



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-581

**Proposal Title:** Living with Fire in Minnesota Forests

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Robert Bale

**Organization:** The Nature Conservancy

**Office Telephone:** (508) 208-3798

**Email:** robert.bale@tnc.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** This project will restore and enhance lands by growing the pace and scale of prescribed burning on public and tribal lands and educating landowners to promote application of beneficial practices.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$952,000

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

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Land (F)

#### Project Location

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

Region(s): NE, Central,

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

Region(s): NE, Central,

**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.**

Many Minnesota forests are fire-dependent. Fire disturbance functions in a unique combination of ways. Nutrients are rapidly cycled, depositing a flush of nutrients (i.e., ash) which invigorates the native seedbank and fruit bearing shrubs. Heat and smoke stimulate the release of some seeds and germination of others. Post-fire canopy structure changes increase air movement, reduces precipitation interference, and increases sunlight penetration to the understory and exposed soil, promoting regrowth and regeneration. Trees that prefer mineral soil or shallow duff to maximize seedling success benefit from the burning of forest floor litter and dead/downed woody debris. Heat injuries to trees create cavities for wildlife. Forest prescribed burns usually leave unburned patches within the treated area. The unburned refugia provides shelter for wildlife in the short time that fire is present, and remains as a source site for repopulation of the burned areas by insects, mosses, plants, etc. Ultimately, treating a fire dependent habitat with prescribed fire allows that site to maximize its biodiversity potential. This collaborative project seeks to restore and enhance fire-dependent forests in Minnesota by increasing the pace and scale of prescribed burning, increasing coordination among stakeholders, and expanding community outreach.

### **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 collaborative project seeks to restore and enhance fire-dependent forests in Minnesota by assisting agency and tribal partners to successfully implement priority prescribed burns, conducting in-person and media-based public outreach, and fostering coordination among myriad agencies and diverse communities.

TNC has built a program with dedicated fire staff who plan and implement prescribed burns, deliver prescribed burn training, provide technical assistance to landowners, and conduct outreach. Dovetail staff are expert at engaging diverse audiences and facilitating coordination among many agencies and stakeholders to productively address fire management issues. The capacities of TNC and Dovetail are complementary and necessary to innovate solutions where the fire management needs of numerous agencies and landowners intersect.

TNC has prescribed fire staff and equipment sharing agreements with state and federal agencies and Tribal partners. The partner land managers overseeing this project's sites indicate that they expect to often rely on the TNC operational support to meet required burn crew sizes and/or to complete necessary firebreaks. In the Arrowhead region, Dovetail staff are well established conveners, coordinators, and network builders among state, county, municipal, and federal agencies and their constituents and are acknowledged authorities on how communities can reduce wildfire risk while benefiting ecological values.

### **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?**

It is prudent when planning burn objectives to prepare a variety of potential sites to maximize treatment options under a range of weather conditions. Within this proposal's list of potential priority sites, TNC is confident that at least 1,500 acres will have favorable conditions for burning over the course of the project. TNC staff will also lead and support pile burning workshops for landowners, provide fire-informed forest restoration and enhancement technical assistance to landowners. Dovetail will connect with and facilitate meetings among agency representatives, local fire departments, community groups, and additional stakeholders on a regular basis.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Support partners to prepare for and implement prescribed burns to restore and enhance lands.

**Activity Budget:** \$653,000

**Activity Description:**

No one agency has the capacity alone to address prescribed burning needs on the lands they administer, so collaborative efforts are imperative. TNC is uniquely able and ready to utilize LCCMR funds this way because TNC has intentionally built a prescribed burn program focused on supporting partners. TNC has established relationships and prescribed fire resource sharing agreements in place with many partners. Partners whom TNC prescribed fire staff will assist conducting prescribed burns through this project include DNR Parks and Trails, DNR Wildlife, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Chippewa National Forest, and Superior National Forest. LCCMR funds will leverage prescribed fire investments by all the partners involved, which are needed in combination to advance this crucial restoration and enhancement practice.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Maintain qualified and equipped prescribed fire staff and agreements with land management agencies	December 31, 2028
Plan and coordinate with partners to prepare to implement prescribed burns	December 31, 2028
Complete prescribed burns on 1,500 acres or more of priority restoration and enhancement sites	December 31, 2028

### Activity 2: Deliver public outreach to promote the application of beneficial practices, including holding educational workshops and providing technical assistance.

