



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-361

Proposal Title: Protecting the Future of the Superior Hiking Trail

Project Manager Information

Name: Lisa Luukkala

Organization: Superior Hiking Trail Association

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: We seek to ensure a bright future for Minnesota's premier hiking trail by creating and implementing a robust Trail Protection Program that will secure the Superior Hiking Trail corridor.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$200,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Land (F)

Project Location

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

Region(s): NE

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

Region(s): NE

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.

The Superior Hiking Trail is vulnerable to losing critical sections of its trail alignment due to changing land use, development and changing ownership. Over 45 miles of the Trail is privately owned. By parcel that is 353 parcels held privately, and of those approximately 37 of them are considered parcels of concern. Parcels of concern are defined as currently held in private ownership with no filed easement, no adjacent public lands to reroute the trail, topography limitation, and/or if lost could lead to extensive reroutes of the Superior Hiking Trail that could take years and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

We've addressed this looming challenge by completing title reviews on 145 private parcels, creating an official vulnerable parcels list, and developing a land acquisition policy. But the most critical next step is finding a partner who can help us expedite this critical work, and we have now found that with the Minnesota Land Trust. Our organizations have committed to a pursue a multi-year partnership to develop a comprehensive Trail Protection Plan and systems, and launch the Program for the Superior Hiking Trail, meeting both our both organizations' goals along the North Shore.

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 project will build a Trail Protection Program, that not only addresses the current issues, but takes the long view and studies proactive, future-forward strategies to protect the Trail and conserve important lands of the North Shore. This will include:

- (1) Development of a Trail Protection Plan to decrease the number of vulnerable sections of the SHT by creating a formal framework to vet and track parcels of concern across the Trail Corridor, develop a decision-making framework of various approaches to trail protection (i.e. easement, acquisition, conservation easement, etc.), formalize outreach procedures when working with landowners and educating the general public. Once the Plan is complete, begin implementation.
- (2) Identify Superior Hiking Trail's "Green Corridor" conservation priorities. First we will conduct a Viewshed Analysis, that will help create a vision for land protection along the North Shore among conservation agencies, NGOs and local units of government for preserving critical habitats and enhancing the wilderness experience for users of the Hiking Trail
- (3) Create an Education and Outreach Campaign to engage SHTA and MLT supporters on issues that impact recreation and conservation. Using our shared values to increase public stewardship of public lands and water, we will create multi-platform messaging.

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?

Trail Protection means ensuring that the continuity and immersive hiking experience of the Superior Hiking Trail is conserved for the benefit of the hiking public today and into the future. By strategically partnering with Minnesota Land Trust we can proactively coordinate conservation activities along the North Shore, not just with our two entities, but with many other potential partners.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Addressing long-term protection of the Superior Hiking Trail through a Trail Protection Plan

Activity Budget: \$75,708

Activity Description:

Develop of a Trail Protection Program, with consultation with Minnesota Land Trust through a comprehensive planning process. The Plan will be a systematic approach to landowner and land manager relationships. Using existing data analysis of our existing easements and agreements, The Plan will be built out a clear process of how to increase the number of permanent trail easements with landowners, evaluate parcels for purchase and protection and navigate the land acquisition and/or easement process (appraisal, negotiation, closing, etc.) when prioritized, monitoring parcels that appear on the market, perform landowner outreach as well as utilizing co-created branding and communications tools (digital and print) to inform landowners of the benefits of protecting the SHT, along with creating the opportunity to protect their properties surrounding the Trail through conservation easements.

Facilitate Trail Protection Plan Workshop with MLT: Staff from both organizations will participate in a three all-day workshops to develop a system which outlines guidelines and structure of the Trail Protection Program. Identifying needs for the Program, process from engaging landowners to securing easement through negotiation or acquisition, prioritizing existing unprotected parcels, and monitoring "parcels of concern." The Plan will be developed and implementation will immediately follow, including landowner outreach.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Trail Protection Development Workshop #1	September 30, 2027
Trail Protection Development Workshop #2	October 31, 2027
Trail Protection Development Workshop #3	December 31, 2027
First draft of the Trail Protection Program Plan complete	January 31, 2028
Final draft of Trail Protection Plan complete and presented to SHTA Board of Directors	March 31, 2028
Implement Plan - Outreach goal of forging active conversations with 30 landowners	July 31, 2028
Secured a minimum of five new permanent easements along the Trail Corridor	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Identify Superior Hiking Trail “Green Corridor” conservation priorities

Activity Budget: \$63,363

Activity Description:

Work with local conservation organizations, agencies, local units of government and community members to identify priority parcels important to create a variable width “corridor” of protected lands that conserves the environment that surrounds the Trail and preserves the rugged and wildland experience unique to the Superior Hiking Trail.

