



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-173

Proposal Title: Completing the Root River Trail in Houston County

Project Manager Information

Name: Lawrence Kirch

Organization: City of La Crescent

Office Telephone: (507) 895-4096

Email: lkirch@cityoflacrescent-mn.gov

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Complete preliminary engineering, environmental review, permitting and stakeholder engagement for the first six miles (La Crescent to Hokah) of the final 18 miles of the Root River State Trail.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$792,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31, 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?

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.

Houston County, La Crescent, Hokah and Houston have worked to complete the state trail, first authorized by the legislature in 1971. La Crescent is applying on behalf of the three cities and Houston County. The DNR Master Plan for the extension was approved in 2011. Two recently concluded planning activities covering the first two miles have made it possible to seek funding for preliminary engineering, environmental review and permitting from La Crescent to Hokah. This segment will connect Hokah to the Wagon Wheel Trail in La Crescent (\$7 million in investments) and a new Wagon Wheel Connector (phase 4 bridge) crossing the West Channel of the Mississippi River to La Crosse, WI (\$8 million-2027 construction). The project will collaboratively engage the varied stakeholders during the pre-design, environmental and permitting process. The projects aim is to ultimately connect all 11 Root River and Harmony-Preston Valley State Trail towns. The recreational, physical, environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits of a completed trail are important to the cities, county, region and the state. There is widespread support from area legislators, the Root River Trail Towns, Parks and Trails Council, the three cities, chambers of commerce, DNR Trail staff and others.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

The communities desire to implement the 2011 DNR Root River State Trail Extension Master Plan which is a priority under C. Education and Outdoor Recreation. The project crosses over into activities 7 and 8 but is primarily activity 9. Acquisition of land and easements can occur as part of the process as the specific alignment is finalized. Land and easements will be needed from five landowners, MNDOT, CPKC Railroad, and Houston County. A citizens exploratory committee authorized by a Memorandum of Understanding, along with La Crescent staff have been championing this project and has sought federal and state funds for this project over the last three years. A trail project cannot move forward until the pre-design, stakeholder engagement, environmental review and permitting steps are completed.

Statement of Work: Engineering design activities

- Consultant Procurement and Project Scoping
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement (USF&WS, USACOE, Interior, USDOT, MnDOT, MnDNR, cities, tribal communities, landowners, businesses, residents)
- Alignment refinement (former rail bed, flood structures, city, county, and MnDOT ROW)
- Environmental Review/SHPO
- Complete Predesign Review through the Dept. of Administration
- Technical and Engineering - Preliminary Design (15 and 30 percent design plans)
- Facility Cost Engineering Estimates
- Report Document and Preliminary Engineering Design Plans

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?

There are known endangered, threatened and species of special concern in the full 18-mile-long corridor as well as habitats that have been impacted by the rail corridor and historical land uses. The first six miles from La Crescent to Hokah has fewer environmental constraints and can connect Hokah to La Crescent and the Wagon Wheel Trail system, with connections to Wisconsin's trail system. There is an opportunity for the trail project to protect, enhance and restore previously impacted lands as well as become a path to educate the public. A connection to the federal refuge and state WMAs becomes possible.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Stakeholder engagement, environmental review, preliminary design, permitting

Activity Budget: \$792,000

Activity Description:

The proposed project will result in the preliminary engineering design of six miles of multi-use state trail for all ages and abilities following federal, state, MUTCD, AASHTO, NACTO, and Minnesota DNR standards for shared-use trail facilities. The preliminary design will incorporate facilities and amenities that include; trail heads, secure bicycle parking, bike repair stands, water fountains, benches, shade trees, picnic tables, rest rooms, parking, signage and wayfinding, kiosks, and educational signage depicting the Driftless Region's environmental features, endangered and threatened species, and Indigenous and recent history. The project corridor is adjacent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Lands, Minnesota Wildlife Management Areas, is nearby a State Scientific Natural Area and areas purchased by the state for wetland mitigation.

