



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-067

Proposal Title: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail Development

Project Manager Information

Name: Alexa Shapiro

Organization: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Office Telephone: (760) 274-7493

Email: director@mndriftlesshikingtrail.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Research and develop infrastructure along the trail that supports long term sustainability of the region's natural resources while supporting education and development to engage residents in protection and preservation efforts.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$495,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

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.

As the project has progressed, key areas of development surfaced that need to be addressed for the project to be successful. We need resources to work on solving these challenges, which include sustainable latrine systems, accessible camping, and volunteer development. These areas surfaced during listening sessions in prior years, when residents provided feedback about the project to our staff and board.

By late 2025, MDHT secured access for the first 8.5 miles of trail in Chatfield. Additional miles are close to being secured in and around Caledonia and Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center in Fillmore County. We are actively working with the MN DNR determining routes that account for sensitive habitats on state land. With this mileage, the trail project is at a stage where the next phase of development needs to begin. In Chatfield, this includes establishing camping. The City of Chatfield closed their public campground years ago. For hikers, this means they would need to travel over 8.5 miles before having access to camp. Additionally, approximately 50% of the trail is projected to be on private land, much of it agricultural. Developing latrines will be crucial for sustainability of the region once the trail is built.

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.

We hope to take an applied research approach to several challenges that were identified during our outreach efforts in the last few years. We propose to conduct research on latrine systems that will protect and preserve the sensitive ecosystem along the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail and implement the construction of two latrines in key regions of the trail. We are seeking funding to conduct research, purchase supplies, and construct two latrines.

We also propose to study where there are gaps in access for camping in the trail corridor. Utilizing our standards and guidelines for trail development, we will construct two new campgrounds along the trail to increase access for recreationalists. We are seeking funding for supplies and materials as well as for the construction of the campsites.

Finally, we will develop chapter groups to support the sustainability of the trail long term. We are seeking funding to work with professional contractors to provide trail maintenance and trail crew leadership training to key partners. Additionally, we seek funds to recruit, coordinate and develop volunteers. This funding will allow us to provide leadership opportunities for volunteers to engage others in trail stewardship work and promote natural resource education locally.

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?

Develop standards and guidelines for a sustainable latrine system;

Construct latrine systems at a minimum of two separate sites;

Construct two campsites along the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail;

Develop three chapter groups to maintain segments of the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail;

Provide a trail maintenance skills-development and trail crew leadership development training opportunities for up to 100 volunteers in and around the trail corridor.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Research and Develop Sustainable Latrines

Activity Budget: \$269,094

Activity Description:

The Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership or others will conduct research on sustainable latrine designs that consider the unique needs of the Driftless Region. MDHT will also conduct a study of existing public toilets in the trail corridor to understand what resources are currently available for recreational users. Using this research, we will determine a design for a sustainable latrine system that can be constructed along the trail in key areas. These sites would lack access to bathroom facilities and have sensitive ecosystems where other methods of waste management would not be suitable. Utilizing the funding provided, we would purchase all of the materials and equipment needed to construct the latrine and then establish a minimum of two separate latrine sites across the trail corridor.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Sign partnership agreement to secure support for project research	June 30, 2026
Secure partners for two latrine sites at key areas along the trail corridor	December 31, 2027
Consult with SHPO	June 30, 2028
Environmental Site Assessment completed for latrine sites	June 30, 2028
Develop management MOUs with partners for long term co-management of latrine sites	August 31, 2028
Secure construction funds for project	December 31, 2028
Purchase supplies and materials needed to build latrines	December 31, 2028
Install two latrines at different sites along the trail including signage with ENRTF language	June 30, 2030
Open for public access	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Campground Access for the MDHT

Activity Budget: \$117,686

Activity Description:

Reviewing the trail corridor, we will identify existing resources for camping including public land and campgrounds, and private rentals. Honing in on areas that lack adequate camping (accessible every 5-10 trail miles), we will conduct site visits to determine potential locations for campgrounds. We will develop partnerships across private, local, and state agencies to secure access for two sites. Using the funds allotted, we will purchase the supplies and materials needed for each campground. Utilizing the support of volunteers, we will build two campgrounds at different locations across the trail corridor, increasing access for camping for recreational users along the trail.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Review the trail corridor to identify existing camping and lodging opportunities for hikers	December 31, 2027
Conduct site visits to explore potential campsite locations	June 30, 2028
Secure partners for two camping sites at key areas along the trail corridor	October 31, 2028
Consult with SHPO	October 31, 2028
Develop management MOUs with partners for long term co-management and accessibility of campgrounds	June 30, 2029
Environmental Site Assessment completed for campsites	June 30, 2029
Secure construction funds for project	August 31, 2029
Purchase supplies and materials needed to build campgrounds	August 31, 2029

Develop two camping sites at different locations along the trail including signage with ENRTF language	June 30, 2030
Open for public access	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Volunteer Training and Development

Activity Budget: \$108,220

Activity Description:

We will work with existing and new partners across the trail corridor to develop chapter volunteer groups that support ongoing maintenance of the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail. We will provide training opportunities that focus on skills-development for maintenance, natural resource management, and trail crew leadership. These trainings will provide the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail an opportunity to learn how to educate volunteers and will offer an example of curriculum that can be used with future volunteer groups. Volunteers who participate in training will support the early development of chapter groups, supporting maintenance needs for the trail and mentorship of new volunteers.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Secure up to five community partners for volunteer chapter groups	December 31, 2027
Work with professional trail builders to implement training, including training for work on state land.	June 30, 2028
Provide up to four trainings, two in 2028 and two in 2029, for volunteers.	December 31, 2029
Develop a volunteer training curriculum and procedures to support development of future volunteers	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Colleen Foehrenbacher	Eagle Bluff ELC	Fiscal Agent	Yes
Michele Peterson	City of Chatfield	Campground Site Partner	No
Chris Lannin	NA	Campground Site Partner	No
Tim Gossman	Bluff Country Hiking Club	Latrine Site Partner	No

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

Attracting volunteers, supporters, and users will be key to the success of the Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail. Currently, we utilize social media, a website, and an email newsletter of over 750 names and a 60% open rate to disseminate news of our project. We also regularly seek out and participate in media coverage from statewide and regional media channels. All of these methods will continue upon awarding of funds.