**Activity Budget:** \$199,000

**Activity Description:**

These outreach activities are led by TNC's Fuels Planner and supported by other TNC staff, Dovetail Partners staff, and done in collaboration with diverse communities. This project provides education, outreach, and training for local communities so that they are better informed about and prepared to conduct practices beneficial to the environment, natural resources, and all Minnesotans. Activities will include public outreach events, workshops, hands-on trainings, and social and print media dissemination to help landowners and community members better protect lands. A separate activity in this LCCMR proposal is conducting prescribed burning on agency and tribal lands. This LCCMR project's outreach components support the prescribed burning activities because prescribed burns are made more reliable and have a more wholistic impact when adjacent and nearby landowners and communities conduct complementary restoration activities. Landowners typically rely on cost-share programs, local community support, and self-help efforts to conduct restoration and enhancement activities. The outreach activities will foster landowner familiarity with cost-share programs, while building local networks and individual knowledge and skillsets. Outreach and networking are integral to this project will foster long lasting benefits.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Six pile-building and pile burning best practices public workshops	December 31, 2028
Provide fire-informed forest restoration and enhancement technical assistance to 50 landowners	December 31, 2028
Six outreach and community building events, media creation and dissemination	December 31, 2028

### Activity 3: Facilitate restoration and enhancement coordination amongst agency land managers and foster collaboration with adjoining communities to conduct complementary practices.

**Activity Budget:** \$100,000

#### **Activity Description:**

This set of activities will be led by Dovetail staff. Dovetail will expand upon its strong presence in the Arrowhead region to advance collaboration and innovation among partners and networks. Those existing partnerships include federal, state, county, and municipal agencies, fire departments, landowner communities, the Fire Adapted Communities Network and Fire Learning Network. Dovetail will serve as a liaison and facilitate meetings among partners and networks on a routine basis to assist with the development of priorities and timelines and serve as a hub for information updates. Dovetail will engage with land managers and landowners to understand their management objectives and foster treatments that benefit natural resources. Fire-informed targeted treatments to create desired forest conditions include removal of densely stocked or sick trees, timber sales, mulching, chipping, woody material haul-away, pile burning, and prescribed burning. Dovetail will develop and deliver community education and outreach programs, coordinate resources and share information with diverse stakeholders.

#### **Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Regularly convene myriad agencies and stakeholders in the Arrowhead region and disseminate their project status	December 31, 2028
Coordinate six targeted fire-informed treatments that restore and enhance natural resource, ecological, and recreational value	December 31, 2028
Provide six partners with technical assistance that advances fire-informed environmentally beneficial practices	December 31, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Keith Karnes, Forestry Director	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Oversees site prioritization for prescribed burn planning and implementation, internal budgeting, supervises Tribal Fire Management Officer.	No
Katie Fernholz, President/CEO	Dovetail Partners	Leads Dovetail, supervises outreach professionals who will take actions in this project.	Yes
Michael Stansberry, Forest Supervisor	USFS, Chippewa National Forest	Forest Supervisor, provides required approvals to implement prescribed burns on the forest, supervises Fire Management Officers who plan and conduct prescribed burns on the forest and with whom TNC coordinates operationally to support burns on the forest.	No
Tom Hall, Forest Supervisor	USFS Superior National Forest	Forest Supervisor, provides required approvals for prescribed burn planning and implementation, supervises the Fire Management Officers who plan and conduct prescribed burns and with whom TNC operationally coordinates.	No
Graham Parson	DNR Parks and Trails	District Resource Specialist, plans and coordinates prescribed burns and with whom TNC coordinates with for prescribed burning implementation.	No
Josh Koelsch	DNR Wildlife	Assistant Area Wildlife Manager, plans and coordinates prescribed burns in the DNR Wildlife Cloquet Area and with whom TNC coordinates directly for prescribed burn implementation.	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 results will be implemented by TNC and Dovetail Partners staff working closely together and engaging with a wide variety of people, communities, other non-profits organizations, and municipal, county, state, and federal agencies. The TNC staff and Dovetail Partner staff identified in this proposal are already engaged and have successfully launched the activities described. This LCCMR project will expand and accelerate the pace of that work. Continuity of funding is expected through a combination of government agreements and grants, foundation grants, and private fundraising.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Community Response Monitoring for Adaptive Management	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 03r	\$483,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Robert Bale

