Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-380

Proposal Title: Crookston Tree and Pollinator Habitat Project

Project Manager Information

Name: Nicole Bernd

Organization: West Polk SWCD

Office Telephone: (218) 281-6070

Email: nicole.bernd@wpolk.mnswcd.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Create and implement a cost-effective community-based strategy to diversify Crookston's urban canopy, address the emerald ash borer threat, create pollinator habitat, and beautify public spaces in Crookston.

ENRTF Funds Requested: $157,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Fish and Wildlife (D)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): NW

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

Region(s): NW

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.

According to Tallamy in Nature's Best Hope, if every American converted half of their lawn to productive native plant communities, there would be about 20 million acres of habitat added in the country. Habitat loss and fragmentation is one of the most pressing challenges to protecting wild species, and enhancing natural areas in urban communities can increase people's access to nature. Turning to local ecological challenges and opportunities in Crookston, over 20% of trees in Crookston are ash trees (University of Minnesota, n.d.), the public woodlands are infested with buckthorn, the area has lost half of its historical topsoil, Crookston mows over 400 acres of turf grass on public property, and EAB was discovered in Moorhead and Dilworth in 2023 (which is only about 60 miles away from Crookston). Climate change is MN expected to warm the winters needed to kill EAB, and it may result in less frequent rains in Crookston according to the CliMAT tool (Leis et al. 2023). This lack of plant diversity and degraded woodlands can only support a limited number of species, and the threat of warming winters and EAB necessitates planning and action to avoid the hazards of an unmanaged infestation.

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.

This funding would support the purchase, planting, and care of approximately 510 trees and bushes, as well as 2 acres of turf grass to prairie conversion. The Polk County SWCD, Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, the City of Crookston Parks and Recreation Department, the Crookston Housing and Economic Development Authority, and University of Minnesota Crookston staff and students will collaborate on implementation, research, and deliverables to create and restore habitat for local species, build resilience against warmer and drier weather, beautify parks, and conduct outreach on EAB management and habitat restoration. Two University of Minnesota-Crookston (UMC) Associate Professors and three undergraduate students will be compensated during the summer months to help build local capacity to establish pollinator and habitat-friendly green spaces and, engage with tree initiative committee members, the community, and professionals. The team members will document and share the projects findings to assist other Minnesota communities in EAB response planning and ecological restoration. The project will be integrated into two UMC courses - Wildlife Habitat Management Techniques (Fall 2026) and Ecological Restoration (Fall 2027)—providing students with hands-on learning opportunities and experience. These activities have been incorporated into the existing course curricula, ensuring no additional project costs.

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 City of Crookston has chosen sites with plans to incorporate trees, bushes, and berry plants. Species selections have been chosen to support pollinator species, provide food and shelter for birds, enhance resiliency to drier conditions, and add beautification, public enjoyment, and food access through plants. This work adds capacity for the Parks and Recreation department to plant more trees to beautify the community. This allows the city more time to dedicate to in-house ash removal, targeting first small and marginally healthy ash trees. Residents will be engaged with this work, and resulting research will be shared with other communities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Activity 1: 2026 Planting Season

Activity Budget: $47,000

Activity Description:
Begin planting the 50 empty spots identified by Parks and Recreation staff that can be managed in the fall. Hire a contractor to begin preparation of prairie sites. Rig 2nd watering truck if needed. Finish urban tree inventory if not already completed in 2025. UMC students begin analysis on the most effective insecticide treatment plan for trees (utilizing the urban Slow Ash Mortality Approach). Assist with Parks and Recreation watering and tree maintenance as necessary. Build berry boxes and Fences at Riverside Garden if time allows.
Activity Milestones:
Trees arrive in Crookston for temporary holding in gravel bed for bare roots in late August - August 2026
Plant along shoreline by Riverside Park - September 2026
Contractor tills and sprays site about two times this season - October 2026
Build Berry Raised bed boxes and fences if time allows - October 2026
Boulevard Trees are planted. Watering plan implemented - October 2026
UMC students conduct analysis for optimal insecticide treatments, create outreach materials - December of 2026

