



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-441

Proposal Title: Restoring Forests and Savannas Using Silvopasture- Phase III

Project Manager Information

Name: Brad Gordon

Organization: Great River Greening

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Demonstrate the best practices for restoring buckthorn infested savannas and forests to diverse plant communities managed through implementation of fire and grazing.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$299,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Land (F)

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.

Millions of acres of private forest lands in Minnesota have become infested with invasive buckthorn. A significant portion of those acres are fire-dependent oak woodlands and savannas that are degraded from loss of fire and being abandoned as marginal for crop production. After initial removal of buckthorn, restoration of the herbaceous understory (grasses and forbs) can enable the reintroduction of prescribed fire and grazing for long-term maintenance of the system. This is an ecologically sound and historically appropriate approach that offers a cost-effective, long-range management path for control of buckthorn, an economic opportunity for farmers and ranchers through grazing of livestock, and critical biodiversity gains associated with animal and plant communities supported by woodlands/savannas. This leads to an alternate, stable state for the system rather than recurring buckthorn treatment. The barriers to buckthorn control include failure to recognize the need and lack of knowledge and experience in the steps necessary to re-establish the historic system. Our Phase III proposal was developed in response to the need expressed by landowners and farmers during Phases I and II for more comprehensive long-term guidance. Many land managers are hesitant to take the first step – buckthorn control – without first understanding the long-term management.

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 project is entering the third phase of the M.L.2019 project “Promoting and Restoring Oak Savanna Using Silvopasture.” We are seeking funding to expand the practice of silvopasture across the state of Minnesota by addressing questions and concerns from consultations and demonstrations with resource professionals, farmers and landowners in previous phases. We will conduct outreach and demonstration projects through workshops, field days, online materials, a landowner resource guide, and e-learning tools, including the Silvopasture Learning Network and FarmMaps app. Through field days and workshops we will invite farmers and landowners to learn about the initial clearing of buckthorn, restoring the native understory, and long-term management of oak savannas and woodlands. The primary focus in this phase will be on post-buckthorn land management. Before taking the first step in implementing buckthorn removal, farmers and land managers want to know what the management commitment will be and what resources will be required to succeed. To assist them, we will develop a guide and resource directory. We will also continue an economic survey and case studies specific to buckthorn removal and post-removal management to help farmers evaluate the costs and benefits of initiating silvopasture on their lands.

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?

Through a combination of demonstration events, development of a landowner resource guide, along with the Silvopasture Learning Network and FarmMaps, two farmer to-farmer knowledge-sharing tools developed during Phases I and II, the partnership will continue to educate restoration partners about the benefits of utilizing silvopasture for restoring and managing forests and savannas across the state of Minnesota. They will also provide the economic data, resources, and training needed for farmers and landowners to perform restoration activities and maintain proper grazing practices for the benefit of native plants and pollinators, especially on private lands across the state.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Encourage and facilitate the use of Silvopasture across Minnesota through outreach, education, and resource development for farmers and land managers

Activity Budget: \$204,000

Activity Description:

Great River Greening, the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota, University of Minnesota, and The Nature Conservancy will utilize the Silvopasture Learning Network (SLN) to promote farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities and outreach activities. We will share best practices for managing sites after initial buckthorn removal using fire and grazing. Six on-farm demonstration workshops and field day sites will be established to engage farmers and landowners and educate attendees about considerations for restorations and ensuing management with silvopasture on their lands. Demonstrations will focus on the best native seed mixes to replace buckthorn, when and how to graze, and how fire can assist with plant community health and diversity. Workshops and field days will be hosted in each of the northern, central, and southern regions of Minnesota and demonstrate activities in various forest and savanna systems, depending on the ecological region. Interactive materials will be developed, including e-learning tools, a landowner resource guide, and one-pagers that will be posted and shared through the SLN. The resource guide will describe methods for buckthorn removal, post-buckthorn management practices, economics, and funding resources available to landowners. Additionally, materials, including case studies, economic analysis, and videos from phase 2 will be promoted and shared throughout.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Host 2 demonstration workshops and print first draft of landowner resource guide	June 30, 2027
Host 2 demonstration workshops	June 30, 2028
Host 2 demonstration workshops and print final landowner resource guide	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Farmer consultations to pilot the landowner resource guide and previous phases' resources

Activity Budget: \$95,000

Activity Description:

