



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-206

Proposal Title: Pollinator Pathways: Habitat Restoration and Connecting Communities

Project Manager Information

Name: Tony Wotzka

Organization: Dakota County

Office Telephone: (952) 891-7966

Email: tony.wotzka@co.dakota.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Restore natural areas along the North Creek Greenway to enhance biodiversity and pollinator habitat, and support green space access and environmental education through trailhead enhancements and a pollinator art exhibit.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$652,000

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): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

The North Creek Regional Greenway is a planned 14-mile walk and bicycle trail, habitat and water quality corridor in Dakota County. Following the North Creek through Eagan, Apple Valley, Lakeville, Farmington, and Empire Township, connecting to important regional destinations: Lebanon Hills Regional Park, the Minnesota Zoo, Downtown Farmington, and the Vermillion River. Although 10 miles of trail are complete, much of the surrounding habitat corridor consists of degraded natural communities. The greenway also lacks information to increase visitors' understanding of Minnesota's valuable native landscapes and natural heritage.

The 1.5 mile greenway segment in Apple Valley adjacent to the Minnesota Zoo and School of Environmental Studies (SES) presents a unique opportunity to restore habitat and expand environmental education in a location accessible to the 1.4 million annual visitors (FY 2025) to the Minnesota Zoo and of the nearly 25,000 zoo visitors (FY 2025) who live within biking distance (6 miles) of the Zoo. Proposed restoration and improved trail access amenities will also strengthen ongoing community engagement by the Minnesota Zoo, SES and Great River Greening (GRG). The presence of the federally endangered rusty patched bumble bee further underscores the importance of targeted habitat restoration and long-term stewardship.

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 proposed project will restore 52.5 acres (ac) of natural areas along the North Creek Greenway in northern Apple Valley:

- 26.1ac of oak savanna between the Zoo and Johnny Cake Ridge Road
- 5.2ac of prairie; 3.5 acres around the Zoo parking area, 1.4 pocket prairie at the SES, and .2 of prairie and infiltration basin at the Zoo entrance
- 12.5ac of deciduous woodland in Findlay Park North
- 8.6ac of oak forest; 6.6 near SES and 2.0 in Findlay Park South

This project will also enhance the existing neighborhood access to the North Creek Greenway on McAndrews Road and Zoo Boulevard with improvements to the existing greenway gateway. Proposed improvements include a permanent, public art installation that will interpret the significance of native pollinator habitats. Improvements to the existing access plaza include benches, an updated trail kiosk, bike fix it station, and pollinator plantings surrounding the public art piece and plaza. The greenway access improvements will complement existing and proposed pollinator habitat restoration and educational areas within the Minnesota Zoo and SES campus. Support for this project protects the County's existing natural resources and encourages the future expansion of regional restoration areas.

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 restoration of 52.5 acres of native plant species and pollinator habitat and enhancements along the greenway through the Minnesota Zoo property will provide:

- Increased biodiversity which leads to improved water and air quality and ecosystem functioning
- Increased habitat for pollinator species
- Improved trail user experience and opportunities for pollinators and native landscape education
- Access to bike amenities and establishment of the trailhead as a local and regional destination
- Coordination and partnership with ongoing environmental education and stewardship efforts by the Minnesota Zoo Pollinator Conservation Program, SES, the City of Apple Valley, Dakota County, and Great River Greening

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Habitat Restoration

Activity Budget: \$487,842

Activity Description:

The primary objective of this Activity 1 is to complete the native restoration work necessary within the identified areas along the North Creek Greenway to support native wildlife habitat and ecological functioning of the four natural area landscape types. Great River Greening, the collaborative (subaward) organization, will take the lead on this activity, with Dakota County staff supporting and providing project oversight.

Tasks will include completion of site surveys and Natural Heritage Inventory Survey (NHIS) and consultation with permitting agencies, which will set the stage for defining objectives for each restoration site (target native species and measures of success). An advertisement for bidding the restoration work will be coordinated and distributed to the public. Restoration activities will include invasive species removal, soil preparation, plant and tree protection, erosion control, planting, seeding, and monitoring to restore the four identified biodiversity areas.

