



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-534

**Proposal Title:** Expand Lake Steward to Protect/Restore Minnesota Shorelines

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Jeff Forester

**Organization:** Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education

**Office Telephone:** (612) 961-6144

**Email:** jeff@mnlakesandrivers.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Scale up Lake Steward Program to reach the tipping point for social change adoption (15% adoption) and protect/restore Minnesota's natural shorelines, improve water quality and aquatic habitat.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$205,000

**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.**

The Natural Shoreline Partnership, convened by the MN DNR, reported to the MN Clean Water Council in 2022: “Minnesota’s lakes are in trouble and the situation is urgent. Across the state, we have lost approximately half our natural shorelines. In some areas, we’ve lost even more....”

The report connects this accelerating shoreline loss with the loss of lake water quality, recreation, habitat for fish, waterfowl, frogs, butterflies and more.

The report continues, “It is critical that we act, and act now, to protect our vanishing healthy shore land and help recover what has been lost. We know that... what we’ve been doing isn’t working. Top-down control through rules, education, and enforcement has been only marginally successful.” The MN DNR estimates the rate of natural shoreline loss to be 1% to 2% per year. (Radomski 2006).

There is a paradox: the actions of many riparian owners are inconsistent with their values.

This paradox is THE PROBLEM we hope to address.

The Shoreline report concludes, “...We believe a bottom-up, community approach is... needed....”

Lake Steward, a proven grass roots peer to peer program, is shifting the cultural norm away from a lawn-to-the-lake management to buffers, runoff control and better wildlife habitat.

**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 has piloted Lake Steward for three years. With LCCMR support we will add a dedicated staff member, develop a more complete curriculum for our volunteer shoreland evaluators and build a strategic communication effort to expand Lake Steward from a pilot to a cultural norm.

Lake association volunteers take an online training on shoreline Best Practices adapted from the MN DNR’s Restore Your Shore and Forest Stewardship programs. They receive (and can order more to give to riparian owners as a leave-behind) Shoreland Guide to Lake Stewardship.

The lake association distributes a short “Are You a Lake Steward” quiz online to its members. When someone takes the quiz, MLR’s communication system sends an email to the Lake Steward volunteer from that lake association and they schedule a site visit with the owner.

An online App leads the evaluator through a shoreline assessment and collects data in a statewide database. This provides data-driven feedback to further advance the program.

When the owner meets Lake Steward criteria, they are awarded a lovely Lake Steward sign posted on the shore that serves as a social marketing, peer to peer trigger, further shifting the norm away from manicured lawn to natural shoreline.

**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?**

Lake Steward benefits:

- Abundant, diverse vegetation filters, stabilized shoreline, reduced sedimentation, (Bentrup, 2008),
- Natural near shore aquatic plants and woody debris, decline in algae, cooler water from shade, and reduced turbidity,

- As citizens take first steps towards improving water quality, state and local resources often follow,
- Water quality and shoreline property values are linked (Region, Krysel, Boyer, Parson and Welle, 2003). In six Minnesota counties, shoreline comprises more than 50% of the tax base and funds the majority of local services,
- Lake Steward improves relationships among citizens, non-profits, local government and state agencies.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Raising Awareness of the Need for and Benefits of Natural Shorelines

**Activity Budget:** \$19,000

**Activity Description:**

MLR is in regular communication with 500 plus lake associations and over 30,000 individual shoreline property owners.

Our first goal in Lake Steward is to create a new social norm or aesthetic, first among the MLR Lake Association leadership, then among lake association members, and then among the wider population, that favors a natural shoreline of native plants, shrubs and trees instead of the current aesthetic that favors manicured lawns of Kentucky bluegrass, ornamental plants and flowers, and riparian structures like seawalls, riprap or sand blankets.

We will develop and execute a strategic communications plan including blog posts, articles for Lake Association newsletters, print media, radio, PSAs and social media campaigns.

Combining MN DNR Phosphorus Sensitivity Surveys and data for over 2,900 lakes with Minimal Impact Design Standards (MIDS) best management practice (BMP) calculator, we will estimate the amount of the phosphorus load is coming from lawn-to-the-lake riparian lots on each waterbody we will provide each lake association with a specific phosphorus loading goal for their lake, increase member interest in Lake Steward. This will motivate individuals to act and leadership to work to reduce other non-point sources of phosphorus into the lake.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Produce Phosphorus Sensitivity Goals for all 500 lakes in Minnesota.	September 30, 2026
Work with partners to develop a strategic and comprehensive communications plan.	February 28, 2027

### Activity 2: Build Regional Community Scaffolding to support expansion of Lake Steward among Lake Associations

**Activity Budget:** \$67,000

**Activity Description:**

Lake associations are important civic groups within their communities. Lake association leaders and members are often involved in a diverse number of other organizations and institutions including faith communities, traditional civic organizations and fraternities, local and county government resource managers.