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Students start, site preparation by contractors and plant 25 boulevard trees and build berry box	December 31, 2026

Activity 2: Activity 2: 2027 Planting Season

Activity Budget: $65,500

Activity Description:
Plant 125 trees at Veterans Memorial Site (Arborvitae, other trees for Veterans, berries and remaining trees at Riverside plus personnel). Enlist volunteer and city crew help. Plant 15 more boulevard trees and berries if there is time.
Activity Milestones:
Hold a planting event in June to do Veteran's Memorial Planting - June, 2027
Hold a planting event for plug plants - June or early July 2027
Water these trees according to Watering Plan - September 2027
Plant berries at Riverside in June or the Fall - October 2027
Plant 15 boulevard trees by Fall - October 2027
Remaining Prep done, and prairie seed planted. (Adjust with contractor as necessary) - October 2026 or early 2027
Prairie vegetation management during establishment phase (hand weeding, mowing, spot spraying) - October 2027
Watering of plug plants until establishment and water occasionally if stressed through summer - October 2027

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Veterans Memorial Site	October 31, 2027

Activity 3: Activity 3: 2028 Planting Season

Activity Budget: $34,500

Activity Description:
Plant 220 trees at the Sports Complex. Finish fruit tree planting at Riverside, and plant 15 boulevard trees.
Activity Milestones:
Hold a planting event in June to do Sports Complex Planting - June, 2028
Water these trees according to Watering Plan - September 2028
Plant fruit trees at Riverside in June or the Fall - October 2028
Plant 15 boulevard trees by Fall - October 2028
Prairie vegetation management during establishment phase (hand weeding, mowing, spot spraying) - October 2028

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Sports Complex and Riverside	October 31, 2028

Activity 4: Activity 4: 2029 Planting Season

Activity Budget: $10,000

Activity Description:
Plant 5 remaining boulevard trees. Water in trees from previous year. Button up work and conduct reporting.
Activity Milestones:
Finish any remaining planting in June - June, 2029
Water these trees according to Watering Plan, fully hand off to city crews - June 2029
Conduct final reporting for grant - June, 2029
Finish any remaining work - June, 2029
Host a celebratory event focused on pollinators around grant work. - June 2029
Prairie vegetation management during establishment phase (hand weeding, mowing, spot spraying) - October, 2029

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Finishing Stage	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Shannon Stassen, Executive Director	MN Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership	Planning Committee	No
Kari Kirschbaum, Executive Director	Crookston Community Development, Housing & Economic Development Authority	Planning Committee	No
Dr. Eric Castle and Dr. Matt Simons, Associate Professors, Agriculture and Natural Resources Department	University of Minnesota-Crookston	Planning Committee/Sub Awardee	Yes
Scott Butt, Parks and Recreation Supervisor	City of Crookston	Planning Committee	No
Crystal Rayamajhi, Outreach Specialist	MN Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, in-kind implementation planning, coordination and technical assistance as needed.	Planning Committee	No
Nicole Bernd, District Manager	West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)	Grant Manager/Fiscal Agent/Planning Committee	Yes
Taylor Wyum, Project Coordinator	Crookston Community Development, Housing & Economic Development Authority	Planning Committee	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 tree committee will begin an EAB Management plan in 2025 and begin some tree efforts. LCCMR funding in 2026 would propel urban canopy diversification, beautification, soil conservation, capacity, and research. The resulting research, outreach materials, trees planted, and increased pollinator habitat will be used by the City of Crookston to improve community assets and engagement for years to come. This allows the city to focus on in-house removals of small ash trees. The tree committee partners can build off efforts in this project proposal beyond 2029 by seeking out other grant opportunities and leveraging momentum built in the community.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Nicole Bernd

