Improve trail conditions around several lakes- including two ADA-accessible trails
- Add additional wayfinding signage

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?

- Protection of the existing topography and sensitive areas through the reduction of erosion along trails
- Improved water quality in the park through the reduction in erosion and redesign of stormwater drainage patterns over trails
- Removal of invasive species, which prevent native plants from thriving and will allow for a higher degree of biodiversity to develop and decrease the understory fuel load thus reducing the risk of fire
- Restoration of natural plant species to stabilize slopes and increase biodiversity

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Sustainable Trails

Activity Budget: \$1,000,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity will be to make the trail system in LHRP more sustainable and functional by reducing trail erosion issues, addressing deferred maintenance needs, minimizing trail use conflicts and safety concerns, and Improving ADA accessibility. These objectives will be accomplished by first decommissioning unsustainable trails, restoring the land they were on to prevent further erosion, and addressing deferred maintenance needs on the existing trails that are planned to remain. The County will then establish new trails following the landscape topography and using other sustainable trail design principles based on the Sustainable Trail Study trail plans. Once the new trails are completed wayfinding will be installed that identifies the updated user groups allowed on each trail and helps park visitors find their way around.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design review processes including consultation with SHPO, predesign review with the Dept. of Administration	December 31, 2026
Enrollment in the Minnesota B3 Guidelines Tracking Tool	December 31, 2026
Development and approval of final designs (DD-CDs)	March 31, 2027
All construction funds legally secured	March 31, 2027
Preparation and advertisement of bid	May 31, 2027
Construction, Oversight, & Administration Begins	August 31, 2027
Construction, Oversight, & Administration Ends	March 31, 2029
Project close-out with notice of funding restriction recorded	May 31, 2029
Signage installed with ENRTF logo	May 31, 2029
Trails open for public use	May 31, 2029

Activity 2: Natural Resources Restoration

Activity Budget: \$1,435,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to restore the West Segment to open oak woodland and mixed pine forest with a diverse understory that provides habitat for pollinators and wildlife. The activities will be to remove invasives and thin the canopy, stabilize steep slopes, and install seeds, shrubs, and trees. Following the initial activities, the County will manage establishment through supplemental invasive management, seeding, plant watering, and erosion mitigation. These tasks will be accomplished by Dakota County's dedicated staff that have expertise in natural resource management and programming. Staff will lead implementation of the proposed habitat elements of the project by advertising the project to bid, award the contractor, create a restoration plan, and proceed to complete the restoration.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Invasive Woody Removal & Canopy Thinning, steep slope stabilization	March 31, 2027
Shrub and tree planting, seed installation	November 30, 2028
Establishment Management	May 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Rita Trapp	HKGi	Grant Writing Support	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 elements of this grant will be accomplished through full construction and restoration as proposed. Additional restoration and capital improvements identified will be funded through the annual capital improvement budgeting process. Long-term maintenance and management of the restoration and 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: Tony Wotzka

Job Title: Greenways Manager

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

In my current role and previous positions, I have had a wealth of opportunities to work with internal and external stakeholders on projects from planning to post construction maintenance. My primary role has been to provide leadership, supervision and support of project teams and coordination with project partners to deliver the Greenway program and projects for the County. In these roles I've been responsible for developing project plans, budget needs, project schedules, agreements, communications strategy and providing project management oversight to ensure the plans aligns with the project scope, risk and complexity. In these positions I have led various projects and agency initiatives that involved project management and technical design oversight including budgeting, project stakeholder meetings, and construction plan development and administration as well as asset management planning and coordination. These roles have required the coordination with stakeholders; from the local volunteer group and city council to the consultant project managers and technical design staff, maintenance staff, project managers, senior leadership and other agency leaders.

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 5,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways, Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system that exists to help meet the needs of over 400,000 county residents.

Dakota County Parks has an active and professional capital development program that oversees park development to provide residents with facilities to enable natural resource-based recreation, a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing hundreds of acres of prairie, forest and woodland, and 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								
Natural Resources Project Manager		A Dakota County Parks Natural Resource Department project manager will hire consultants through a competitive bid process and oversee the preparation of restoration plans and will administer the restoration process.			25%	0.75		\$90,000
							Sub Total	\$90,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Natural resources restoration contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will perform all restoration work. Contractor will provide site preparation, planting, erosion control, and other restoration tasks.				0		\$1,666,700
TBD	Service Contract	Contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will prepare the site and construct trails according to the construction plans and specifications. Contractor will provide site preparation, construction, erosion control, and other construction tasks.				0		\$678,300
							Sub Total	\$2,345,000
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	\$2,435,000

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				
Cash	Dakota County CIP	Construction and Restoration	Secured	\$515,000
Cash	Dakota County CIP	Pre-Design/Design/Pre-Construction	Secured	\$300,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$815,000
			Funds Total	\$815,000

