



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-401

Proposal Title: Organizing Aquatic Invasive Species Efforts to Bridge Silos

Project Manager Information

Name: Jeff Forester

Organization: Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: MLR P&E aims to expand Civic Organizing efforts to bridge gaps between stakeholders in AIS management, leveraging successful pilots to increase efficiency, improve cross-county collaboration, and reduce AIS spread.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$190,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Water (B)

Project Location

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

Statewide

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.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) threaten Minnesota's water quality, fisheries, wild rice, and \$1.1 billion recreational boating economy. While many lakefront communities are aware of AIS, surveys by the University of Minnesota in 2024 show lacking confidence in their ability to address the issue. Fragmented governance of water between the Department of Natural

Resources, research institutions, Tribal Nations, counties, and lake associations has led to inefficient, short-term solutions and continual competition for limited resources.

With ENRTF support, MLR has addressed these gaps through Civic Organizing, a framework developed by the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative (MACI). Over the past five years, MLR has facilitated three civic pilot explorations. These pilots have helped manage competing interests, establish effective collaboration criteria, and ensure accountability through strategic planning.

Research supports this approach: a 2024 study by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) found that cross-county collaboration reduced un-inspected boat launches from 25% to 8%. Emerging invaders, like starry stonewort, have also spread slower in Minnesota compared to neighboring states. Expanding MLR's Civic Organizing statewide, including new pilots in the West Central Lakes, Central Lakes, East Metro, and Mankato, will maximize resources and drive long-term solutions for Minnesota's lakefront communities.

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.

MLR's goal for this project is to strengthen and scale AIS prevention and management efforts by developing local leadership, diversifying stakeholders, and fostering a statewide commitment to AIS best practices. We propose three strategic priorities to build a sustainable civic infrastructure for AIS and water quality efforts across Minnesota: Local Stakeholder Engagement: Conduct strategic one-on-one meetings with local leaders and agencies, followed by monthly cross-sector meetings in six regions to create a strong network of stakeholders from various sectors, including anglers, resort owners, and tourism operators.

Leadership Development: Train one key stakeholder in each pilot on how to leverage the Civic Organizing framework to sustain and expand the base of involved stakeholders, ensuring long-term sustainability of AIS efforts.

Resource Alignment and Access Improvement: Reorganize and optimize existing resources to improve access to inspection and decontamination services, enhance AIS control strategies, and deliver education programs to promote AIS best practices.

Additionally, we will convene a biennial statewide Aquatic Invaders Summit to strengthen collaborative efforts across the state, ensuring a unified response to AIS challenges. This funding will empower local communities, enhance collaboration, and create a lasting human infrastructure for AIS prevention and management in Minnesota.

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 six AIS pilots will advance the MACI 2025 Focus for Organizing: "Invest in civic leadership development to build civic policy partnerships and infrastructure between government and community-state-nation needed to achieve a sustainable environment." These efforts will protect Minnesota's natural resources by fostering partnerships within regional communities, organizations, and governments. MLR staff will guide strategy development through monthly one-on-one and public meetings. Pilot leaders will receive civic leadership training and workplans to organize AIS

management. Educational campaigns, including mail, emails, PSAs, and events, will raise awareness, while the Aquatic Invaders Summit will unite leaders to share effective and tested solutions.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Conduct One on One Meetings to Identify and Engage Local Civic Leaders

Activity Budget: \$92,500

Activity Description:

MLR staff will conduct one on one meetings with a broad cross-sector base of local leaders in each of the six regions we are organizing.

Initial conversations will center on defining the central problem of AIS spread and management, addressing a growing number of local leaders who have been looking for new ways to approach environmental issues and test new ways of getting better environmental outcomes using existing resources.

Currently, most citizens tend to look to governmental agencies to solve environmental problems, but then push back on policies, rules and laws put in place to protect the environment. In recent years, there has been a growing sense that existing education and outreach, incentives, regulation, and even civic engagement efforts all have their limits when it comes to achieving real impact.