In addition, because a lake or river is often the most important and valuable resource in a community, many of these other local institutions either have programs, funding and resources to protect water quality, or ought to include clean water in their mission and strategic priorities.

Shoreline management is a social issue, often based on the human need for social standing driving decisions. Using civic organizing strategies, MLR will work to raise awareness of the need for natural shorelines more broadly, working to connect with other local institutions, communities and governmental units. After identifying key stakeholders, we will convene regional meetings to establish roles and jurisdictions to support the protection/restoration of natural shorelines, including execution of communications plan, providing time, knowledge, dollars, expertise and constituencies. With this broader community support, more Lake Associations and lake association members will adopt Lake Steward shoreline practices.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Organize 6 monthly meetings of key stakeholders to align roles, jurisdictions and capacities.	May 31, 2027
One-on-one meetings with 200 key lake association, civic, faith community, and local government leaders	June 30, 2028

### Activity 3: Develop and expand curriculum for Shoreland Evaluators and community and provide educational support to shift social norms

**Activity Budget:** \$42,000

**Activity Description:**

Awareness of the need to protect/restore natural shoreline, and the decision to take action springs from education.

Volunteer Lake Steward Shoreland Evaluators complete a 45 minute online training video.

The Shoreline Evaluator tool, developed with MN DNR, includes diagrams, written text and rankings that leads evaluators through a standardized assessment of shoreland practices, gathers useful data, and generates excellent feedback for the property owners.

The 38 page Shoreline Guide to Lake Stewardship supports the online survey tool, serves as a useful guide for evaluators and supports property owners to take next steps.

The beautiful Lake Steward sign awarded to property owners that meet the criteria, serves as a visual marker and social peer marker for natural shorelines.

With ENRTF support, we will do more.

A flexible shoreland management curriculum, with lessons appropriate for different venues and audiences, like school classrooms, lake association meetings, outdoor education centers, camps, street fairs or farmer markets, local lake associations will further support volunteer Shoreline Evaluators as they work to expand awareness of good shoreline management. MLR staff will provide regional, in-person, and on site trainings to support the volunteer Shoreland Evaluators and give them the skills and confidence to use this new curriculum.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Write set of flexible curriculum focused on Community Education of Natural Shoreline Management Practices	March 31, 2027
Schedule regional, on-site trainings for volunteer Shoreline Evaluators	March 31, 2027
Host onsite trainings to disseminate Lake Steward Outreach Curriculum	June 30, 2028

### Activity 4: Coordinate the Statewide Lake Steward Program

**Activity Budget:** \$77,000

**Activity Description:**

Lake Steward is a community based social organizing effort. As such it is built on relationships; between MLR and our Lake Association members and their volunteer Shoreland Evaluators, between Evaluators and their neighbors and other

local civic institutions.

Organizing the program and building relationships will include:

Analyzing data from the previous summer's efforts,  
Holding meetings with Lake Steward volunteers to identify strengths and weaknesses of the previous year's efforts, and  
adjust program for the next season's efforts,  
Writing case studies and presentations for policy forums and public policy venues,  
Providing informational testimony to policy bodies like Clean Water Council and the Minnesota Legislative Water  
Commission,  
Organizing local government resource managers and commercial shoreline service providers (landscaping companies,  
landscape architects, water service providers, realtors  
and others) to support Lake Steward efforts and facilitate restorations,  
Speaking at lake association meetings and presenting at events,  
Visiting a random selection of Lake Steward properties to assess if they meet criteria and ensure alignment,  
Helping organize shoreline restoration "Showcases" to engage riparian property owners and strengthen peer to peer  
messaging and social norm changes,  
Day-to-day operation of Lake Steward program, Shoreland Evaluator App. and data collection.  
Leading/Participating in the Natural Shoreline Partnership

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Daily Coordination and Support of Lake Steward Program	June 30, 2028

## 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?**

Adoption of a norm generally follows an S-shaped pattern and, once 15% of a group adopts, innovation speeds up. (Rogers, 1962)

By June 30, 2028, 15% of the 500 lake associations in Minnesota, (75) will carry Lake Steward. With an average membership of 200 per association (Ibrahim, Marko, Bjertness, Zabel, 2017) 15% of lake association members (2,250) will complete a shoreline evaluation and begin protection/restoration on an estimated 337,500 feet, or 63.9 miles of shoreline.

Once the 15% tipping point is reached, new norms attract new support and develop an internal momentum, requiring less external inputs.