Great River Greening will also facilitate and host two volunteer events as part of the restoration tasks, which will involve student participation and collaboration with SES.

Completion of the tasks within this activity will enhance pollinator habitat, especially for the rusty patched bumble bee and other vital pollinators, as well as improve ecosystem services and functionality within the restoration areas.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Site Surveys completed	November 30, 2027
NHIS / Permitting and Agency Review	January 31, 2028
Objectives for each restoration site defined	February 28, 2028
Advertisement for bid for restoration activities	March 31, 2028
Restoration work complete	June 30, 2030
Execution of two volunteer restoration events	June 30, 2030
Project closeout	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Neighborhood Gateway

Activity Budget: \$74,158

Activity Description:

The primary objective of Activity 2 is to fully enhance the existing North Creek Greenway trailhead at McAndrews Rd and Zoo Blvd to be a Neighborhood Gateway with improvements that will support pollinator habitats and raise awareness of this vital topic with trail and zoo visitors.

Tasks will include preparing and distributing an RFP or RFQ for design services to prepare and finalize the site design, obtain necessary approvals, and advertise for bid the construction contractor. Pre-Construction and Construction processes will include permitting, securing funds, construction oversight and administration. Minor removals, earthwork, expansion of concrete surfacing, signage (interpretive and a new wayfinding kiosk), site furnishings (artist-designed benches and a bicycle fix-it station), and enhanced pollinator gardens at the Neighborhood Gateway will be conducted or installed.

Completion of tasks within this activity will bring increased accessibility and visibility of the North Creek Greenway, entrance to the Minnesota Zoo, and will raise awareness of pollinators through signage and plantings to this location.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
RFP/RFQ for Neighborhood Gateway Design	September 30, 2027
Selection of Consultant	November 30, 2027
ESA Checklist and Records Check, permitting and agency review	January 31, 2028
Approval of final plans for Neighborhood Gateway design	September 30, 2028
Advertisement for bid for Neighborhood Gateway construction	October 31, 2028
Selection of Contractors for Pre-Construction and Construction	December 31, 2028
Pre-Construction Processes, permitting, funds secured, Construction, oversight and administration complete	June 30, 2030
Project closeout, opening of Neighborhood Gateway for public use	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Pollinator Art and Interpretation

Activity Budget: \$90,000

Activity Description:

The primary objective of Activity 3 is to develop and install public art with the theme of pollinator awareness to the Neighborhood Gateway. Tasks will include preparation and distribution of an RFP or RFQ to hire a Pollinator Artist Consultant. The consultant's primary responsibility will be to facilitate a transparent and guided process to select a qualified and appropriate artist who will design, create, and install public art piece(s).

Completion of this activity will result in an inviting, vibrant, and artistic addition to the Neighborhood Gateway, serving as a beacon to welcome visitors to the Minnesota Zoo and provide a landmark destination for those traveling along the North Creek Greenway.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
RFP/RFQ for Pollinator Artist Consultant	September 30, 2027
Selection of Consultant	November 30, 2027
Approval of public artist selection	April 30, 2028
Installation of the Pollinator Art and Interpretation	June 30, 2030
Project closeout	June 30, 2030

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.

Information about this project and ENRTF funding will be presented on Dakota County's parks website, during interpretive programs, with interested media and to natural resource and land management professionals using either the ENRTF logo or attribution language. In addition, Dakota County will display the ENRTF logo at the enhanced trailhead and on interpretive signage.