We will be looking for leaders willing put themselves and constituents into the center of governing resources (time, constituencies, knowledge and dollars) to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, and who can invest in developing their own civic imagination and political skills to organize the stakeholders necessary to impact the problem. These leaders will be invited to attend monthly organizing meetings.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Schedule and 600 One on One Meetings in 6 regions	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Convene Civic Leaders in Six Regional Pilots Across MN to Organize Local AIS Prevention/Management Response and Align Local Resources

Activity Budget: \$92,500

Activity Description:

MLR will be working to deepen established Stop Starry pilots (See the attached “Proposed Civic Pilot Locations) establish new pilots in the Arrowhead, East Central, West Central and Southern Lakes regions by establishing monthly governance meetings. Membership will represent a cross-sector base of civic leaders representing government and community institutions. Effort is focused on organizing those interested in and willing to engage in all aspects of the civic policy making process (including problem definition, strategic planning, leveraging the complex resources needed to advance AIS solutions, working with all stakeholders needed to prevent/manage AIS, and insisting upon and contributing to transparent, accountable decision-making). The meetings will provide the support necessary for people to take leadership role, evaluate outcomes, be informed, and address conflict constructively. Participants integrate Civic Governance into what they are already doing to improve water quality in their existing organizational role.

In these meetings MLR will establish internal policies in all institutions that support the obligation of governing for the common good that comes with the identity of being a citizen. Our process will emphasize the capacity of leaders and create a governing processes that sustains a meaningful governing role for interested citizens in these regions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Monthly AIS Pilots Established in Six Regions	March 31, 2027

Activity 3: Convene Statewide Aquatic Invaders Summit to Bring Together AIS Groups

Activity Budget: \$5,000

Activity Description:

Organizing Aquatic Invasive Species Efforts to Bridge Silos requires a sharing of information, ideas, efforts, and relationship building and direct communication. In order to bridge silos, this work must occur at different scales, locally, regionally and statewide. Despite the benefits of hybrid meetings using online platforms, there is no replacement for in person, face to face contact.

The event will be planned with the input and engagement of the six regional pilots, and will share innovations, best practices and governing gaps and the processes used to close those gaps. Presentations will include presentations, workshops and field trips by state level research entities like Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, MN DNR, professional lake managers and nonprofits.

This event will help expand awareness of AIS, build regional relationships, unify best practices statewide, and increase energy and commitment to this work.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Statewide Aquatic Invaders Summit of Regional AIS Pilots	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dr. Nicholas Phelps	Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center	Resource/advisor and help Disseminate Results	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?

By aligning pilot goals with stakeholders' objectives, the pilots ensure continuity through annual Strategic Planning meetings. These meetings enable members to leverage their own budgets, reducing the need for state funding. Members set yearly benchmarks and track progress through monthly rankings. Meeting rankings (0-5 scale) assess individual results, challenges, and time investments, while yearly benchmarks (0-4 scale) evaluate collective achievements. Mid-point and end-point evaluations use qualitative and quantitative data to identify successes and gaps. Data sources include DNR AIS metrics, CD3 Station usage, MAISRC monitoring tools and programs, and engagement metrics. MLR's Civic 101 training evaluates leadership using MACI criteria.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Stop Starry Invasion - Community Invasive Species Containment	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 06g	\$1,000,000
Emerging Issues Stop Starry Invasion	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 10b-1	\$385,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jeff Forester

Job Title: Executive Director

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

Jeff Forester, Executive Director of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education, MLR will serve as the project manager on this effort. MLR has long worked at the nexus of civic engagement, local government, Tribal Nations, university researchers and state agencies. Examples include the many diverse partners of the three Aquatic Invaders Summits and the composition of the current Stop Starry pilots Forester organized. Forester served for three years on the Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee, and the Initiative Foundation's AIS Innovation Advisory Panel. In 2021 MLR was recognized by the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, with the MAISRC Research Partnership Award..

MLR seeks to protect Minnesota's lake and river heritage for current and future generations by forging powerful links between lakes, lake advocates and policy makers. Aquatic Invasive Species are a unique threat because Minnesota's heritage is very much based on the use of our water resources resources.