- Consultant Procurement and Project Scoping
- Community and Stakeholder Engagement (USF&WS, USACOE, Interior, USDOT, MnDOT, MnDNR, cities, tribal communities, landowners, businesses, residents)
- Alignment refinement
- Environmental Review & Consultation with SHPO
- Complete Predesign Review through the Dept. of Administration
- Technical and Engineering - Preliminary Design (30 percent design plans)
- Facility Cost Engineering Estimates
- Final Report Document and 30% Engineering Design

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Consultant Procurement and Selection, Final Contract Scoping, Contract Execution, Project Initiation, Kickoff Meetings	December 31, 2027
Data Collection, Community/Stakeholder Engagement (throughout), Alignment refinement, Environmental Review, SHPO Consultation, Preliminary Design	December 31, 2029
Preliminary Engineering Design (30%), DOA Review, Cost Estimates, Final Report	December 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Allison Wagner	Houston County EDA	Project Partner	No
Michelle Quinn	City of Houston - Clerk - Administrator	Project Partner	No
Lindsey Martell	City of Hokah - Clerk - Administrator	Project Partner	No
Kent Skaar	Minnesota Department of Natural Resource	Project Partner	No
Louise Thompson	Minnesota Department of Natural Resource	Project 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.

Published final report will be sent to LCCMR staff for dissemination and published on the 3 city websites and the Houston County Website. The final report will be presented to the public and all agency stakeholders in a public meeting. The report will contain a "Funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund" statement and logo. All materials related to the project will include the ENRTF logo and attribution language.

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?

If funded, it positions the three communities/county to seek construction funding from federal and state resources that include federal discretionary grants, congressionally designated spending, state bonding bill(s), other DNR trails programs, ENRTF and local funds from the county and cities for eventual construction and habitat protection/restoration projects. By completing the proposed scope, a feasible construction project will be supported in the final report and 30 percent plans. The three cities and county are collaborating on several funding requests including a FY26 Federal BUILD Grant application and a legislatively initiated stand-alone bonding request.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Lawrence Kirch

Job Title: Community Development Director

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

Mr. Kirch has over 39 years of regional, county and municipal planning experience and holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Geology from Winona State University and a Master's Degree in Urban Planning from the University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee as well as a Master's Degree in Philanthropy and Development from St. Mary's University in Winona, MN. Mr. Kirch is a certified planner (AICP) and Certified Transportation Planner (CTP) by the American Planning Association/American Institute of Certified Planners. Mr. Kirch also holds a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) certification from the Association of State Floodplain Managers and a Professional Transportation Planner (PTP) certification from the Institute of Transportation Engineers. Mr. Kirch has been a project manager for county comprehensive plans, municipal comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, brownfield redevelopment plans, transportation corridor plans, and natural area master plans. Mr. Kirch has extensive experience in facilitation and leading collaborative multi-disciplinary teams through such planning processes including being responsible for multi-million-dollar budgets and programs that includes supervisory management of departments of 20-25 personnel. Mr. Kirch is the lead staff for the cities of La Crescent, Hokah, Houston and Houston County for the Root River Trail Extension - Citizens Exploratory Committee. That committee operates under a Memorandum of Agreement to Jointly Cooperate, and the four entities are in the process of developing a Joint Powers Agreement for this project.

Organization: City of La Crescent

Organization Description:

Local Unit of Government - Municipality. La Crescent is applying on behalf of Houston County and the cities of La Crescent, Houston and Hokah, MN. La Crescent was founded in 1851 and incorporated as a city in 1857 and is known as the Apple Capital of Minnesota. La Crescent is the largest city in Houston County with a population of 5,270.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Professional Services including Preliminary Engineering, Environmental review process, Stakeholder Engagement, permitting, final report				15		\$742,000
							Sub Total	\$742,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
	Trail Easement Acquisition	Parcels: 8 Miles: 2						\$50,000
							Sub Total	\$50,000
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-

Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$792,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	City of La Crescent Operating Budget/In-kind staff support	Staff costs for Project Manager, City Finance Director, City Administrator, City Attorney, Sustainability Coordinator.	Pending	\$270,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$270,000
			Funds Total	\$270,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,062,000

