



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-306

**Proposal Title:** Greater Fountain Lake Aquatic and Trail Accessibility Enhancements

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Courtney Phillips

**Organization:** Shell Rock River Watershed District

**Office Telephone:** (507) 379-8782

**Email:** courtney.phillips@co.freeborn.mn.us

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** This proposal requests funding the installation of features to safely improve pedestrian access to fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and public park space located along the Shell Rock River Channel.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,280,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

**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.**

The Shell Rock River Channel between Fountain and Albert Lea Lake is degraded, with erosion and crumbling concrete sidewalls, which poses a safety concern for many who fish from it. Also, there is not a location for the public to access the river recreationally. The SRRWD secured OHF funding for improving the in-stream and streambank habitat portion of the project (Phase 1).

This proposal (Phase 2) will build on that grant funding to implement the recreational access portions of the project. This proposal is requesting funds to complete the project including installing a canoe/kayak launch, providing fishing access and piers, installing a walking path underneath a heavily trafficked highway to create a safe crossing, as well as replacing a bridge that would allow pedestrians to access park space that is currently landlocked by the river channel. All features are located within an environmental justice area as identified by the MPCA understanding environmental justice tool. Additionally, the SRRWD plans to continue partnering with the Community Education Boathouse to implement educational programs by utilizing the proposed features.

**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.**

Currently the channel is composed of failing concrete with steep side walls and has no portage locations to recreationally use the river. The SRRWD and City of Albert Lea have designated a spot along the channel that would be used for a canoe and kayak launch. Additionally, building on the habitat improvements of the channel from Phase 1, the SRRWD would like to install fishing piers located along the channel. Many youths utilize this channel and are left to climb the steep concrete to access the river, posing safety risks.

Additionally, this project aims to install a pedestrian crossing under Highway 65 along the channel, so anglers can utilize both sides of the river and access city green space on either side of the highway. Currently, no pedestrian crossings exist near the channel. Lastly, the City has over 5 acres of wooded green space that is currently inaccessible to the public due to being landlocked between private ownership and the channel. This proposal funding would replace an abandoned railroad bridge with a pedestrian bridge to allow Minnesotans to recreate and engage with nature by connecting the green spaces seamlessly.

**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?**

Physical outcomes of this proposal include the installation of a canoe and kayak launch, the installation of two fishing piers, the installation of a pedestrian crossing along the channel, under Highway 65 bridge, and the transition of a railroad bridge to a pedestrian crossing to access currently landlocked City green space. These features will provide anglers with safe fishing locations and safe access under the highway. It also allows Minnesotans the ability to access the river recreationally and opens up new public green space. SHPO review for the project location will be completed with Phase 1.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Canoe/Kayak Public Landing

**Activity Budget:** \$157,500

**Activity Description:**

The SRRWD partners yearly with the Community Education Boathouse to enhance students' skills and knowledge related to aquatic natural resources and canoe/kayak operations. The Boathouse works with students, directly engaging them with nature, by using a variety of canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards on our local lakes. In any given June, the Boathouse provides the opportunity for over 1,000 students to get on the water.

By installing this canoe and kayak launch in the river channel, it allows residents, and Boathouse funded programs, to experience river systems outside of our chain of lakes. It also opens up canoeing and kayaking downstream of a dam that is currently inaccessible for continuous paddling. We have the opportunity to expand recreational access between these two waterbodies, targeting the underserved community that is located in this area. Currently the river channel system has never been utilized due to lack of access. The District often finds that when people utilize resources, it promotes ownership, and that promotes people caring. The goals and outcomes of this launch include allowing residents the ability to even access the resource, and work with Community Education to incorporate the river system into their environmental education classes.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engineering/Design	December 31, 2026
Permitting	June 30, 2027
Construction	December 31, 2027
Project Closeout/Retainage	December 31, 2028

### Activity 2: River Channel Fishing Piers

**Activity Budget:** \$307,500

**Activity Description:**

Using the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Understanding Environmental Justice mapping tool, the District strives to locate areas within underserved communities, and find ways to implement projects to better the community. The Shell Rock River channel between Fountain and Albert Lea Lake is located in an underserved community location and the District secured OHF funding to implement in-stream and streambank habitat improvements. Building on this habitat funding, and following the LCCMR Strategic Planning goals, the District wants to install two fishing piers located on the river channel where the in-stream habitat work will be installed. This allows Minnesotans direct engagement with natural resources, and partners with OHF funding to showcase the restoration work.

