



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-268

Proposal Title: Veterans Memorial Greenway Main Memorial Trailhead

Project Manager Information

Name: Tony Wotzka

Organization: Dakota County

Office Telephone: (952) 891-7966

Email: tony.wotzka@co.dakota.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Trailhead improvements will include expanded parking, a new shelter with restrooms, Purple Heart Plaza, smaller plazas, loop trail connections, interpretive signage to honor veterans, and pond shoreline restoration.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$3,000,000

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?

In the Future

Narrative

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

The Veterans Memorial Greenway is a proposed regional trail and open space corridor linking Lebanon Hills Regional Park and the Mississippi River in Dakota County. The Greenway provides opportunities to connect to activity centers, schools, and gathering spaces. The 5-mile greenway is planned to honor Dakota County Veterans and to share their stories. The completed corridor will honor and recognize the sacrifice made by Veterans and provide a place for healing through memorials, as well as provide stories that inform and inspire visitors about military services through interpretation.

Details of the planned trail nodes are included in the Dakota County Veterans Memorial Greenway Interpretive Memorial Plan (adopted in 2023). The Main Memorial Trailhead, to be located within Rich Valley Park, is one of eight memorial nodes planned, and intended to serve as the primary gathering location for the Greenway corridor. Dakota County is home to 25,000 Veterans; interpretive subthemes for the memorial will focus on 'Who Veterans Are' and 'Service Experience'. This will be accomplished through creating high-quality spaces for gathering, reflection, and passive recreation.

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 Veterans Memorial Greenway Main Memorial Trailhead is a 4-acre redevelopment project located within Inver Grove Heights' Rich Valley Park. The trailhead will serve as one of eight military-themed interpretive nodes, and will be the primary trailhead along the 5-mile Veterans Memorial Greenway, a regional trail within Dakota County. This project aims to connect people to the cultural history of Veterans in Dakota County, while also expanding the regional trail network.

The project includes replacing and expanding parking, adding an accessible open-air shelter and restrooms, establishing the Purple Heart Plaza, with a fountain, accessible amphitheater seating, statues, flags, and stone markers. The area is designed to host gatherings and ceremonies, with associated smaller plazas featuring interpretive panels to honor veterans' experiences. Interconnected trails will lead to a scenic pond overlook for contemplation and reflection. Along the pond a lake walk extension will lead to a challenge course for family friendly competition. The project will also include shoreline restoration at the pond to enhance wildlife habitat and ecological function of the waterway. The existing open lawn, shaded areas, and playground at Rich Valley Park will complement the Veterans Memorial Greenway Main Memorial Trailhead by providing adjacent picnicking and passive recreation 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?

The project aligns with the LCCMR's constitutional purpose by investing in the protection and restoration of areas near trailheads. These trailhead locations offer greenway users the best opportunities to witness the results of stewardship, interact with relevant historical connections on the land, and ensures a high-quality user experience. This initiative will also enhance connectivity to other local and regional trails, such as neighborhood gateways to Lakeside Park and to the Southern Lakes neighborhood. Veterans Memorial Greenway Regional Trail will create a more complete connection to the Mississippi Regional Trail, facilitating enriching recreational and educational experiences for everyone.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Design Development and Approvals

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to finalize the design, obtain necessary approvals, and advertise the bid for the Veterans Memorial Greenway Main Memorial Trailhead. Tasks include completing design review with the Department of Administration and SHPO, approving final designs, and going out to bid for the project. The design process will be led by Dakota County and include 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 design phase of this project will incorporate feedback from community and stakeholder engagement and the expertise of park staff into final designs.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design review processes with SHPO, Dept. of Administration, ESA checklist, Enroll B3	October 31, 2026
Development and approval of final designs (DD-CDs) and bid documents	March 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 address the bidding process 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.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Selection of contractors for pre-construction and construction of project	June 30, 2027
Pre-construction processes, construction preparation, permit acquisition, all funds secured	October 31, 2027

Activity 3: Construction

Activity Budget: \$2,800,000

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 Main Memorial Trailhead will involve demolition of existing park features that will not remain,

installing necessary utility infrastructure to support the buildings and site design, and performing shoreline restoration activities.

Construction of improvements includes: trail loop connections, shelter with restrooms, parking lot expansion, Purple Heart Plaza and smaller supporting plaza spaces, installation of site furnishings. All improvements will be ADA-accessible and meet local and state building and energy codes.

County Park staff will help as agreed upon with construction administration and oversight. Contractors will complete construction tasks.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Construction, Oversight and Administration Begins	November 30, 2027
Construction, Oversight and Administration Ends	March 31, 2029
Project closeout, signage with ENRTF logo and open for us	April 30, 2029

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 proposed project is a 4-acre redevelopment site within Rich Valley Park by intertwining education and recreation through a military focused themed trailhead. Funding is requested for the construction of the expanded parking, interconnecting looped trails, shelter with bathrooms, the military themed interpretive signs with a main memorial and smaller plazas. Funds will also address minor pond shoreline restoration with construction of a lake walk extension to a physical challenge course. Ongoing implementation efforts will include regular maintenance of these amenities to be funded through county resources such as the Capital Improvement Plan, Environmental Legacy Funding, and community partnerships.