MLR's solution has been to focus energy on "forging powerful links." This project is in MLR's tradition of bringing

together local government resource managers, local civic organizations, state agencies, business interests and university researchers to align resources and prevent/manage the spread of AIS.

Mr. Forester is a Humphrey School of Public Affairs Policy Fellow, Shannon Leadership Institute Fellow, and has been met the criteria and been designated as a Civic Lead Organizer by the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative.

MLR has strong relationships with over 300 Lake Association members and 50,000 cabin and lake home owners, resort owners, lake service providers, WD and SWCD personnel. We have long term relationships with many DNR staff, Tribal Nations, county AIS coordinators and researchers at the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center and other institutions.

MLR is stable, and well supported by a dedicated staff, volunteer board and large volunteer base.

Organization: Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education

Organization Description:

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education, MLR P&E is a nonprofit that protects the cultural, economic, and ecological vitality of water resources through programs that strengthen civic imagination and leadership and builds the civic infrastructure necessary to produce a new approach to public engagement.

The degradation of Minnesota's water quality, shorelines, and habitats is accelerating due to climate change, pollution, aquatic invasive species, increased use, and unwise development. To combat these challenges, MLR is increasing investments in awareness, organizing, programs, and civic leadership development. Through our programs we align resources and foster accountability to shape new approaches to addressing lake and river conservation challenges.

Drawing from the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative, we apply a framework that fosters change in local communities by building civic identity and organizing state and local stakeholders to solve problems collaboratively.

MLR P&E, working with partners, has set four strategic priorities:

- Invest in and support scientific inquiry to develop solutions to the problems facing our waters
- Design and lead on-the-ground programs to educate, promote, and advance public engagement
- Expand and activate membership and other stakeholders to initiate public policy initiatives
- Support the capacity of Lake Associations across the state.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		Administration of Grant and Project			11%	0.5		\$66,600
Project Coordinator		Educator/lead organizer			19%	1		\$57,844
Bookkeeper/Administrator		Fiscal Administration			11%	0.14		\$3,996
							Sub Total	\$128,440
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Producing and Distributing 5- month video and digital marketing campaign, April - August, estimated 1,400,000 impressions: One :30 video, one :15 video plus digital ads will be delivered monthly Each month will be a different theme Delivered to lake home owners via list provided by MLR.				2		\$49,000
							Sub Total	\$49,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel to 6 monthly Pilot Mtgs 9 meetings and Aquatic Invaders Summit	While most of our AIS Pilot Meetings will be held virtually, we will schedule some strategic planning, midpoint evaluation and endpoint evaluation meetings in person & travel to Aquatic Invaders Summit					\$7,560

							Sub Total	\$7,560
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Aquatic Invaders Summit	Bring all members and key stakeholders together for two day conference/symposium					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
							Grand Total	\$190,000

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				
In-Kind	Local Government Units, Tribal Governments, University/Colleges	Staff Time to prep for and attend AIS Pilot meetings and do work in interim	Potential	\$38,400
In-Kind	Local Civic Group Volunteers	Attend Organizing Meetings and Carry Out Projects	Potential	\$38,400
			Non State Sub Total	\$76,800
			Funds Total	\$76,800

Total Project Cost: \$266,800

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [71d53000-9b0.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of the two active Stop Starry Pilots, organized with ENRTF support, and 4 new pilot regions to be organized to prevent/manage AIS....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education	200d2a19-9ce.pdf
2023 MLR P&E 990	ddfd4ff5-936.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education In Support of LCCMR RFP "Organizing Aquatic Invasive Species, AIS Efforts to Bridge Silos" Approved by the MLR P&E Board March 12, 2025	52cdb6aa-51d.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Hubbard County Coalition of Lake Association Support Letter	37df641f-2a7.pdf
Facilitating effective collaboration to prevent aquatic invasive species spread	fce51af5-591.pdf
Itasca County SWCD Support	66956a43-c84.pdf
MLR Governing Document	bd51c23d-c40.pdf
Civic Governance Policy Agenda	108087f9-9c5.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?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

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?

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:

NA

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