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 elements of this grant will be accomplished through full restoration and enhancements as proposed. Additional restoration and capital improvements identified will be funded through the annual capital improvement budgeting process. Long-term maintenance and management of the restoration and improvements will be performed by the respective land and facility owners. These activities are funded by tax levy and external grant funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Reintroduction Of Bison To Spring Lake Park Reserve	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08q	\$560,000
Completing the Mississippi River Greenway: Dakota County	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$657,000
Spring Lake Park Reserve Restoration and River Access	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$2,925,000
Cannon River Preservation and Access	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09a	\$2,717,000
Lake Byllesby Regional Park Restoration and Recreation	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09i	\$1,120,000
Thompson County Park Restoration and Accessibility Improvements	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j	\$867,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Tony Wotzka

Job Title: Greenways Manager

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

In Tony's current role as the County Greenways Manager and previous positions, he has had a wealth of opportunities to work with internal and external stakeholders on projects from planning to post-construction maintenance. Tony's primary role has been to provide leadership, supervision, and support of project teams, and coordination with project partners to deliver the Greenway program and projects for the County. In these roles Tony has been responsible for developing project plans, budget needs, project schedules, agreements, and communications strategy; and for providing project management oversight to ensure the plans align with the project scope, risk, and complexity. In these positions, Tony has led various projects and agency initiatives that involved project management and technical design oversight including budgeting, project stakeholder meetings, construction plan development and administration, as well as asset

management planning and coordination. These roles have required coordination with multiple stakeholders; from the local volunteer group and city council to the consultant project managers, technical design staff, maintenance staff, project managers, senior leadership, and other agency leaders.

Organization: Dakota County

Organization Description:

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the Dakota County Park System serves the state's third most populous county. With more than 5,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways, Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system that exists to help meet the needs of over 400,000 county residents. Dakota County Parks has an active and professional capital development program that oversees park development to provide residents with facilities to enable natural resource-based recreation, a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing hundreds of acres of prairie, forest and woodland, and a professional outdoor education program that manages and interprets the cultural sites within the Dakota County Park System.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Natural Resources Specialist		Project Oversight - Restoration			25%	0.07		\$5,460
							Sub Total	\$5,460
Contracts and Services								
Great River Greening	Subaward	Project management and coordination of the contracted habitat restoration of the North Creek Greenway.				0.75		\$72,300
Public Art Consultant	Service Contract	Manage a process to select and direct a public artist for the Pollinator Art and Interpretation				0.1		\$15,000
Neighborhood Gateway Designer	Service Contract	Landscape architecture and engineering services to design the Neighborhood Gateway.				0.25		\$15,000
Public Artist	Service Contract	Creating and installing public art				0.5		\$75,000
Restoration Contractor	Service Contract	Performing restoration work				4		\$410,082
Neighborhood Gateway Contractor	Service Contract	Construction of Neighborhood Gateway				0.25		\$59,158
							Sub Total	\$646,540
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$652,000

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	Dakota Co - Greenway Enhancement Set-Aside (CPA + TAA)	Pre-Design/Design, Restoration, Pre-Construction/Construction, Contingency	Secured	\$217,334
			Non State Sub Total	\$217,334
			Funds Total	\$217,334

Total Project Cost: \$869,334

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
Findlay North	Dakota	Deciduous Woodland	Restoration	12.5	-	-	Public	Apple Valley	Has Not Begun
Findlay South	Dakota	Oak Forest	Restoration	2	-	-	Public	Apple Valley	Has Not Begun
SES North	Dakota	Oak Forest	Restoration	3.6	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
SES Pocket Prairie	Dakota	Prairie	Restoration	1.4	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
SES South	Dakota	Oak Forest	Restoration	3	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo Connector Prairie	Dakota	Prairie	Restoration	0.9	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo Entrance Prairie and Infiltration Basin	Dakota	Prairie	Restoration	0.34	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo Lot Pollinator Buffers	Dakota	Prairie	Restoration	2.6	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo Lot Storage Area	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	7	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo N Savanna 1	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	2.1	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo N Savanna 2	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	1.3	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo N Savanna 3	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	3.5	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo S Savanna 1	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	7.5	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo S Savanna 2	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	1.6	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Zoo S Savanna 3	Dakota	Oak Savanna	Restoration	3.1	-	-	Public	MN Zoo	Has Not Begun
Totals				52.44	0	-			

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 that is in public ownership by the City of Apple Valley, Dakota County, or by the State of Minnesota.