SHTA and Minnesota Land Trust will facilitate a series of meetings and workshops to strategize with land managers, state and federal agencies, and local units of government to determine conservation and protection priorities through a re-iterative process of priority setting, map analysis and discussion. A comprehensive map analysis will be completed by a GIS professional using spatial analysis and mapping services using extant data sets such as Native Plant Communities and MCBS priority sites, trout streams, watershed protection areas, existing landownership and others to inform working group priority setting. This task includes developing a GIS viewshed analysis for the full length of the Hiking Trail alignment to identify scenic vistas.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Advertise RFP for GIS mapping consulting services	September 30, 2027
GIS mapping consultant chosen and under agreement	October 31, 2027
Hiking Trail viewshed analysis complete	January 31, 2028
Initial formation and convening the working group (quarterly meetings, in total 8)	January 31, 2028
Completion of outreach priorities map	October 31, 2028
Outreach inquiries mailed and initiated to area landowners/land managers	December 31, 2028

Activity 3: Education and outreach campaign for recreation and conservation

Activity Budget: \$60,929

Activity Description:

This collaborative education and outreach campaign will focus around “cross educating” Superior Hiking Trail members, hikers, conservationists and Minnesota Land Trust supporters on issues that impact recreation on the Trail and conservation on the land surrounding it. The campaign would create co-branded educational messages that work to funnel constituents along a series of learning moments on trail stewardship and conservation. The result will be a more rounded constituency looking to protect and conserve one of Minnesota’s best recreational assets -- the Superior Hiking Trail.

- 1.) Build communications structure between the SHTA and MLT.
- 2.) Define the Education Outreach Campaign and the messages it would like to communicate.
- 3.) Implement baseline survey that measures current knowledge of trail stewardship and conservation on the SHT.
- 4.) Create the assets and tools that will be needed to communicate the messages and content the partnership is trying to engage the public with.
- 5.) Implement the Outreach and Education campaign both regionally as well as statewide through direct-education opportunities, online materials, and other media channels that are most effective and impactful.
- 6.) Track education and outreach effectiveness through survey with SHT users post-campaign implementation.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Initiate monthly partner meetings to further define collaboration goals	October 31, 2027
Administer baseline survey to SHTA and MLT users and member	December 31, 2027
Education & Outreach Campaign Plan Complete	January 31, 2028
Construct Education Tools (Engage outside contractors as needed)	February 28, 2028
Implement strategies in the Education & Outreach Campaign Plan	May 31, 2028
Complete post surveys with SHTA and MLT users and members	April 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Hansi Johnson	Minnesota Land Trust	Director of Engagement	No
Nate Eide	Lake County, Minnesota	Land Commissioner	No
Paul Gagnon	North Country Trail Association	Trail Protection Director	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.

The Final Trail Protection Plan will be housed and managed by the Superior Hiking Trail Association's Trail Protection Program and due to data privacy, will be available upon request by the project partners.

A large portion of this project is focused on the creation of public and targeted-audience materials for the Trail Protection Program -- including brochures and toolkits. Additionally, Activity #3, "Education and Outreach Campaign for Recreation and Conservation" will produce an array of public materials for education toolkits used by SHTA's Trail Ambassador Program, digital materials on both SHTA and MLT's websites, along with a robust social media plan implemented by both entities. All video content will be available through SHTA's YouTube Channel. Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund will be acknowledged through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications per the ENRTF Acknowledgment Guidelines. All digital and print public education and outreach materials produced by this project will include recognition of ENRTF as a funding partner.

In addition, ENRTF funded project updates will be shared through SHTA communication platforms: (1) SHTA's monthly e-newsletter that is sent out to 11,000 individuals. There is no cost to receive this newsletter and majority of those who sign up are supporters and users of the Trail. We recognize funders and provide project updates through this publication. (2) SHTA's twice monthly Ridgeline publication that is sent out to 3,000 households. This publication is for members of the Association and we recognize our grant funders and highlight project in each publication. (3) Press releases, social media and earn media around the project. Upon completion of the project we will engage the media through a press release and/or a media event to share the story of this project and its funding partners. (4) Physical signage at the project location(s).

