



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-510

Proposal Title: Mississippi River Learning Center - Peninsula Restoration

Project Manager Information

Name: Anne Gardner

Organization: City of St. Paul

Office Telephone: (651) 266-6421

Email: anne.gardner@ci.stpaul.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Peninsula Restoration for environmental cleanup, regrading, habitat creation, native plant communities, and introduction of outdoor learning elements such as the Cottonwood classroom, wetland overlook and cultural ceremony landing

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$7,500,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31, 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): Metro

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

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

The Mississippi River Learning Center project envisions a unique hub to attract national, regional, and local visitors to experience the land, river and culture at the edge of the Mississippi River at a nexus of cultural and environmental significance. The site is located within the Bdote, the sacred birthplace of the Dakota people near the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota River across from Historic Fort Snelling and Pike Island (Wita Tanka) and within the Mississippi Flyway, an important migratory path for hundreds of bird species. Partner organizations including National Park Service, Mississippi Park Connection, and Wilderness Inquiry will operate the site in partnership with the City of St Paul and focus programming to welcome local school children, families, people with disabilities, and underserved communities. Indigenous and Tribal leaders are engaged with the project to determine plant restoration approach and locate areas for ceremony and cultural practice. The site is within the popular and well-used Hidden Falls-Crosby Farm Regional Park yet needs restoration due to long term impacts from flood inundation and human disturbances for upgrades to facilitate improved and accessible programs. The project will reconnect the floodplain forest ecology and all park visitors to the Mississippi River.

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 Peninsula restoration will address the severe degradation of approximately 11-acres of the 25-acre Mississippi River Learning Center site and restore access to the river to enable the programming for recreation and learning. Decades of dumping spoils on the site has raised the ground surface over 20 feet and effectively disconnected this section of floodplain from the river. Large scale soil disturbance is the seminal event that has shaped the present-day ecology of this site and altered the successional path of vegetation resulted in a forest dominated by exotic woody species as compared to the neighboring 'undisturbed' floodplain parcels. The site is characterized as a disturbed forest and ranked "poor" in the Crosby Farm Regional Park Ecological Inventory and Restoration Management Plan developed in 2005. A restoration approach called 'rewilding' will restore and improve the site to increase biodiversity by restoring natural process and re-engaging society with nature. The approach will incorporate ecological dynamics into managing and restoring ecological functions and take inspiration from the past, though adapt to current conditions. Trails and outdoor classroom spaces on site will create opportunities to learn about the dynamic floodplain environment, migratory species, specific site ecology, and the cultural significance of the Mississippi.

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 Mississippi River Learning Center Peninsula restoration project is a site within the floodplain of the Mississippi River, an invaluable cultural and ecological resource to the state and region contributing to the successful migration of species across the North American Continent. Soil remediation, regrading and restoration of specific plant species will restore habitat for a variety of snakes, forest interior birds, shoreline birds, migrating songbirds, raptors, fish, mussels, amphibians, and bats. Site design and construction methods will be sensitive to water quality and reduce erosion and slope degradation while creating places for learning to foster conservation values in visitors.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Site Preparation - First construction phase to restore the site to reconstruct historic landform and reinstate floodplain ecology and access

Activity Budget: \$3,679,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to reestablish historic floodplain elevations on the lower peninsula and replicate characteristic floodplain topography. Significant tree removal is required to eliminate invasive vegetation with sensitivity and planning to protect federal endangered species. Site preparation will begin by cutting and treating all buckthorn and black locust stems to systemically kill their root systems and prevent regrowth. Treated stumps and other woody invasives (Siberian elm, invasive honeysuckle) will be removed during grubbing. Several follow up treatments and monitoring will be required to fully control invasives. Care will be taken to remove root masses to limit erosion and additional treatment will capture escapees or sprouting seeds. Remediation efforts include removal of large debris (concrete pieces, steel beams, talus from eroded bluffs, rock and concrete) and soil clean. Decompaction, bed preparation, and stabilization of slopes with native vegetation cover and erosion control will employ construction best practice techniques to limit sedimentation of the adjacent water bodies of the Mississippi River and identified wetland. Overall sequencing and access is planned to be least disruptive to the floodplain environment and will be monitored during construction activity via state and watershed permits

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Endangered Species List and Phase I Report	December 31, 2025
Consultation with SHPO	December 31, 2025
Department of Administration Pre-design Review	July 31, 2026
Site Clearing, Demolition, Preparation, and Remediations	December 31, 2026
All Construction Funds Legally Secured	December 31, 2026

Activity 2: Construction- Implementation of site elements to support park users, learning programs, and Indigenous cultural ceremony space along the Mississippi River

Activity Budget: \$1,154,000

Activity Description:

The objective of the Mississippi River Learning Center project is to create a physical space for park visitors to experience the land, water, and culture of the Mississippi River. The construction activity of the peninsula restoration will define spaces for recreation, learning, ceremony and contemplation. The site is within the Minnesota National River and Recreation Area, a 'partnership' National Park, comprised of public lands owned and managed by a cooperation of agencies. The City of St Paul will continue to own and manage the land with partners organization leading public programs for school groups, community, and national visitors. The physical space for outdoor classrooms will accommodate groups up to 30 individuals. Paved and accessible trails will connect the outdoor learning environments each of which will include seating for participants and interpretation. The Cottonwood classroom will focus on the large cottonwood trees on site and learn about the vegetation of a floodplain forest. The Wetland Boardwalk and overlook will hover above the sensitive wetland with opportunities to study the vegetation type and significance for water quality adjacent to the river. Lastly, the cultural ceremony classroom is a requested space from Tribal and indigenous engagement for community gatherings and ceremony.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Trails and Cottonwood Classroom Construction	August 31, 2027
Construction of the Cultural Ceremony Landing	December 31, 2027
Construction of the Wetland Boardwalk and Overlook	December 31, 2027