Additionally, the District would like to incorporate signage at the location in multiple languages including English, Spanish, and Karen. Signage would be engaging, describe the native plants and aquatic species that could be found in the river channel, and also incorporate fishing regulations and habitat improvements that were made.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engineering/Design	December 31, 2026
Permitting	June 30, 2027

Construction	December 31, 2027
Project Closeout/Retainage	December 31, 2028

### Activity 3: River Walk Accessibility and Safety Improvements

**Activity Budget:** \$457,500

#### Activity Description:

The river channel located between Fountain and Albert Lea Lake is transected by Highway 65 with a bridge that prevents any type of safe pedestrian passage as it abuts the river channel. This heavily trafficked 4 lane highway causes disruption to the connectivity of the streambank system. Furthermore, this access bridge would allow uninterrupted access from the proposed fishing piers to the canoe/kayak launch site.

By installing this access path parallel to the river, it expands the network of trails, parks, and natural areas to connect green spaces seamlessly, all while improving accessibility and safety to Minnesotans. Additionally, the current streambank system has highly erosive banks, and incorporating the OHF streambank restoration project, this access path will allow those with disabilities the opportunity to engage directly with the riparian components of the river.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engineering/Design	December 31, 2026
Permitting	June 30, 2027
Construction	December 31, 2027
Project Closeout/Retainage	December 31, 2028

### Activity 4: Connecting Public Greenspaces

**Activity Budget:** \$357,500

#### Activity Description:

The City of Albert Lea has a 5-acre tract of land that is currently undeveloped and landlocked due to private ownership and the river channel. There is an abandoned railroad bridge that crosses the river, but years of neglect and wear and tear make it an unsafe crossing for pedestrians. As part of the City's goal in that region to increase trails, parks, and public green spaces, a more suitable, ADA compliant, pedestrian bridge would need to be installed to allow residents new access to the landlocked piece. Opening up this green space would allow for entities such as the Boathouse to teach about riparian corridors as the tract consists of wooded shoreline, floodplain, and upland habitats. Additionally, it would allow any Minnesotan the ability to engage with nature, as this area boasts deer, fox, pheasants, and ducks, in a secluded area, all within City limits.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Permitting	June 30, 2025
Design/Engineering	December 31, 2026
Construction	December 31, 2027
Project Closeout/Retainage	December 31, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Steve Jahnke	City of Albert Lea	Landowner of project area and supporting in construction administration and oversight.	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 proposal outcomes would be of capital improvement nature and included in the City of Albert Lea's maintenance and inspection schedules, as these features are located on City right-of-way or property. Additionally, the Shell Rock River Watershed District is an entity that has taxing authority along with a local option sales tax that could be used for maintenance activities.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Precision Acquisition For Restoration, Groundwater Recharge And Habitat.	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 09k	\$467,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Courtney Phillips

**Job Title:** Program and Project Manager

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

The Shell Rock River Watershed District has staff on hand that has completed and expended multiple different grant funding sources including Board of Water and Soil Resources Watershed Based Implementation Funding, previous Legislative-Citizen Commission of Minnesota Resources funding, and Outdoor Heritage Funding Dollars that are appropriated to the SRRWD directly by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Over the last 20 years, the District has administered over \$40 million in grant funding with Project and Program Manager, Courtney Phillips, overseeing over \$10 million herself. Courtney has also completed multiple streambank and lake shore restoration projects, wetland restoration projects, along with completing many planning grants. The District is efficient and effective in spending grant dollars and welcomes the opportunity to once again use LCCMR funding.