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?

A shared vision of for land protection along the North Shore among conservation agencies, NGOs and units of government for preserving critical habitat and enhancing the wilderness experience will benefit the hundreds of thousands of Trail users, and all Minnesotans. Anchored around the protection of the Trail, this project will have stacked benefits of increasing collaboration among interest groups, resulting in impactful project outcomes around recreational access, land protection and stewardship education. Combined and coordinated implementation of conservation

activities reduces competition for resources and speeds completion of a corridor plan in advance of the increasing pace of incompatible development.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Plumbing The Muddy Depths Of Superior Hiking Trail	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$187,000
Renewing Access to an Iconic North Shore Vista	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08m	\$197,000
Addressing Erosion Along High Use River Loops	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08n	\$368,000
SHT Bridge, Boardwalk and Trailhead Renewal	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08f	\$532,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Lisa Luokkala

Job Title: Executive Director

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

Lisa Luokkala has served as the Executive Director of the Superior Hiking Trail Association since 2020, prior to that time she was the Senior Parks Planner for the City of Duluth. In her current role she oversees multiple grant-funded trail infrastructure construction projects annually, alongside a highly proficient team of staff. She also led the organization through their first ever Master Plan, a guiding document for the next 10 years of prioritization care and renewal of the SHT.

For over 20 years Lisa Luokkala has secured grant funding and executed grant-funded project and programs from private, state and federal sources. Luokkala has 12 years of experience in construction project management, including complex multi-year, multi-million recreation facility projects.

Organization: Superior Hiking Trail Association

Organization Description:

Superior Hiking Trail Association is the non-profit organization that manages, maintains, promotes and supports the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT). The SHT is a nationally-recognized 300-mile long natural footpath running from the Ontario border to the Wisconsin border, passing through Duluth. Started in 1986, the SHT features 94 backcountry campsites and several loops and spurs. A beloved and popular Minnesota recreational amenity, the Trail hosts over 400,000 user visits annually between May and November. The SHT is enjoyed by people age 6 to 86 -- long-distance hikers and day hikers, trail runners, church youth groups, and adventure travel enterprises all enjoy the stunning scenic beauty and the physical challenge that the SHT affords.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Trail Stewardship Director		Lead the project management, consultants hiring and management, conduct priority land communications and related legal actions			25%	0.7		\$57,208
Administrator		Administration			0%	0.06		\$3,000
Communications Director		Trail Protection Communications Plan development, coordinate sub-contractors for SHTA related trail protection updates -- webpage updates, print media, videography, etc.			25%	0.3		\$24,104
							Sub Total	\$84,312
Contracts and Services								
TBD -- GIS Mapping Consulting Services	Service Contract	Spatial analysis and mapping services using extant data sets such as Native Plant Communities and MCBS priority sites, trout streams, watershed protection areas, existing landownership and others to inform working group priority setting. This task includes developing a GIS watershed analysis for the full length of the Hiking Trail alignment				0.15		\$50,000
Real Estate Attorney	Service Contract	A real estate attorney will be engaged to assist SHTA staff with the development of trail easements and/or in a rare case, an acquisition. They will review all easement agreements, help negotiate any changes requested by either party.				0.2		\$25,000
TBD Communications Consult(s)	Service Contract	Technical communications including graphic design for the program, podcast production (8-part series to educate public on goals of trail protection and recreating responsibly) and SHTA website/webpage updates to include increase content about Trail Protection Program				0.3		\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$90,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								

							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
	Trail Easement Acquisition	Parcels: 5 1.25						\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel for SHTA staff with land managers related to the Trail Protection Program development and implementation (10 trip/year x 2 years, average of 100 miles/round trip, two staffers @ federal mileage rate estimated at \$0.75/mile) Staff meals and lodging if needed as part of meetings.	Host project partner meetings and workshop, engage land managers					\$4,500
							Sub Total	\$4,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Trail Protection Program Brochures and Landowner Toolkit: 1,000 public ed pamphlets, 300 landowner pamphlets, 250 landowner toolkits	A deliverable of the project is to create messaging/content that will then be shared via diverse platforms to inform the general public about Trail Protection on the SHTA and also targeted education and outreach materials for landowners and managers.					\$3,188
	Printing	Trail Protection Educational Mailing to 3,000 households x 2 mailings + postage	Target SHTA members, supporters, and specific SHTA corridor communities with educational materials about the Trail Protection					\$8,000