## 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.**

Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education, MLR was formed to organize programs, education, communication and capacity to protect/restore Minnesota's lakes for current and future generations. MLR uses a Civic Organizing framework licensed by the Midwest Active Citizenship Initiative, MACI, to advance our Mission. Project Manager Jeff Forester is a Designated Lead Organizer in MACI.

Forester has organized three Aquatic Invaders Summits, each of which drew over 400 people from across Minnesota and neighboring states. The Summits featured local, national and international experts on Aquatic Invasive Species, AIS issues and programs. The Summits increased communication, collaboration and cooperation among the many groups working to prevent the spread and manage the current infestations of AIS in Minnesota.

Forester works in the nexus of local government units, academia, state agencies and local civic groups to address AIS issues.

In 2016 Forester worked with AIS Planners at the DNR and County AIS Specialists to design a standardized template for Counties to use when reporting on the AIS programs established after the County AIS Prevention Aid came online. Last year about half of the counties voluntarily used this framework to report on their AIS efforts, providing better data in a format that is more comparable and trackable.

Under Mr. Forester's leadership, MLR has been a stable and efficient organization with a long track record. He has built the networks to advance this citizen led program. He has also managed over \$1.5 million dollars in ENRTF grants previously, meeting all deadlines and budgets to good outcomes.

Mr. Forester has grown the Lake Steward Program from one lake in central Minnesota to over 40 participating lakes today. He also Chairs the Minnesota Natural Shorelines Partnership, and has the capacity to execute this program

**Organization:** Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Protection and Education

**Organization Description:**

MLR P&E formed in 2017 to support lake science and provide organizing, communication, education, and support for Minnesota's lakes and rivers and the communities dependent upon them.

MLR works in the nexus of local government units, academia, state agencies and local civic groups to address complex lake and river related issues. MLR is not a preservation organization, and does not seek to set aside land. Instead, our model addresses resources where people live and recreate while still preserving the ecosystem services our lakes and rivers provide. MLR works to protect Minnesota's lake and river heritage. a heritage of people in a place over time.

MLR has strong working relationships with people at all levels of the lake and river resource management world. This project leverages the relationships MLR's has made, and builds upon established partnerships as a way to define a problem and reach a shared solution, bringing together local government resource managers, Tribal Nations, local civic organizations, state agencies, business interests and university.



## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Project Administrator		Supervise the Program and Grant			11%	0.2		\$27,000
Bookkeeper		Track and record expenses, reimbursement requests, expenditures.			11%	0.06		\$4,000
Program Coordinator		Lead the Lake Steward Effort			11%	1.66		\$73,376
Educator		Write Curriculum and Run Trainings for Shoreland Evaluators and Community Stakeholders			18%	0.1		\$3,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$107,376</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
TBD	Service Contract	Producing and Distributing 5 episode 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 MN Lakes and				1		\$49,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$49,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-

<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Promotion/Education at Lake Association and other local meetings - 4000 miles at \$0.70 per	Raise awareness and Educate/Support Shoreline Evaluators					\$2,800
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Shoreland Evaluation site checks 4000 miles at \$0.70 per	Ensure consistency of program					\$2,800
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Lodging (nights) 7 overnight stays for late meetings or two day trips at \$98 per night	Travel for multiple meetings or two day site visit trips					\$1,372
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Per diem for 14 days per 7 overnight trips at \$59 per day	Attend late night or two day meetings/events					\$1,652
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$8,624</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Lake Steward Award Sign - metal, high quality paint, sun and weather coating. See attachment	Raise Awareness by demonstrating a property has met Lake Steward Criteria by posting a Lake Steward Award sign. 1000 signs with additional signs (estimated 100) to be purchased by local partners.					\$40,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$205,000</b>

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$205,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [0cb6fbf2-2bc.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Lake Steward Sign Awarded to Shoreline Owners that meet Program Criteria...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
MLR P&E Certificate of Good Standing	<a href="#">f0a8fc6a-e70.pdf</a>
MLR P&E 2023 990	<a href="#">d34fbb53-66e.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
MLR Board Resolution in Support of "Expand Lake Steward to Protect/Restore MN Shorelines	<a href="#">ec342d30-99a.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
MN COLA Support Letter	<a href="#">08cfe843-a06.pdf</a>
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Support Letter	<a href="#">62e202cd-747.pdf</a>
MLR Governing Document	<a href="#">357e7003-00c.pdf</a>
Gull Lake Support	<a href="#">a095ec48-0df.pdf</a>
National Loon Center Support	<a href="#">4e36f547-5fe.docx</a>
Hubbard County SWCD Support	<a href="#">a9d5dda4-4f8.pdf</a>
Freshwater Society letter of Support	<a href="#">55f255e3-8c1.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?**

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