**Organization:** Shell Rock River Watershed District

**Organization Description:**

The Shell Rock River Watershed District (SRRWD) is a local government agency located in Albert Lea, MN whose mission is to implement reasonable and necessary improvements to the water-related and other natural resources of the District. The SRRWD was formed in 2003 and is guided by 10-year water management plans. Since the SRRWD was created, it has implemented projects totaling over \$40 million dollars. Projects that the SRRWD have completed include lake reclamations, wetland restorations, upland prairie management, streambank and lakeshore restorations, installation of fish barriers and phosphorus remediation projects.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Courtney Phillips		Project Manager			0%	0.3		\$15,000
Carmen Christensen		Financial Tech			0%	0.15		\$5,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Engineering Firm TBD	Subaward	Engineering services paid to a professional engineer who has signoff to design a plan set for construction of the capital improvement projects.				0.15		\$200,000
Attorney	Subaward	Attorney review of contractual documents, relating to the engineering contract, contractor agreement and other applicable insurance and qualified bidder documents.				0.15		\$10,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$210,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
		Canoe/Kayak Launch	Installation of a canoe/kayak launch to be used by the Community Education Boathouse and the general public to access the Shell Rock River Channel.	X				\$100,000
		River Channel Fishing Piers	Installation of two fishing piers to highlight habitat work completed with OHF funding and engaging Minnesotans with angling locations.	X				\$250,000
		River Walk Accessibility	Installation of a pedestrian walkway under a highway to improve accessibility and safety while utilizing the Shell Rock River Channel.	X				\$400,000

		Connecting Public Greenspaces	This bridge will serve as a walkway to connect a City greenspace that is landlocked by private ownership.	X				\$300,000
							Sub Total	\$1,050,000
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	\$1,280,000

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Expenditures		Canoe/Kayak Launch	<p>This capital improvement project satisfies Goal 5.2 of the Strategic Plan by "Assess programs, activities, or physical spaces for their accessibility and effectiveness and/or implement changes to adapt and retrofit them to welcome more people."</p> <p><b>Additional Explanation :</b> Once installed, this launch will be incorporated into the City's maintenance and inspection program and be used to connect Minnesotans and Community Education programs to the Shell Rock River Channel.</p>
Capital Expenditures		River Channel Fishing Piers	<p>Fishing access is a cornerstone to connecting Minnesotans and the natural resources Minnesota contains, and piers are one of the best tools for providing good places to fish. This satisfies Goal 5.8 by "Design and/or develop culturally relevant, accessible, resilient, and environmentally friendly outdoor recreation facilities and infrastructure – including recreation areas, parks, trails, fishing piers, or shelters – that create new natural resources-based experiences."</p> <p><b>Additional Explanation :</b> Once installed, the piers will be incorporated into the City's maintenance and inspection program and be used to connect Minnesotans to the river channel. After construction, it will not be removed, or be used for any other purpose.</p>
Capital Expenditures		River Walk Accessibility	<p>This capital improvement project satisfies Goal 5.9 of the Strategic Plan for Expenditures Recommended by the LCCMR by "Expand networks of trails, parks, or natural areas to protect and connect green spaces seamlessly, improve accessibility and safety, and/or encourage all Minnesotans to recreate in nature".</p> <p><b>Additional Explanation :</b> Once installed, this walkway will be incorporated into the City's maintenance and inspection program and be used to connect greenspaces seamlessly. After construction, it will not be removed or be used for any other purpose.</p>
Capital Expenditures		Connecting Public Greenspaces	<p>This capital improvement project satisfies Goal 5.9 of the Strategic Plan for Expenditures Recommended by the LCCMR by "Expanding networks of trails, parks, or natural areas to protect and connect green spaces seamlessly and to encourage all Minnesotans to recreate in and engage with nature".</p> <p><b>Additional Explanation :</b> Once installed, this pedestrian bridge will be incorporated into the City's maintenance and inspection program and be used to connect greenspaces seamlessly. After construction, it will not be removed, or be used for any other purpose.</p>



Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
In-Kind	OHF Funding; ML 2023, Ch. 40, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(l)	Instream and Shoreland Restoration	Secured	\$1,600,000
			State Sub Total	\$1,600,000
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	\$1,600,000

Total Project Cost: \$2,880,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [797a57b5-6b3.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Attached is a map that shows the proposed projects between Fountain and Albert Lea Lake, along the Shell Rock River Channel....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
2023 Audit	<a href="#">97784209-8a3.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution	<a href="#">000d69df-649.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Budget Addendum	<a href="#">b7a7e968-a58.xlsx</a>
MnDot Letter of Support	<a href="#">9c4e7fd3-35d.pdf</a>
Capital Project Questionnaire	<a href="#">29d43118-373.pdf</a>
City of Albert Lea	<a href="#">26768424-2af.pdf</a>

## 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:**

Courtney Phillips, SRRWD

**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**

N/A