**Job Title:** Assistant Fire Manager - Forests

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

Marya Bob has managed prescribed burn programs for more than 20 years in several US states, always in collaborative contexts with diverse partners and stakeholders. In those programs, Bob directed burn bosses, fire managers, multiple prescribed fire modules operating concurrently in several states, grant and contract administrators, a fire planner and a fire ecologist. Bob is a NWCG qualified Type 2 burn boss, and has served as a burn boss on prescribed burns in a wide range of habitats and socio-political contexts in 15 US states and The Bahamas. Bob holds a master's degree in Geography and Planning, and consulted on National Park-scale fire management planning, training, and implementation in Tanzania and the Bahamas. In his management and burn boss capacity, Bob has partnered with numerous state

agencies, the USFS, NRCS, NPS, and Tribes on prescribed fire projects across the country. Bob's work in Minnesota focusses on forested lands, and he is also one of the TNC staff members serving the Indigenous Peoples Burning Network, with responsibilities to the Network in Minnesota and across the country.

**Organization:** The Nature Conservancy

**Organization Description:**

Founded in 1951, The Nature Conservancy is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners.

Sub-award partner: Dovetail seeks to engage you in thoughtful, collaborative processes so that we can create an inspiring path forward and empower you to lead with confidence. Dovetail seeks to accomplish that by providing authoritative information about the impacts and trade-offs of environmental management, including consumption choices, land use decisions, and policy alternatives. Dovetail is a highly skilled team that fosters sustainability and responsible behaviors through collaboration to develop unique concepts, systems, models, and programs. Dovetail excels at solving complex problems and helping responsible organizations succeed. We also help define programs that increase the job creation and the job quality of resource-based industries. Dovetail Partners is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

TNC and Dovetail have relationships and agreements in place with numerous partners to facilitate the critical, multi-jurisdictional work included in this proposal.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
TNC MN Assistant Fire Manager - Forests		Project Manager, Supervisor of Prescribed Module Leaders and Fuels Planner, Burn Boss			46.5%	1		\$150,000
TNC MN Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module Leader		Leads prescribed fire module based in Ely, MN			46.5%	1.8		\$175,000
TNC Central MN Prescribed Fire Module Leader		Leads TNC Prescribed Fire Module Based in Central MN			46.5%	0.8		\$75,000
TNC Central MN Assistant Prescribed Fire Module Leader		Provides leadership within the TNC Central MN Prescribed Fire Module			46.5%	0.8		\$65,000
TNC Fuels Planner		Outreach, Training Delivery, Technical Assistance			46.5%	1.8		\$170,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$635,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Dovetail Partners	Subaward	Dovetail networks with and facilitates meetings among agency representatives, local fire departments, community groups, and additional stakeholders. Dovetail collates and disseminates partners' internal and cooperative project information to stimulate innovative collaborations. Personnel: \$85k; Travel: \$10k; Supplies: \$5k.				2		\$100,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Fire Crew Supplies	Safe firebreak preparation and prescribed burn implementation					\$30,000
	Tools and Supplies	Fuel for Crew and Fuels Planner work vehicles	Transportation from office and work shop to field sites					\$15,000
	Equipment	Fuels Planner leased work truck	Transportation from office to work sites					\$24,000
	Equipment	Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module Leased Work Truck	Travel from shop to field sites					\$34,000
	Tools and Supplies	WiFi for Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module leased office/shop and leased crew house.	Internet connectivity for staff work.					\$2,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$105,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
		Workshop lease for Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module	Secure indoor work space for tool and equipment maintenance and storage and secure vehicle storage.	X				\$45,000
		Crew housing in Ely for Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module	Provide lodging for rotating seasonal fire crew in Ely, MN, which has limited short-term housing availability.	X				\$34,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$79,000</b>
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Central MN Prescribed Fire Module Engine and Crew Truck mileages	Travel in TNC fire engine and crew truck from Central MN office to work sites					\$8,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Overnight work travel expenses for Northwoods and Central MN Prescribed Fire Modules	To allow travel among the many sites included in this project, where work activities are at times multi-day efforts.					\$25,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$33,000</b>



<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$952,000</b>

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Expenditures		Workshop lease for Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module	Shop space is not optional for a fire crew. It would be like a fire department without a fire house for its engine(s) and equipment. <b>Additional Explanation :</b> This is leased shop space which will be needed for the duration of the project.
Capital Expenditures		Crew housing in Ely for Northwoods Prescribed Fire Module	Providing housing for seasonal crew is necessary for successful staff recruitment. <b>Additional Explanation :</b> The housing will be occupied during the course of the project by rotations of seasonal prescribed fire crew.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$952,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