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.

Proposed restoration objectives are specific to management for deciduous woodland, oak forest, oak savanna and prairie. The primary goals of the restoration will be to maximize biodiversity and increase community resilience, conserve and promote species in greatest conservation need, enhance water quality, restore degraded landscapes to native plant communities, and remove invasive species. Reseeding and replanting to support prairie restoration, managing nonnative species, and thinning tree canopies to support targeted native tree species are anticipated activities.

Dakota County completed a North Creek Greenway Master Plan in 2011. The process included an inventory of existing resources and development of a plan for the greenway that is supported by this project. The North Creek Greenway Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP), completed in 2022, will guide restoration priorities and activities. This plan will be updated as needed or approximately every five to seven years. The NRMP includes sections on existing natural resources, priority features and recommendations, restoration efforts and work plans, and strategic partnerships. Plans are kept on file electronically and are available to the public on the Dakota County website. The County's Natural Resources Program includes 7.5 full-time restoration project managers who work together to identify and conduct projects based on natural resources management plan priorities.

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.

Dakota County utilizes and follows the guidelines of BWSR's "Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines" in all restoration and enhancement efforts in the County parks, greenways, conservation easements, and projects lead by Dakota County on other publicly-owned land. We will continue to restore and enhance these proposed projects in accordance with these guidelines. For instance, we will be in keeping with the guidelines for seed and plant source, diversity levels, cultivar use, protecting plant communities, preventing the introduction of invasive species, and planting and management strategies for climate change.

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.

Dakota County is committed to supporting long-term maintenance and management efforts along County greenway corridors, regardless of land ownership. The Dakota County Natural Systems Plan and Dakota County Greenways Plan, both currently under development, will explore cost share and other funding mechanisms to support public land managers in maintaining restored areas.

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

Dakota County plans to notify the Conservation Corps of Minnesota about this project opportunity and will give consideration to employing a crew from Conservation Corps of Minnesota to work on this project where it aligns with their skills, mission, and equipment.

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.

The County has a robust monitoring and evaluation program that is utilized for restoration and enhancement project sites. After the proposed project is completed, the County, Great River Greening, and respective land managers from MN Zoo and City of Apple Valley will make an initial evaluation of whether the activity was successful or not. If something was not successful, the County will work to uncover the issue and then remedy the situation in the future. Land managers will continue to intentionally monitor and evaluate the sites annually. Dakota County staff will provide assistance as needed in alignment with the Natural Systems Plan and Greenway Plan (currently under development).

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [2916e673-5ab.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Project map highlighting different restoration areas by type and the location of the neighborhood gateway trailhead enhancements. Also indicates location of the North Creek Greenway, Zoo, SES, and Findlay Park North and South, and ownership of relevant parcels....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	1387478b-996.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Dakota County Board Resolution	0d36db1f-028.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Project Map with Parcel Name & Acreage Labels	b6adc7e5-d25.pdf
Resolution of Support, Dakota County	52b9e5bb-02f.pdf
Pollinator Pathways_Budget Addendum	6a560174-4dd.pdf
North Creek Greenway Master Plan (2011)	785bfef2-09e.pdf
North Creek Natural Resources Plan (2022)	a38a79ad-3cd.pdf
Letter of Support, Great River Greening	34006f25-629.pdf
Letter of Support, School of Environmental Studies	47cdab75-038.pdf
Letter of Support, Minnesota Zoo	9a80eb59-6a6.pdf
Resolution of Support, City of Apple Valley	311b221a-bc1.pdf
Confirmation of SHPO Review Request	64161640-27e.msg
Project Summary	c0de1a76-1fa.pdf
Pollinator Pathways_Capital Const Project Questionnaire	2db682fc-5e5.pdf

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?

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

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:

Niki Geisler (Dakota County), Jody Rader (HKGi), Rita Trapp (HKGi)

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