Job Title: District Manager

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

West Polk SWCD's District Manager carries the qualifications to manage this proposed project. They are an experienced fiscal agent and coordinator over the last 20+ years managing several projects ranging from $50,000 - $700,000, including the multi-million water quality and habitat project. They have been a facilitator for the One Watershed One Plan of the Wild Rice-Marsh, Middle-Snake-Tamarac and Sand Hill River watershed planning grants and currently participates as part of the planning group and steering committees. Currently, they are acting as the fiscal agent and coordinator for the Sand Hill River Watershed Based Implementation Fund in the amount of $705,267. The District Manager carries the ability to establish lasting relationships through partnerships and collaboration with each project including the establishment of the planning committee for this proposed project. Responsibilities of this project manager would be grant management, fiscal responsibility, required reporting and partner stewardship.

Organization: West Polk SWCD

Organization Description:

West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District is a local government unit established to manage natural resource conservation programs at the community level, primarily focusing on protecting and conserving soil and water resources by working with landowners in both urban and rural areas to implement practices that promote sustainable land use and environmental health; it's mission is to assist the citizens of Western Polk County, in accordance with M.S. Chapter 103, in the preservation and protection of our soil and water resources; thereby, ensuring the quality of the environmental and economic base of Polk County.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	**-**
Contracts and Services								
Assoc. Prof. Eric Castle, University of Minnesota-Crookston	Subaward	Will be assisting the other Associate Professor in supervising student workers and interns for two weeks each summer.				0.45		$18,561
Assoc. Prof. Matt Simons, University of Minnesota Crookston	Subaward	Will be supervising student workers and interns for two weeks each summer. Additionally, he will integrate the project into two of his courses, NATR 3468 Wildlife Habitat Management Techniques (Fall 2026) and NATR 3480 Ecological Restoration (Fall 2027).				0.45		$21,060
Student A (summer)	Subaward	Personnel: summer student worker: Please see UMC's "Scope of Work" attachment.				0.3		$21,600
Student B (summer)	Subaward	Personnel: summer student worker. Please see UMC's "Scope of Work attachment.				0.3		$21,600
Student C (fall)	Subaward	Personnel: fall student worker. Please see UMC's "Scope of Work" attachment.				0.3		$5,400
							Sub Total	**$88,221**
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	510 trees and shrubs planted on 5 prioritized sites within the city and 2 acres of pollinator plantings.	Constructing and placement of a gravel bed (lumber, gravel, fencing) to development strong, fibrous root systems for the young woody vegetation stock, Woody vegetation replacement, beautification and windbreak purposes; native vegetation for landscape cover, beautification and pollinator support and enhancement.					$68,779

							Sub Total	**$68,779**
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	**$157,000**

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				
			Non State Sub Total	**-**
			Funds Total	**-**

Total Project Cost: $157,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: fe1f0936-cbc.pdf

Alternate Text for Visual Component

City of Crookston Tree and Pollinator site map...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
West Polk SWCD Profit and Loss Performace_2024	57fced83-992.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
West Polk SWCD Resolution Letter and Document signed	b06b6806-96c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
UMC Proposal, Scope of Work and Cover Letter on SPA Letterhead	f6632830-7ec.pdf
LCCMR Grant Application Memorandum of Agreement	6e57b137-e39.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?

Yes, West Polk SWCD

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:

Shannon Stassen, Executive Director, MN Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, Planning Committee
Kari Kirschbaum, Executive Director, Crookston Community Development, Housing & Economic Development Authority, Planning Committee
Dr. Eric Castle and Dr. Matt Simons, Associate Professors, Agriculture and Natural Resources Department University of Minnesota-Crookston, Planning Committee/Sub Awardee
Scott Butt, Parks and Recreation Supervisor City of Crookston, Planning Committee
Crystal Rayamajhi, Outreach Specialist MN Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, Planning Committee
Nicole Bernd, District Manager, West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Grant Manager/Fiscal Agent/Planning Committee
Taylor Wyum, Project Coordinator, Crookston Community Development, Housing & Economic Development Authority, Planning Committee

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