In coordination with the first activity of demonstrations and resource guide development, partners will provide consultations to farmers who are looking for assistance implementing silvopasture on their lands. Many farmers who attend demonstration events or read resources created in the previous phases have questions that are best answered in the context of their lands and operations. The partners have agricultural specialists and ecologists on staff who will coordinate with NRCS, DNR, and SWCD offices to visit farms and private forestlands to offer methods applicable to that site for buckthorn removal and long-term management plans. They will also assist the farmers and landowners with understanding which NRCS practices best fit the activities they plan on implementing including brush removal, biochar creation and application, fencing, tree planting, biodiverse seedings, rotational grazing, and more. These consultative services will provide feedback for the resource guide while it is under development. Edits to the Guide will be made before the end of the project. Partners will coordinate and work closely with SWCD, NRCS, and DNR offices throughout the state to train those staff and connect farmers to them for enrollment in their respective programs.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Create consultative checklist for buckthorn removal, post-removal management, and funding resources	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Lucinda Winter	Sustainable Farming Association	SFA was founded in 1989 by farmers united in their commitment to creating an agricultural system focused on improving soil health, growing healthy food and revitalizing rural communities. Our mission is to transform agriculture one farm at a time through farmer-to-farmer education, innovation, research and technical support.	Yes
Dean Current	Center for Integrated Natural Resource and Agricultural Management, University of Minnesota	CINRAM is a partner-based organization that catalyzes the development and adoption of integrated land use systems. They will perform economic surveys, interviews, and evaluations of the costs and benefits of silvopasture in Minnesota. Staff will work directly with farmers, agency staff, and partners to collect the most accurate data.	Yes
Tyler Carlson	The Nature Conservancy	The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. They will provide on-farm consultation, work with government partners to improve programs, assist with development and presentation of field days. Co-develop best-practice guide and resource directory.	Yes

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?

This is the third phase of the project. The goal is to address concerns and questions raised during the second phase in order to work toward larger-scale implementation. This partnership will communicate results from the previous phases through the Silvopasture Learning Network, e-learning tools, online material, FarmMaps mobile app, and a landowner resource guide. As the questions and concerns regarding post-buckthorn management are addressed, this partnership will pursue other funds to assist NRCS offices with larger-scale implementation across the state. This phase is seen as a necessary step before a larger-scale effort to assist farmers with enrollment and implementation.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Pollinator Central: Habitat Improvement with Citizen Monitoring	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 08a	\$750,000
Pollinator Central II: Habitat Improvement With Community Monitoring	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08c	\$631,000
Engaging a Diverse Public in Environmental Stewardship	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05d	\$300,000
Biochar Implementation in Habitat Restoration: A Pilot	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 07b	\$185,000
Pollinator Central III: Habitat Improvement with Community Monitoring	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$190,000
Restoring Forests and Savannas Using Silvopasture - Phase2	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$674,000
Building Resilient Urban Forests for Climate Change	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 07b	\$752,000
Pollinator Central IV: Habitat Improvement with Public Engagement	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08e	\$698,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Brad Gordon

Job Title: Associate Conservation Director

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

Dr. Brad Gordon has been a partner on this project for the first two phases and was project manager for the second phase. He has been at Great River Greening for five years working on over one thousand acres of restoration and enhancement projects along with community engagement and farmer consultative services for regenerative agriculture. His education background is in water resources and land use effects on water quality with his PhD in Water Resources Science from the University of Minnesota and Masters in Environmental Science from Taylor University. He has over 15 years of professional experience in the intersection of agriculture and ecological restoration. At Great River Greening, he supervises the team of ecologists, conservation agronomists, project managers, and program managers working on restoration and regenerative agriculture. He has coordinated large and small events for volunteers, farmer field days, community gatherings, and more. He has published numerous peer-reviewed works including the Agricultural BMP Handbook for Minnesota.

Organization: Great River Greening

Organization Description:

Great River Greening's mission is to inspire, engage and lead local communities in conserving and caring for the land and water that enrich our lives.

Great River Greening (GRG) as a non-profit has been restoring, adapting, and sustainably managing ecosystems to address climate change, providing benefits for both people and the environment since 1995. To achieve our vision of healthy, climate change resilient ecosystems throughout MN, GRG leans into the practices and projects that can truly impact our shared climate future. Our land-based restoration centers on three pillars of impact: (1) Restoring resilient landscapes, (2) Addressing critical biodiversity loss, and (3) Increasing carbon sequestration and storage.

