



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-385

**Proposal Title:** Root River State Trail Extension to the Mississippi

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Lawrence Kirch

**Organization:** City of La Crescent

**Office Telephone:** (507) 895-4096

**Email:** lkirch@cityoflacrescent-mn.gov

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Complete pre-design process including public/agency engagement; environmental review; B/C and merit analysis; 15% engineering design of the final 18 miles of the Root River Trail.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$990,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31, 2028

**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?**

Statewide

**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.**

Houston County and the communities of La Crescent, Hokah and Houston have wanted this trail completed since 1971. This project has languished, even with a completed DNR Master Plan in 2011. The project can only become a reality if all the interested parties and stakeholders collaboratively engage in the pre-design process for a trail alignment. The alignment will include former RR bed, MnDOT, County and city rights-of-way, DNR and DOT owned lands, and private lands. This funding creates a mechanism to select the most feasible alignment. One that is compatible with public/private interests and serves to preserve, protect and restore critical habitat in the Root River Valley. The region is also looking for the community and economic benefits associated with connecting to the eight other communities to the west. The trail also connects users in the La Crosse/La Crescent MSA (population 140,000) via La Crescent's Wagon Wheel Trail. Routinely, trail users drive from the La Crosse area to the trail head at the Houston Nature Center rather than bicycle. The physical, environmental, cultural, recreational, social and economic benefits of a completed trail are important to the region and state.

**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 communities are wanting to implement the 2011 DNR Root River State Trail Master Plan by moving forward with the preparation of 15% pre-design plans. Once this environmental review and pre-design phase is completed, the communities can move directly into seeking final design and construction funds for segments of the trail. Without completing this pre-design phase, the project will continue to remain a "plan on a shelf." With preliminary engineering plan, mitigation/preservation/restoration, and permitting needs identified the project is much more likely to accelerate. With an 18-mile-long corridor, the communities realize that the construction phase will very likely take multiple funding sources and multiple years of grant funding.

Statement of Work: Planning and design activities

- Consultant Procurement and Project Scoping
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement (USF&WS, USACOE, Interior, USDOT, MnDOT, MnDNR, cities, tribal communities, landowners, businesses, residents)
- Facility alignment alternatives evaluation (former rail bed, flood structures, city, county, and MnDOT ROW)
- Environmental - DNR/NEPA/Mn Env. Qual. Bd
- Benefit-Cost Analysis
- Merit Criteria Analysis/Report
- Technical and Engineering - Preliminary Design (15 percent design plans)
- Facility Cost Engineering Estimates
- Report Document and 15% Engineering Design Plans

**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?**

There are known endangered, threatened and species of special concern in the corridor as well as habitats that have been impacted by the rail corridor and historical land uses. There is an opportunity to use the trail project to protect, enhance and restore previously impacted lands and educate the public. The project will identify lands that can be protected, preserved, restored and enhanced. The project will take into account all the known and unknown cultural, historical and natural resources along a recommended final alignment.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Planning, stakeholder engagement, environmental, preliminary and final design

**Activity Budget:** \$990,000

**Activity Description:**

The proposed project will result in the pre-design of an eighteen-mile-long multi-use state trail for all ages and abilities following federal, state, MUTCD, AASHTO, NACTO, and Minnesota DNR standards for shared-use trail facilities. The preliminary design will incorporate facilities and amenities that include; trail heads, secure bicycle parking, bike repair stands, water fountains, benches, shade trees, picnic tables, rest rooms, parking, signage and wayfinding, kiosks, and educational signage depicting the Driftless Region's environmental features, endangered and threatened species, and Indigenous and recent history. The project corridor has seven bridges/water crossings and is adjacent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Lands, Minnesota Wildlife Management Areas, is nearby a State Scientific Natural Area and areas purchased by the state for wetland mitigation.