Activity 3: Vegetation Establishment- Restoration of native plant communities for habitat, restored ecological function and educational opportunities

Activity Budget: \$2,667,000

Activity Description:

Vegetation establishment will restore the full native diversity to the floodplain forest and raise the habitat quality ranking as the forest regenerates. Following site preparation and construction activities, planting and seeding will reintroduce the associated native plant communities, including a small seasonal wetland, mesic and floodplain forests. Species selection will reference the MDNR's Native Plant Community guides and climate-adaptive native species to enhance the resilience of the forests. As plants adapt and grow, management is necessary to prevent re-colonization by invasives during the establishment of the native plant communities. Restoration will utilize native pollinator friendly practices at all stages. During site preparation, invasives removal will prioritize mechanical removal over chemical use wherever possible. Herbicide use to control woody species will focus on cut stump treatments and foliar spray and will be timed when native pollinators are not active. Establishment will start with a forb-heavy herbaceous seeding and plug planting to stabilize slopes and provide forage throughout the growing season. Shrub and tree species selection will include appropriate-sited early season blooming species such as basswood, willow, and chokecherry. Propagules will be sourced within 150 miles. During establishment, maintenance will focus on burning and mowing to reduce competition from non-native weeds.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Seeding and Plug Planting	October 31, 2027
Implementation of soils for seeding and planting	December 31, 2027
Tree and Shrub Planting	December 31, 2029
Closeout - Notice of Funding Restriction Recorded, COI, Signage Installation, Open Facility	December 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Paul Sawyer	City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation	Grants Coordinator	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?

Implementation of the project includes design and planning for a phased restoration of the Peninsula area. Selective vegetation and remediation are initial steps prior to re-grading the land to reintroduce the historic floodplain elevation and natural shoreline of the Mississippi. The River Learning Center Facility is a City of St Paul owned and operated site with agreements in place on the long term operations and maintenance with partners. Landscape implementation will require a 5 year maintenance and establishment period to monitor and ensure establishment for native species and adaptive management techniques will be applied for habitat and plant communities.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Anne Gardner

Job Title: Lead Landscape Architect

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

Anne Gardner is a Landscape Architect with a breadth of experience in private, public, and non-profit work in the field of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design. She has worked for the City of Saint Paul in the Design and Construction section of the Department of Parks and Recreation since 2010 as a designer and project manager to oversee masterplans, site design, and construction for park projects, in addition to serving on technical advisory committees for planning projects in St Paul. She has a particular passion for integrating natural systems into the urban environment as well as a love of community engagement in the design process. Anne is currently the project manager for the Mississippi River Learning Center project; a complex 25 acres site along the Mississippi river where new headquarters for National Park Service and Mississippi Park Connection will be constructed. She is leading a robust consultant team for the engagement, planning, and design of the site and buildings with a total estimated cost of approximately \$65 million. The project endeavors to carry out the vision from the Great River Passage Master plan to connect people to the land, water, and culture of the Mississippi River by restoring the floodplain environment and construction learning space for park visitors. Anne holds a Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree of liberal arts from St. Olaf College.

Organization: City of St. Paul

Organization Description:

Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Saint Paul

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	Site Clearing, Demolition, Soil Preparation, and Soil Remediation				0		\$3,679,000
TBD	Service Contract	Site Construction for Cottonwood Classroom				0		\$262,000
TBD	Service Contract	Site Construction of Cultural Ceremony Landing				0		\$217,000
TBD	Service Contract	Site Construction for River Trails				0		\$229,000
TBD	Service Contract	Site Construction for Wetland Boardwalk and Overlook				0		\$446,000
TBD	Service Contract	Vegetation Establishment - Soil preparation, Seeding and Plug Plantings				0		\$1,527,000
TBD	Service Contract	Vegetation Establishment - Tree and Shrub Planting with Supplemental Soil and Mulch				0		\$1,140,000
							Sub Total	\$7,500,000
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	\$7,500,000

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				
Cash	Local Option Sales Tax	25% of costs in services tab	Secured	\$2,500,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$2,500,000
			Funds Total	\$2,500,000

Total Project Cost: \$10,000,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [8147d501-2ee.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A site plan shows the entirety of the Mississippi River Learning Center Project demonstrating the development and restoration of the 25 acre site along the Mississippi River. The 10 acre peninsula project is identified with the pink boundary and identifies the outdoor learning classrooms, trails, and gathering space....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Third Party Audit	cc736732-261.pdf
Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	97321097-3ee.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
City Council Resolution of Support	c5b738ac-ab9.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Existing Site Images	62bc9ae2-fa0.pdf
Capital Budget Addendum	264c12da-e0a.xlsx
Letter of Support - Mississippi Park Connection	79f54583-501.pdf
Capital Project Questionnaire	10501b99-36c.pdf
Mississippi River Learning Center_Regional Context	3d47b6b8-990.pdf
Mississippi River Learning Center_Peninsula Project_Restoration Zone	1947babd-ec7.pdf
Mississippi River Learning Center_Peninsula project_Birdseye	524935d8-4ff.pdf
Letter of Support - WTA	3ddc8043-51e.pdf
Letter of Support - National Park Service	b8e4d961-d90.pdf
Letter of Support - GRPC	ef025306-d18.pdf
Letter of Support - FMR	b936ef3b-2fe.pdf
Letter of Support - CRWD	b81c6cff-ca8.pdf
Letter of Support - Wilderness Inquiry	ab796a75-23e.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?

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:

Anne Gardner, City of St Paul, Department of Parks and Recreation

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