Environmental stewardship is one of our core commitments. We partner with the communities we serve to increase environmental connection, teach environmental restoration, and ultimately empower committed individuals to join us in caring for our shared natural resources, engaging 6,000+ volunteers annually.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager Ecologist		Manages day to day project execution, contractors, project deliverables, budget and timeline. Evaluates demonstration sites, maintains the Silvopasture Learning Network, creates resources, and organizes with field days and webinars.			21%	0.3		\$31,000
Events and Outreach Manager		Manages tasks related to event development, event execution, and outreach in coordination with partners			21%	0.12		\$8,000
Grant Administrator		Tracks grant budget, project budgets, develops status reports and amendments			21%	0.09		\$10,000
Conservation Agronomist / Regenerative Agriculture Specialist		Provide consultative services to farmers and landowners, develop resources, host and plan demonstration workshops			21%	0.27		\$26,500
							Sub Total	\$75,500
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Buckthorn removal sub-contracts following state competitive RFP requirements; there will likely be multiple subcontracts due to the multiple locations across the state; tree and shrub removal will be for each demonstration workshop				0.45		\$20,000
Sustainable Farming Association	Subaward	Provide farm consults and on-site assistance to support farmers and landowners who are adopting silvopasture; lead grazing management demonstrations; host webinars and field days; assist with network outreach and material development; Funds for personnel, travel, mileage, and supplies.				0.27		\$55,000
Center for Integrated Natural Resources and	Subaward	Conduct economic analyses to understand costs to restore forests and savannas with silvopasture and compare to traditional restoration approaches. Adapt Farm maps professional networking tool to include silvopasture case studies. Funds for				0.54		\$55,000

Agricultural Management - University of Minnesota		personnel, travel, mileage, supplies, and tool development for one faculty, one graduate student, and one undergraduate student.						
The Nature Conservancy	Subaward	Identify landowners and restoration sites, assess and document restoration activities, plan field days. Contribute to SLN community engagement via Facebook Group. Connect SLN with startup Prescribed Burn Associations in MN and other fire resources. Provide on-farm technical assistance to landowners. Co-develop landowner guide and resource directory.				0.6		\$55,000
							Sub Total	\$185,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Seed and tree seedlings for demonstration workshops	Native seed for grazing the understory and tree seedlings for demonstrating restoration activities in silvopasture acres as part of the demonstration events					\$19,500
							Sub Total	\$19,500
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage, lodging, and meals for project personnel to implement all components of the project - 30 trips with approximately 6,000 miles (\$4,200)-rates are based on state projected rates; lodging for 6 events, 2 staff, 1 night each (\$1,400); per diem for 14 travel days, 2 staff (\$1,400)	Mileage to demonstration workshop setup, demonstration workshop events, and farmer/landowner meetings/consultations					\$7,000

							Sub Total	\$7,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing educational materials and landowner resource guide	Printing educational materials and the landowner resource guide for distribution at workshops and field days					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Other Expenses								
		Event supplies and rentals	Supplies and rentals as a standard recruitment tool and safety item: healthy food, beverages, tables, chairs, portable toilets, and tent rentals for 100-200 attendees total.	X				\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
							Grand Total	\$299,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Event supplies and rentals	<p>Demonstration workshop and field day events will include supplies and rentals as a standard recruitment tool and safety item: healthy food, beverages, tables, chairs, portable toilets, and tent rentals for 100-200 attendees total.</p> <p>We do not want attendees hungry or thirsty while walking on or participating in hands-on activities at remote locations. Standard food items and beverages include selections of fruit, granola bars, muffins, juice, water, coffee, and sandwiches (Food, beverages and rentals: \$10,000/6 total events).</p>

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	Farmer consulting, hosting field days and farmer meetings, helping farmers enroll in NRCS conservation programs	Pending	\$20,000
Cash	Great River Greening - cash match	GRG direct expenses required to do the work for this grant	Pending	\$50,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$70,000
			Funds Total	\$70,000

Total Project Cost: \$369,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [33a11f58-80b.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

We have attached a one-page, front-and-back, informational handout describing silvopasture and the project partnership....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
GRG Audit Report	545e3650-02c.pdf
IRS Form 990	f6f944b8-990.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Letter	ac0305bd-3b5.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
TNC Letter of Commitment	187d599f-b2e.pdf
CINRAM Letter of Support	62b816cd-25a.pdf
SFA Letter of Commitment	88db457f-d4d.docx

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:

Callie Bertsch (USDA NRCS State Forester) and numerous other NRCS state forestry and grazing staff and DNR forestry staff have coordinated with partners on previous phases for consultative and conservation practice services, speaking at demonstration events, and creating educational material. They will continue to coordinate with partners on this phase of the project for similar tasks and activities.

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