- Consultant Procurement and Project Scoping
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement (USF&WS, USACOE, Interior, USDOT, MnDOT, MnDNR, cities, tribal communities, landowners, businesses, residents)
- Facility alignment alternatives evaluation (former rail bed, flood structures, city, county, and MnDOT ROW)
- Environmental - DNR/NEPA/Mn Env. Qual. Board
- Benefit-Cost Analysis
- Merit Criteria Analysis/Report
- Technical and Engineering - Preliminary Design (15 percent design plans)
- Facility Cost Engineering Estimates
- Final Report Document and 15% Engineering Design

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Consultant Procurement and Selection, Final Contract Scoping, Contract Execution, Project Initiation, Kickoff Meetings	November 30, 2026
Data Collection, Community/Stakeholder Engagement (throughout), Alignment Alternatives/Analysis, Environmental Review Record, Preliminary Design	July 31, 2028
Preliminary Design, B/C Analysis, USDOT Merit Criteria Analysis, Pre-design, Cost Estimates, Final Report	December 31, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Allison Wagner	Houston County EDA	Project Partner	No
Michelle Quinn	City of Houston - Clerk - Administrator	Project Partner	No
Lindsey Martell	City of Hokah - Clerk - Administrator	Project Partner	No
Kent Skaar	Minnesota Department of Natural Resource	Project Partner	No
Louise Thompson	Minnesota Department of Natural Resource	Project Partner	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 sole purpose of this proposal is to position the county and communities to seek funding from federal and state resources that include federal discretionary grants, congressionally designated spending, state bonding bill(s), other DNR trails programs, ENRTF and local funds from the county and cities for eventual construction and restoration projects. By completing the public and agency engagement, environmental, cultural, and historical review and preparing 15 percent plans, a feasible project will emerge for construction. There will be a final plan produced that includes chapters that are required for grant funding from state and federal funding programs.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Lawrence Kirch

**Job Title:** Community Development Director

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

Mr. Kirch has 39 years of regional, county and municipal planning experience and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geology from Winona State University and a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee as well as a Master's Degree in Philanthropy and Development from St. Mary's University in Winona, MN. Mr. Kirch is a certified planner (AICP) and Certified Transportation Planner (CTP) by the American Planning Association/American Institute of Certified Planners. Mr. Kirch also holds a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) certification from the Association of State Floodplain Managers and a Professional Transportation Planner (PTP) certification from the Institute of Transportation Engineers. Mr. Kirch has been a project manager for county comprehensive plans, municipal comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, brownfield redevelopment plans, transportation corridor plans, and natural area master plans. Mr. Kirch has extensive experience in facilitation and leading collaborative multi-disciplinary teams through such planning processes including being responsible for multi-million-dollar budgets and programs that includes supervisory management of departments of 20-25 personnel. Mr. Kirch is the lead staff for the cities of La Crescent, Hokah, Houston and Houston County for the Root River Trail Extension

- Citizens Exploratory Committee. That committee currently operates under a Memorandum of Agreement to Jointly Cooperate, and the four entities are in the process of developing a Joint Powers Agreement for this project.

**Organization:** City of La Crescent

**Organization Description:**

Local Unit of Government - Municipality. La Crescent was founded in 1851 and incorporated as a city in 1857 and is known as the Apple Capital of Minnesota. La Crescent is the largest city in Houston County with a population of 5,270.

## 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	Professional Services including Pre-design, Environmental review process, Stakeholder Engagement, Alternatives analysis,				15		\$990,000
							Sub Total	\$990,000
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	\$990,000

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
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	City of La Crescent Operating Budget	Staff costs for Project Manager, City Finance Director, City Administrator, City Attorney, Sustainability Coordinator.	Potential	\$341,734
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$341,734</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$341,734</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,331,734**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [44ed6ada-1e2.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

2011 Root River State Trail Master Plan - Houston to La Crescent, Figure 2 Regional Setting - Unfinished Corridor Highlighted...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
La Crescent Final 2023 Auditors Report	<a href="#">b75f9b56-15a.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Council Letter with Mayor's Signature	<a href="#">95096485-42b.docx</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Support Letter - Sen. Jeremy Miller	<a href="#">696713fa-1db.pdf</a>
Newspaper Article October 2024 - Rochester Post-Bulletin	<a href="#">e16ea1cf-072.pdf</a>
Congressman Finstad Letter of Support for Root River Trail - January Federal Grant Application	<a href="#">ddc20430-0d7.pdf</a>
Combined Letters of Support for January 2025 Federal Grant	<a href="#">0a9fa60f-db9.pdf</a>
Citizen Exploratory Committee Trail Plan	<a href="#">84f9a780-49a.pdf</a>
MN Rep. Davids Support Letter	<a href="#">d2b7bfaf-768.pdf</a>
Capital Construction Budget Addendum	<a href="#">76370089-ed7.xlsx</a>
Capital Projects Questionnaire	<a href="#">f080aee0-Off.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:**

Bill Waller, City Administrator, Tim Hruska PE City Engineer with WHKS, Kent Skaar, MnDNR (general feedback)

**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