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
A&K Development 05.0175.000 (Wieser Bros.)	Houston	Wetlands, former rail bed, open water, restoration of wetlands	Easement - Other	21	-	\$5,000	Private	MnDOT or MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
BTZ (Zenke) 08.0265.000	Houston	Wetlands	Easement - Other	7.17	-	\$2,500	Private	MnDOT or MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
CPKC ROW 08.0261.000	Houston	Some wetlands, mostly MnDOT and CPKC ROW	Easement - Other	6	-	\$10,000	Private	MnDOT or MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
David and Jennifer Faas 05.0287.001	Houston	Wetlands, 100% former rail bed	Easement - Other	5.91	-	\$2,500	Private	MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
Houston County ROW 05.0258.001 County Road 7 ROW	Houston	public roadway adjacent to Root River	Easement - Other	3.9	-	-	Public	MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
James R. Chapel 05.0186.000; 05.0188.000; 05.0194.000	Houston	Wetlands, former rail bed,	Easement - Other	64	-	\$20,000	Private	MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
John Lehmann 05.0179.000	Houston	Wetlands, former rail bed	Easement - Other	52	-	\$10,000	Private	MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
MnDOT Parcels- ROW 08.0263.000; 08.0269.001; 98.0267.002	Houston	Wetlands, open water,	Easement - Other	10	-	-	Public	MnDOT or MnDNR or County	Has Not Begun
Totals				169.98	0	\$50,000			

Fee Acquisition

1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.

The parcels were selected based on the well-studied corridor, most likely alignment, least impact to the environment, existing public rights-of-way and former rail bed properties.

2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.

2011 DNR Master Plan for the Extension of the Root River State Trail, La Crescent Active Transportation Plan, Active Transportation Corridor Plan, DNR slope/cross section analysis, La Crescent Downtown Plan, MPO regional transportation Plans, MNDOT and MnDOT District 6 Multimodal plans as high priority corridor, Mississippi River Trail/U.S. Bike Route 45.

3. For any parcels acquired in fee title, a restoration and management plan must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.

We have not identified fee title at this time and only easement acquisition. If owners wish to sell or donate lands, the city will prepare a restoration and management plan. Many of the parcels are suitable for wetland restoration and are adjacent to USF&W lands, Root River WMA, and the floodplain of the Root River. Restoration will improve the entire floodplain and watershed.

4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.

Houston County is a member of the Memorandum of Agreement to Jointly Cooperate and a strong supporter of this application. County Board approval will be obtained for conveyance of any parcels that are transferred to any public agency including the DNR, DOT or possibly the federal government.

5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction.

The cities and county will obtain written approval from the DNR Commissioner 10 days prior to any final acquisition transaction.

Easement (Other) Acquisition

1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including an explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.

The parcels were selected based on the well-studied corridor, most likely alignment, least impact to the environment, existing public rights-of-way and former rail bed properties.

2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified for the acquisition purposes you propose. Include the URL to the plan if one is available.

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We have not identified fee title at this time and only easement acquisition. If owners wish to sell or donate lands, the city will prepare a restoration and management plan. Many of the parcels are suitable for wetland restoration and are adjacent to USF&W lands, Root River WMA, and the floodplain of the Root River. Restoration will improve the entire floodplain and watershed.

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Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [44ed6ada-1e2.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

2011 Root River State Trail Master Plan - Houston to La Crescent, Figure 2 Regional Setting - Unfinished Corridor Highlighted...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2024 Audited Financials La Crescent	52e3e902-9fc.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
La Crescent Council - Mayor Letter	ec23d404-a36.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Support Letter from Senator Jeremy Miller	d1955b76-a0e.pdf
Fed BUILD FY 26 App Project Description	d5fe0b2e-a4b.pdf
FY 26 Fed BUILD LOS For Root River Trail	6db7c962-761.pdf
Merged LCCMR LOS	b66bc2cb-340.pdf
Budget Supplement La Crescent	a1041886-da8.xlsx
La Crescent Cap Const Project Questionnaire	4fa3e32e-670.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Fee Acquisition, Easement (Other) Acquisition,

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

N/A

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

No

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

N/A

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

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

Yes

Is the purpose of the acquisition for construction of a building(s), trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration, either now or in the future?

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:

Bill Waller, City Administrator, Tim Hruska PE City Engineer with WHKS, Kent Skaar and Louise Thompson MnDNR (general feedback and letter of support.

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