## Acquisition and Restoration

### Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
638 Pilot Project	Cass	Priority Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Red Pine Stands	Restoration	45	-	-	Public		Has Not Begun
Bass Lake Phase 2 West and East, Slim Lake, Geraldine, Westminister, Canary, Bear Island, 20 Proof Creek, Stoney Island, Deer Ridge, Hi Fen, Fenske, Hanson	St. Louis	Superior National Forest Priority Burn Units for this project	Restoration	4,055	-	-	Public		Has Not Begun
Cuba Lake, Goose Hill, Tanglewood, Lydick Brook, Sunken Lake, Third River	Cass	Chippewa National Forest Priority Prescribed Burn Units for this project	Restoration	1,504	-	-	Public		Has Not Begun
DNR Parks St. Croix State Park Burn Units A, B, C, D, H, I, and J, Trail Center East, Piedmont West, Piedmont East, Deadhorse North, Central, South, NE, East, Crooked Creek West	Pine	Priority Restoration Prescribed Burns for DNR Parks in St. Croix State Park	Restoration	3,041	-	-	Public		Has Not Begun
Rutledge WMA, Sandstone WMA, Rath WMA, Firebird WMA, Kettle Lake WMA, Red Clover WMA, Ricehaven WMA, Canosia WMA	Carlton	Priority Fire Dependent habitats managed by DNR Wildlife planned for prescribed burning	Restoration	7,095	-	-	Public		Has Not Begun
				-	-	-			
				-	-	-			
<b>Totals</b>				<b>15,740</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>			

## Restoration

**1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.**

All restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

**2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.**

All the prescribed burn treatment units listed in this project proposal are priority restoration sites for the respective agency and tribal land managers. As many of these acres will be treated within this project as weather and other objective factors allow. Prescribed burn unit plans are always prepared for each treated parcel, and management plans that justify the needs for restoration are produced by each respective agency and tribe and those plans are saved on MN TNC's shared computer folders. The success of initial prescribed burn treatments planned for this project will usually make subsequent burn treatments increasingly practical. Before and after photos will be recorded for each treated parcel to record treatment effects.

**3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources "Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines" in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.**

Seed sowing is not part of this project.

**4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.**

It is expected that a combination of agency funding, grant awards, and private donations will be required to maintain periodic repeated prescribed burn treatments. The frequency of those treatments depends on the impact of prior burns, intervening weather conditions, and various characteristics peculiar to each site.

**5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.**

If Conservation Corps crews with fire qualifications are available to assist the burns planned for this project, additional funding is expected to be available to contract their services.

**6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.**

Where parcels have been treated with prescribed burning within this project, evaluations of the treatment effects will be made initially after the respective prescribed burn is complete and three-years later to again evaluate treatment effects. The evaluations will assess to what extent treatment goals were met, identify problems with the treatment implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Map*

File: [98cbc4a5-37b.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Map*

Living with Fire in Minnesota Forests LCCMR 2026 Project Sites...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
MN Secretary of State	<a href="#">993bde21-c6d.pdf</a>
Single Audit	<a href="#">d807b4fc-8f3.pdf</a>
Form 990	<a href="#">b98834e6-6f1.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Certificate of Authority	<a href="#">de3304ff-a73.pdf</a>
Director's Letter Approving LCCMR Project	<a href="#">ea86b6ed-195.docx</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Superior National Forest Priority Burn Units - Detail on Bass Lake	<a href="#">30e10bdc-51e.pdf</a>
Superior National Forest Priority Burn Units for this Project	<a href="#">57164d49-dbc.pdf</a>
List of Chippewa National Forest Restoration Sites for this Project	<a href="#">043f0fcc-f07.xlsx</a>
Description and Map of Leech Lake Band 638 Red Pine Pilot Project Burn Units	<a href="#">1887f04e-877.pdf</a>
St. Croix State Park Potential Burn Units Map	<a href="#">5086d2f9-730.pdf</a>
Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Letter of Support	<a href="#">9e403c55-329.pdf</a>
Dovetail Partners Letter of Support	<a href="#">8166eb90-404.pdf</a>
University of MN Cloquet Forestry Center Letter of Support	<a href="#">a5364636-057.pdf</a>
Superior National Forest Letter of Support	<a href="#">34a47a01-5b0.pdf</a>
Chippewa National Forest Letter of Support	<a href="#">5ec4d657-80f.pdf</a>

### Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

Yes: Restoration,

**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:**

April Yoder, Marya McIntosh

**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**

N/A