Total Project Cost: \$3,250,000

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
LHRP North West Segment West Parcel: 10-03200-51-010	Dakota	This parcel is a forested section of Lebanon Hills Regional Park containing trails. This parcel has areas steep slopes with moderate and high soil erodibility. This are has old growth forest area and former oak savanna. The oak savanna will be restored with a focus on invasive species removal.	Restoration	75	-	\$585,566	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
LHRP West Segment East Parcel: 10-03200-75-010	Dakota	This parcel is a forested section of Lebanon Hills Regional Park containing wetlands, lakes, and trails. This parcel has areas steep slopes with moderate and high soil erodibility. This are has former oak savanna. The oak savanna will be restored with a focus on invasive species removal.	Restoration	79	-	\$585,567	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
LHRP West Segment South West Parcel: 10-03200-52-010	Dakota	This parcel is a forested section of Lebanon Hills Regional Park containing wetlands and trails. This parcel has areas steep slopes with moderate soil erodibility. This are has former oak savanna. The oak savanna will be restored with a focus on invasive species removal.	Restoration	84	-	\$585,567	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
Totals				238	0	\$1,756,700			

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.

Dakota County owns the parkland where these proposed restoration activities will take place.

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.

Proposed restoration in this grant is specific to the West Segment of Lebanon Hills Regional Park which consists of 223-acres of predominantly degraded oak woodland. Much of the project area is in a degraded state due to the dense encroachment of non-native species (primarily invasive European Buckthorn). The primary goals of the restoration will be to manage nonnative species, thin the canopy of non-representative trees to support oak regeneration, support under-story plant diversity, and prepare the site to be managed by fire long-term.

Dakota County completed a Natural Resources Management Plan covering this project area in 2019. Plans guide restoration priorities and activities and are updated as needed and/or approximately every five to seven years. Plans include sections on: geology and soils, natural and cultural history, an assessment of current conditions, ecological quality, issues and opportunities, water resources, prioritized goals and objectives, and management recommendations. Plans are kept on file electronically and are available to the public on our website. The Natural Resources program includes four full-time restoration project managers who work together to identify and conduct projects based on natural resources management plan priorities.

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.

Dakota County utilizes and follows the guidelines of BWSR’s “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in all of our restoration and enhancement efforts in the County parks, greenways, and conservation easements. We will continue to restore and enhance these proposed projects in accordance with these guidelines. For instance, we will be in keeping with the guidelines for seed and plant source, diversity levels, cultivar use, protecting plant communities, preventing the introduction of invasive species, and planting and management strategies for climate change.

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.

For all of our restoration and enhancement projects that we implement in Dakota County, we are committed to long-term maintenance and management. Once a project site is finished with a grant period, this is just the beginning. In the subsequent and following years, we give special attention to making sure that these sites continue to establish well and do not revert to their former degraded condition. The County hires and contracts with professional ecological restoration firms that provide experienced crews to maintain these sites. We also use volunteers and Conservation Corps Minnesota crews to help us with these efforts. Funding for ongoing maintenance and management is done entirely with County money. Dakota County has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining our restored and enhanced sites in the County over the past several years, and the Dakota County Board is committed to maintaining these sites in perpetuity. The park improvements proposed in this application are no exception, and will be maintained by the County perpetually into the future.

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

Dakota County has a longstanding relationship with Conservation Corps of Minnesota, and has partnered with them on most all past restoration and natural resource management projects. Dakota County plans to give consideration to a

summer crew from Conservation Corps of Minnesota to work on this project where it aligns with their skills, mission and equipment.

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 County has a robust monitoring and evaluation program that is utilized for restoration and enhancement project sites. After the proposed project is completed, the County will make an initial evaluation of whether the activity was successful or not. If something was not successful, the County will work to uncover the issue, and then remedy the situation in the future. Three years later, we will continue to intentionally monitor and evaluate the sites annually. Per recommendations from the NRMP, Dakota County conducts regular vegetation monitoring surveys to track the effectiveness of completed restoration projects and monitor conditions of future restoration locations. The west section of LHRP contains seven established long term vegetation transects and three meander survey locations. This data is analyzed using the Floristic Quality Index to track changes in plant community over time. These points will continue to be monitored post restoration to monitor effectiveness. The county will also establish photo points pre project implementation, to be monitored before, during and after the project implementation to track effectiveness of the restoration.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [3f84e547-50c.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Project map showing the location of the park, the park boundary, and the individual parcels that make up the park...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Dakota County 2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	04a8d864-9d6.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Dakota County Resolution 25-107 AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT GRANT APPLICATIONS TO LCCMR	525c6ecc-dc8.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
LHRP Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	ede6bd59-237.pdf
Capital Project Budget Addendum	5adb30c7-2cd.pdf
SHPO Request for Review Response	df18dce6-798.pdf
Grant Summary Page	9cf52930-4e8.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:

Ritta Trap - 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