			Program and ways to get involved/engaged.					
							Sub Total	\$11,188
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$200,000

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				
In-Kind	Minnesota Land Trust	Minnesota Land Trust has committed to support this initiative through in-kind donation of staff time dedicated to the deliverables of this grant and the success of SHTA's Trail Protection Program.	Secured	\$100,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$100,000
			Funds Total	\$100,000

Total Project Cost: \$300,000

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
				-	-	-			
Totals				0	0	-			

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.

In 2023, SHTA hired out the professional title review of 145 private parcels along the SHT corridor with questionable or unidentified trail easements. 72 of the 145 were in need of future study and easement negotiation. From that list SHTA was able to determine a list of 45 priority "parcels of concern," meaning these are parcels that if lost could lead to a severe loss of trail connectivity. Parcels of concern are defined as currently held in private ownership with no filed easement, no adjacent public lands to reroute the trail or topography limitation, and if lost could lead to extensive reroutes of the Superior Hiking Trail that could take years and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The 45 parcels then have been ranked by order of vulnerability in relationship to land use changes or ownership changes known to SHTA. One of the outputs of this project is to further refine the existing "Parcels of Concern" through further risk assessment based on further engagement of project stakeholders (land managers, NGOs, local units of government, conservation groups, etc).

SHTA has the intent of completing an additional 5 trail easements during the duration of this grant. No ENRTF support will go towards the purchase of the easements. ENRTF funds will be used only for attorneys fees and title fees.

To-date, SHTA does not paid for easements, but works exclusively with willing landowners to gain a permanent easement to the Superior Hiking Trail. SHTA acknowledges that Trail easement for a fee, or land acquisition purchases may be necessary in our future.

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.

2024 Superior Hiking Trail Master Plan, SHTA's 2023 Parcel Review Report (internal only)

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.

While SHTA does not wish to see acquisition, only permanent trail easements, sometimes the only course of action to protect a section of the Trail is through its purchase. Because of this, SHTA has develop a Land Acquisition, Transfer, and Dispossession Policy, passed by it's Board of Directors on March 15, 2025.

In context to the question a management plan, below the language directly cited from our Policy:

"Management Plans:

SHTA shall have a complete management plan for fee title lands within 12 months of acquisition and revise each management plan following the addition of new parcels or significant changes to conservation values, use, or natural features. Management plans shall include a discussion of purpose, conservation values, significance, goals, objectives, and activities needed to achieve goals and adhere to restrictions (e.g., via funder or donor). Management plans shall describe current and desired future conditions and include relevant maps.

The detail of a management plan shall depend on the nature of the land and SHTA's intentions for the land. Simple, "boilerplate" plans may be used in instances where the land was purchased only for its value as a strategic trail link, or where SHTA is not the final recipient of the land. Real estate acquired solely for investment purposes shall have a management plan specific to the sound upkeep, temporary use (including rental or lease), and strategy for dispossession of the real estate.

SHTA may work cooperatively with other partners in creating management plans or designate management

responsibilities to those partners better positioned to handle land management duties. SHTA shall ensure that such partners manage the land consistently with SHTA policies and goals.

Inspection: SHTA shall inspect fee title lands at least once per calendar year (including during the interim management period) for potential management problems and promptly document the inspection."

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.

N/A

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.

N/A

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [1b4691b1-3e9.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

The exhibit map shows an example of a parcel series along the Trail corridor that are privately owned and currently are vulnerable because of lack of permanent easement. There are 45 parcels of concern like these along the SHTA, that if lost, could dramatically change the Trail alignment and experience....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
FY2025 990	7a1652c5-7d9.pdf
FY2025 Audited Financials	e3d5a3f4-340.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
SHTA Board Letter	ee9488fe-0cd.pdf
SHTA Board of Directors Resolution of Support	b5fb12c8-560.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Minnesota Land Trust Letter of Partnership & Support	9a92f284-f08.pdf
Lake County Letter of Support	fb3cce8b-b35.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: 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?

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

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?

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:

Lisa Luukkala

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