



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-154

Proposal Title: Restoring Prairies, Supporting Communities

Project Manager Information

Name: Cedar Walters

Organization: West Central Initiative

Office Telephone: (218) 739-2239

Email: cedar@wcif.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Support communities in west central Minnesota with transitioning mowed areas to prairie plantings, complemented by a regional campaign to increase awareness and adoption of prairie plantings for climate resilience.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$296,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Resiliency (A)

Project Location

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

Region(s): Central, NW,

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

Region(s): Central, NW,

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.

Native prairie once covered more than 18 million acres of Minnesota, but now only approximately 1% of this critical habitat remains. There is growing interest in supporting prairie habitat and biodiversity by restoring prairies in communities, but often these projects fail or flounder, due to a lack of appropriate seed sources and knowledge about maintaining these community assets. Often, a large prairie planting is installed by a contractor, after which a community is left to manage the planting without the training, knowledge, and community buy-in required to make these projects succeed long-term. Issues with public perception, invasive species, and weed management can lead to project abandonment without adequate knowledge and support.

In addition, small rural communities are interested in nature-based solutions for stormwater management and climate resilience but often lack the staff or financial capacity to pursue projects on their own. Funding and capacity-building support, as well as forming long-term relationships with partners like WCI and UPF, can provide support and resources that will ensure prairie projects in communities in west central Minnesota succeed and have benefits for the environment and communities for years to come.

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.

West Central Initiative will support and coordinate prairie restoration projects in 10 communities across west central Minnesota in a regional campaign aligned with United Prairie Foundation's (UPF) mission to "Make Prairie Common Again." The project will preemptively address the problem of unsuccessful prairie restorations by providing communities with small-scale plantings that function as a training ground for municipal staff and community volunteers. UPF will implement restoration work in participating communities to ensure success through proper site preparation, planting highly diverse and locally harvested seeds, and providing demonstrations and training for communities and their staff. Following restoration activities, the sites will support biodiversity, enhance stormwater resilience, and increase public awareness of prairie ecosystems through interpretive signage.

We believe that by leveraging relationships with community leaders in west central Minnesota and supporting conversion of community-owned land to vibrant prairies, we will create regional momentum around the importance and adoption of prairie plantings as a community climate resilience strategy. In addition, by reducing the barrier of entry to these projects for small, under-resourced rural communities, and by supporting peer learning and regional relationship building, we increase capacity for communities to pursue and maintain prairie restorations for climate adaptation and mitigation in the future.

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 outcomes include:

Conversion of up to 30 acres of public land in 10 communities in west central MN to strategically placed prairie plantings;

Enhancement of planted areas with UPF's Educational Prairie Trail signage;

Increased knowledge and experience maintaining native plantings among municipal staff, and peer learning between communities;

Increased community engagement with prairie projects through volunteering and participation in educational events;

Distribution of native plant kits and education on prairie gardens and natural stormwater management; and

Increase in awareness of the importance of native prairie through a robust educational campaign.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Community Recruitment and Site Selection

Activity Budget: \$17,708

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to select up to 10 communities for prairie planting projects over the 2028 and 2029 field seasons and identify project sites that have environmental and community benefits.

WCI will create a simple application process and promote the program to communities in the 9 counties in west central Minnesota as a part of implementing recommended priority actions in the MN Region 4 Climate Action Plan. WCI will work with UPF to select communities that have a desire to install prairie restorations, and agree to meet program criteria, such as contributing staff time to planting days, training and workshops, and some maintenance of installed plantings.

UPF will assist communities with final site selection, prioritizing sites that maximize stormwater infiltration benefits, as well as sites that would increase educational value through installation of UPF Educational Prairie Trail signage.

We will evaluate the outcomes of these tasks by how many communities apply for the program, the number of communities that are selected for each field season, and how many project sites/acres are identified in each community.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Set up and promote online application and participation requirements for 2028 projects	September 30, 2027
Select communities for 2028 prairie projects	December 31, 2027
Communities work with United Prairie Foundation to select planting sites	March 31, 2028
Set up and promote online application and participation requirements for 2029 projects	September 30, 2028
Select communities for 2029 prairie projects	December 31, 2028
Communities work with United Prairie Foundation to select planting sites	March 31, 2029

Activity 2: Prairie Planting Site Prep and Installation

Activity Budget: \$183,048

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to establish prairie plantings at selected sites in participating communities. In coordination with WCI, UPF will lead all phases of restoration, including site preparation, seeding, and first-year management, while engaging community partners and volunteers when appropriate.