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.

As the Greenways Manager at Dakota County, Tony Wotzka has experience working with external and internal stakeholders on planning and construction projects. His primary role is to provide leadership, supervision, and support of project teams and to coordinate with project partners to implement the county's Greenway Program and affiliated projects. Tony is responsible for developing project plans, providing management oversight to ensure plans align with project scopes, and overseeing project budgets, schedules, and agreements. Asset management planning, technical design oversight, facilitation of stakeholder meetings with volunteers, county board members, consultants, design and maintenance staff and agency leaders are responsibilities for the Greenway Manager.

Organization: Dakota County

Organization Description:

Dakota County is part of the 7-county metropolitan area with an operating budget of \$308 million in 2023. Dakota County employs approximately 2,000 staff at three primary service center locations. Approximately 1/3 of the land area is considered developed as urban/suburban and 2/3 remain as rural/agricultural. Dakota County is the third most populous County in the state estimated at 442,038 in 2021. Dakota County is bordered by 3 rivers including the Minnesota River to the west, Mississippi River to the east and the Cannon River to the south.

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	Preparation of the site. Construction of all the site features included in the construction plans and specifications, including erosion control, and other construction tasks.				0		\$2,800,000
TBD	Service Contract	Park design and engineering contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will develop the final site design, engineering, and construction specifications.				-		\$200,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000,000
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	\$3,000,000

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				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Dakota County CIP	Predesign, Pre-construction	Secured	\$1,050,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$1,050,000
			Funds Total	\$1,050,000

Total Project Cost: \$4,050,000

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
Rich Valley Park	Dakota	The native shoreline restoration will provide vital habitat for aquatic and emergent ecosystems such as such as migratory birds, waterfowl, amphibians and fish. The benefits from this restoration will support continued ecological resilience and natural resource preservation of natural habitat. This will result in many public benefits such as the ability to observe natural wildlife, increase water quality and reduce erosion for all, that use and experience Rich Valley Park.	Restoration	-	0.23	-	Public	City of Inver Grove Heights	Has Not Begun
Totals				0	0.23	-			

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 restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land in public ownership (City of Inver Grove Heights).

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.

This project proposes native shoreline restoration along the perimeter of the pond within Rich Valley Park. The purpose of this restoration project will be to provide vital habitat for species that depend on aquatic and emergent ecosystems, such as migratory birds, waterfowl, amphibians and fish. Native planting establishment to prioritize species that can tolerate fluctuations in water levels and provide seasonal cover for species will be prioritized, along with invasive species removal. There are approximately 1,200 linear feet of shoreline along the pond at Rich Valley Park.

Dakota County completed a Natural Resources Management System Plan in 2017. This plan guides 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. The City of Inver Grove Heights also has a Water Resources Management Plan, which was completed in 2018. This plan provides guidance for water resources, including the water body at Rich Valley Park.

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. County staff will continue to restore and enhance these proposed projects in accordance with these guidelines. For instance, alignment 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 restoration and enhancement projects that are implemented in Dakota County, there is a commitment to long-term maintenance and management. Once the funds from the grant program concludes it is just the beginning of the long-term maintenance and management process. In the following years, special attention is given to make sure that these sites continue to grow well, establish maturely 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. The County also recruits volunteers and Conservation Corps Minnesota crews to help us with these efforts. Funding for ongoing maintenance and management is done entirely with County funds. Dakota County has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining the restored and enhanced sites within the County over the past several years, and the Dakota County Board is committed to maintaining these sites in perpetuity. The sites 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 an ongoing, multi-year partnership with Conservation Corps Minnesota. The County hosts a full-time

crew to perform project work within all County parks. The approach for these projects will be to include them where the required tasks align 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 utilized for restoration and enhancement project sites. There is consistent monitoring of vegetation on these sites by established scientific methods, including using relevés, transects, and timed meanders. Data is collected and evaluated by the Floristic Quality Assessment method. Each year data is collected for a ten-year time span following initial project completion. In addition, inventory recording is captured for everything accomplished on a site, including site preparation methods, seeding rates, seed mixes/lists, planting methods, watering methods, establishment management efforts during the project, prescribed burning, mowings, etc. There is collaborative evaluation to determine what seemed to work well and what did not, with notes to serve as improvements in the future. The Adaptive Management approach is used for all of County projects, which helps guide implementation work. After the proposed project is completed, the County will make an initial evaluation 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.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [5c32a51d-372.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

The graphic includes three separate images. One representing the project location in Rich Valley Park in relation to Dakota County regional context. The second is the project context within Rich Valley Park. Thirdly, it depicts the Main Memorial Trailhead project concept design including labels of the proposed and existing features....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Dakota County Financial Capacity Statement	585526c9-b44.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Grant Acceptance Authorization	7116d7ac-20d.pdf
Resolution No. 25-107	ed903a23-68c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Vet MG Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	7aca1c42-aa0.pdf
Capital Construction Project Budget Addendum	2a5c7dd0-c97.pdf
Project Summary	06003f7e-6d6.pdf
SHPO Environmental Review Submittal	d35a7b47-659.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:

Rita 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