Additionally, we will be creating print and digital maps, informational signage, and other media such as videos to demonstrate progress on trail development.

Finally, we will invite local educational institutions and civic groups to participate in trail development, and to use the trail to better access and understand Minnesota's natural resources. We will also work with our partners to promote trail opportunities and to disseminate information about trail development to their communities.

All of this will include acknowledgement of the ENRTF.

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?

Sales of branded merchandise, maps, booklets, and guided hikes or wilderness programs.

Individual donations, corporate sponsorships, and continued grant-seeking.

Trail memberships via a Friends or Supporters group.

Public events.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 09a	\$426,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Alexa Shapiro

Job Title: Trail Director

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

Alexa Shapiro is MDHT's Trail Director, hired in October 2024. She has over twelve years of experience managing non-profits and working in outdoor recreation and environmental education. Alexa has a masters degree in recreation management.

Organization: Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

Organization Description:

The Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail is working to establish a 100+ mile backpacking trail through the Driftless Area of Minnesota, in the style of the National Scenic and Recreational Trails, supported by volunteers and operating as an independent organization.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Trail Director		Manage all staff duties of the project			30%	3		\$198,744
							Sub Total	\$198,744
Contracts and Services								
Great Lakes Trailbuilding	Service Contract	Latrine construction, volunteer trainings				1		\$109,000
Eagle Bluff ELC	Service Contract	Fiscal Agent				0		\$64,565
							Sub Total	\$173,565
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Latrines: \$35,000 in materials and supplies for one latrine. Campgrounds: \$5,000 for materials and supplies for one campground. Volunteer Chapters: \$5,000 for chapter tool libraries. \$150.00 budget per training.	Materials for construction projects, tools and supplies for trainings and volunteer chapters.					\$90,600
							Sub Total	\$90,600
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	100 miles/weeks x 156 weeks x \$.72/mile	Mileage throughout the trail corridor					\$11,091

							Sub Total	\$11,091
Travel Outside Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Conference attended by staff at an Outdoor Recreation related Conference outside of Minnesota (\$450 registration, \$1000 travel, \$800 Lodging, \$250 food)	Develop skills and knowledge pertaining to trail maintenance, design, and development to enhance volunteer programs	X				\$2,500
							Sub Total	\$2,500
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Outdoor signage, printed materials, marketing	Signage for latrines and campgrounds, printed materials for training, budget for marketing training					\$10,000
	Publication	Trail Guides, user maps, and educational materials	Publications on campgrounds to promote regionally					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$11,000
Other Expenses								
		Legal fees	Attorney fees to review access agreements for up to four sites (campgrounds, latrines)					\$7,500
							Sub Total	\$7,500
							Grand Total	\$495,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Travel Outside Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	Conference attended by staff at an Outdoor Recreation related Conference outside of Minnesota (\$450 registration, \$1000 travel, \$800 Lodging, \$250 food)	As a completely new recreational asset dependent on volunteer development, we believe participating in industry events, including conferences, is an important way to maximize exposure to the backpacking population and develop necessary skills.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
In-Kind	University of Minnesota Extension	Research and development of a sustainable latrine model to use in the Driftless Region	Pending	\$15,400
			State Sub Total	\$15,400
Non-State				
Cash	Taylor Family Farms Foundation	Purchase equipment and a trailer to transport tools to and from work sites, to be used in the construction of each latrine site	Secured	\$10,000
Cash	Corporate sponsorship from Enlightened Equipment	Operational expenses for the trail project	Secured	\$2,500
In-Kind	Volunteer labor	Volunteers will support the project through site prep work, construction of the latrine, and sign installation.	Potential	\$8,000
Cash	Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail	MDHT is providing approximately 15% of the Trail Director's salary for this project. These funds will be secured through grant dollars, fundraising, corporate sponsorships, and merchandise sales.	Pending	\$28,392
			Non State Sub Total	\$48,892
			Funds Total	\$64,292

Total Project Cost: \$559,292

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [86e40c7f-7af.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of proposed general trail route corridor....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
MDHT 990	dcb4186e-61d.pdf
Evidence of Good Standing	426f2f52-084.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Letter	a67bd644-536.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	60d4d750-759.pdf
Budget Addendum	49fca36c-29d.pdf
Eagle Bluff Letter of Support	a534d06b-7f9.pdf
City of Whalan Letter of Support	7bb11281-5be.pdf
Jim Mason Letter of Support	bf7fbf5b-633.pdf
City of Chatfield Letter of Support	f0c8b5ca-7d0.pdf
City of Caledonia Letter of Support	f23405e3-dea.pdf
Caledonia School Forest Committee Letter of Support	a4818af3-31d.pdf
Bluff Country Hiking Club Letter of Support	ce811411-6ee.pdf
Bluff Country Hiking Club and MDHT MOU for Lost Creek Hiking Trail co-trail management	689c0e50-1ec.pdf
City of Chatfield Council Resolution on MDHT Trail Designation	7b48aab2-eb2.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

Yes, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center

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:

Alexa Shapiro, Minnesota Driftless Hiking Trail

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