Site preparation includes applications of non-selective herbicide that will be completed by UPF or city staff. UPF staff will conduct all seeding using locally harvested native seeds. Highly diverse seed mixes tailored to each site will be broadcast or drilled between November and February. First-year maintenance mowing, if necessary, will be completed by UPF or city staff. The output will be approximately 30 acres prepared and seeded in 2028 and 2029.

Community staff and volunteers will assist with plug planting and watering newly installed plugs when possible. These activities will build community knowledge and support long-term stewardship of restored sites.

Outputs include total acres planted, plugs planted, and numbers of staff and volunteers engaged. Outcomes will be evaluated through site monitoring and documentation of establishment success.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Site preparation for 2028 projects (for first round of communities selected for projects)	September 30, 2028
Native plugs installed in late spring/fall depending on conditions	October 31, 2028
Prairie sites dormant seeded (approximately 10-15 acres)	February 28, 2029
Site preparation for 2029 projects (for second round of communities selected for projects)	September 30, 2029
Native plugs installed in late spring/fall depending on conditions	October 31, 2029
Prairie sites dormant seeded (approximately 10-15 acres)	February 28, 2030

Activity 3: Regional Educational Campaign to “Make Prairie Common Again”**Activity Budget:** \$95,244**Activity Description:**

The objective of this activity is to create and implement a regional educational campaign in partnership with UPF that promotes the value of native prairie and increases the use of native plants in gardens and landscaping that drives regional change to “Make Prairie Common Again”.

The tasks include planning a regional educational campaign that WCI and UPF will implement in west central Minnesota, planning and delivering educational prairie workshops and demonstration days in communities across the region, partnering with libraries on community-wide read events, and promoting successful implementation of the community prairie projects.

UPF will train staff and engage community members in participating communities on prairie project maintenance, to ensure staff increase their ability to identify native plant species and have the knowledge and skills to maintain prairie plantings through mowing, use of fire, and identification and management of invasive species.

Outputs of these tasks would be campaign assets such as social media posts, press releases, web content, events, trainings and workshops hosted, and communication of project outcomes via newsletters, media releases, and presentations, and social media content.

Outcomes of these tasks and outputs will be measured by how many people engage with the educational campaign through content and events.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
WCI and UPF plan regional educational campaign for 9-county area	December 31, 2027
Plan and promote 2028 events and workshops	July 31, 2028
Host regional field day for participating communities at established UPF prairie sites	September 30, 2028
Host prairie planting workshops in communities in 2028	October 31, 2028
Plan and promote 2029 events and workshops	July 31, 2029
Host regional field day for participating communities at established UPF prairie sites	September 30, 2029
Host prairie planting workshops in communities in 2029	October 31, 2029
Implement community-wide read initiative featuring books on the importance of native prairie for all ages	October 31, 2029
Celebrate and promote outcomes of prairie planting projects, community workshops, and community-wide read initiative	May 31, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
John DeVries	United Prairie Foundation	Founder/Executive Director	Yes
Patrice Delaney	United Prairie Foundation	Senior Biologist	Yes

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.

WCI and UPF will acknowledge the ENRTF through use of the logo and/or attribution language on all program materials and promotions. The ENRTF logo would be added to interpretive signage already included in the budget. ENRTF attribution language will be incorporated into communications regarding project success and project outcomes at the end of the grant period.

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?

WCI and UPF are committed to supporting participating communities and advising on management practices after the grant period is over. Planting projects will remain in place and will provide benefits to communities for years to come. Seeds can eventually be harvested from these plantings, contributing to further community prairie restoration and ensuring locally adapted plant genetics remain in use. WCI and UPF have interest in expanding this work through future rounds/additional sources of funding and collecting data on the impacts of small municipal prairie plantings on insect and bird biodiversity.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Cedar Walters

Job Title: Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs

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

The project manager – the Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs – holds an M.S. degree in biology and environmental education, and has experience in grant administration and project management for both philanthropic and state funds. The project manager has in-depth knowledge of climate and sustainability efforts in the west central Minnesota region that West Central Initiative serves, and will leverage knowledge and relationships across the region to implement the activities described in this application. The project manager has experience planning and implementing programs that increase and measure collective impact. For example, the project manager planned and implemented an organics recycling program for Otter Tail County that included commercial pickups as well as residential drop-off options, and a backyard composting program that distributed over 500 backyard compost bins to residents along with tracking data from bin recipients to measure collective impact. In 2022, the project manager advocated for and helped plan and implement a small native planting on county-owned property, in addition to coordinating prairie planting workshops in the City of Fergus Falls for several consecutive years. The project manager also planned and worked with other staff to implement the Municipal Solar Cohort program at West Central Initiative that bundles small solar projects in 20+ rural communities to reduce barriers to implementation and provide technical assistance efficiently for participating communities. The project manager will coordinate project tasks and expenses, manage the regional

educational campaign, work with partners to implement project activities, and track progress to ensure milestones are met.

Organization: West Central Initiative

Organization Description:

West Central Initiative (WCI) is one of six independent community foundations created by the McKnight Foundation in 1986 to help address a historic crisis in the farming and mining sectors. WCI also serves as the federally recognized Economic Development District Organization for the region (MN EDR 4).

Our status as both an Initiative Foundation and Regional Development Organization allows us to connect local units of government and organizations in our nine-county region to a broad array of grants and resources. WCI's mission is to serve west central Minnesota through funding, programs, and technical assistance. Our vision is for a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable world in west central Minnesota. We support regional development in six core areas: community planning, transportation planning, early childhood, climate action, and welcoming communities, as well as regional strategic planning.

United Prairie Foundation (UPF), the identified partner for this proposal, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit operating in the Prairie Pothole Region in Minnesota and North Dakota. Since 2004, UPF has worked to reconnect people with the prairie landscape. Their mission is to "Make Prairie Common Again." UPF maintains regional expertise in native seed collection, local ecotype plant production, and prairie restoration, with an emphasis on education.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs, 1 position		Project Manager			28%	0.27		\$37,000
							Sub Total	\$37,000
Contracts and Services								
United Prairie Foundation	Subaward	Personnel \$84,000, local ecotype seed \$54,000, native plant plugs for public-facing areas \$75,000, signage \$12,000, and mileage \$2,300 to conduct restoration for approximately 30 acres for 10 communities and provide educational events and resources for a regional educational campaign.				0.81		\$227,300
							Sub Total	\$227,300
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Native prairie plant kits - 400 kits at \$60 each	Native prairie plant kits will be distributed at educational events and planting days to support smaller prairie plantings at the residential level. Approximately 200 kits will be distributed per year.					\$24,000
	Tools and Supplies	Book club kit purchases, individual book purchases for community-wide read initiative. Book club kits: 15 kits for regional libraries at approximate cost \$230 each. 80 individual books for youth and children for libraries at approximately \$20/book.	Book club kits and books for children and youth will be used to support a community-wide read initiative that will build regional knowledge about the importance of native prairie for biodiversity and resilience, as a part of the broader educational campaign with UPF.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$29,000

Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	All mileage at \$.72/mile. 300 miles for community recruitment and site selection, 600 miles for planting days, 1800 miles for workshops and educational and library events.	WCI mileage for site visits, planting days, and educational campaign events over the three years of the project.					\$2,700
							Sub Total	\$2,700
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$296,000

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$296,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [6932aed4-057.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map shows potential, but not all, communities that could be selected for a project, based on known stormwater/flooding challenges, letter of support, or verbal indication of interest....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Secretary of State Documentation	f17aeb03-cdf.pdf
Financial Audit	22c9b616-15e.pdf
990	58549721-b89.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
WCI Authorization Letter	b456308c-3c3.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Supporting Documentation Restoration Questions	616a4af4-684.pdf
Letter of Support from the City of Moorhead	aaf52bf0-780.pdf
Letter of support from Fergus Falls Public Library	9c5c61c9-24f.pdf
Letter of Support from City of Vergas	2001cf46-7b5.pdf
United Prairie Foundation Letter of Support	353e5e02-c70.pdf
Letter of Support from Fargo Parks District	6e1a9906-7ea.pdf
Letter of Support from the City of Audubon	bf392877-92a.pdf
Letter of Support from the Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership	ab3f0168-89d.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?

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:

Patrice Delaney, United Prairie Foundation

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