



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-522

Proposal Title: Protecting Priority Trout Streams for Restoration and Access

Project Manager Information

Name: John Lenczewski

Organization: Minnesota Trout Unlimited

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Protect priority trout streams by acquiring permanent easements, enabling habitat restoration of these special public waters, providing recreational access, and connecting corridors of fish and wildlife habitat.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,496,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Fish and Wildlife (D)

Project Location

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

Statewide

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.

Many of the highest priority trout streams are not being protected, preventing restoration of degraded habitat and public angling access. Every significant source of habitat restoration funding requires that the stream corridor have existing permanent protection. The lack of trout stream easements on the most important trout streams is preventing MNTU and the DNR from undertaking needed restorations.

The DNR has been unable to secure funding to acquire protective easement on more than a fraction of unprotected trout stream corridors. Minnesota's Aquatic Management Area Acquisition Plan 2008–2033 set a goal of acquiring easements along 1,500 miles of stream between 2008 and 2033, or an average of 60 miles per year. Yet the DNR has acquired less than 90 miles total during the 15-year period between 2009 and 2024. The easement acquisition rate has not increased since passage of the Legacy Amendment. ENRTF funds have not been provided to DNR since 2011.

Threats to trout streams are increasing and pressure to subdivide rural riparian land is growing, further reducing the odds of protecting the stream corridors in the future. Now is the time to act to permanently protect the stream corridors, enable habitat restorations and secure public angling access.

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

We will acquire permanent easements protecting the riparian corridors of the highest priority trout streams, enabling habitat restoration and guaranteeing public angling access. This will increase the DNR's capacity to protect these unique and scarce resources, since we'll use our own staff, experienced contractors, and private real estate practitioners rather than leaning entirely on Lands & Minerals Division staff. This work is additive and uses a different source of easement funding than DNR has used (with rare exceptions) in the past. Completed acquisitions will be donated to the MNDNR for long term management under the Aquatic Management Area program. Priority parcels include the last remaining trout streams in and near the Twin Cities metropolitan area where miles of degraded habitat cannot be restored, nor access by anglers, until easements are acquired. Also prioritized are streams near Duluth and the North Shore where permanent protection of their riparian forests is needed, as well as access to restore in-stream habitat. These conservation easements also provide angling access to these special waters. The popularity of coldwater angling continues to grow, but access to these public waters is too often through private land that anglers cannot access. Our goal is 8 miles on 4 streams.

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?

We will permanently protect the riparian areas vital to trout stream health by acquiring permanent conservation easements on targeted streams. By providing the prerequisite protection necessary to secure habitat restoration funding, the easements will also facilitate our planned enhancement of degraded habitat on these priority streams.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Acquire permanent conservation easements along trout streams

Activity Budget: \$1,496,000

Activity Description:

Meet with landowners of priority parcels along key trout streams to assess habitat quality, measure the sites to enable calculation of purchase price per DNR formula, create baseline easement reports, and secure written commitments of landowners to sell easements. Prioritize easements and initiate acquisitions. Have real estate professional conduct title examinations and searches, prepare easement documents, conduct closings, and record all real estate transaction documents. Convey completed easements to the MNDNR and transfer easement stewardship funding to dedicated account maintained by the MNDNR.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Meet with landowners to assess parcels, calculate prices, and secure commitments to sell	January 31, 2029
Prioritize easements and initiate acquisitions	January 31, 2029
Complete acquisitions using real estate professionals	June 30, 2029

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.

Once easements are recorded, we will post this news of these acquisitions (and location maps) on our website. When subsequently transferred to DNR we will inform the public via our website. We may also use social media to highlight the completed acquisitions as appropriate.

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 easements will immediately provide protection of the riparian corridors and public angling access. These acquisitions will also enable future habitat restoration work by MNTU and the MNDNR by unlocking access to Outdoor Heritage Fund and other habitat restoration funding.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: John Lenczewski

Job Title: Executive Director

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

The project manager has managed Minnesota Trout Unlimited's habitat restoration program for the past 15 years, as well as several outdoor education program grants. In his former career he practiced real estate law and is familiar with all aspects of title examination and real estate closings. This makes him well suited to hire and efficiently manage real estate professionals.

Organization: Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Organization Description:

Minnesota Trout Unlimited is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect, restore and sustain coldwater fisheries and watersheds throughout Minnesota. MNTU has completed more than 100 stream habitat projects in the past decade, most of them located on private land with permanent trout stream conservation easements. MNTU has identified priority trout streams and stream reaches for habitat restoration which cannot be restored until trout stream conservation easements are acquired. The present proposal would provide funding to acquire these easements and enable MNTU to secure funding for habitat restoration on the acquired parcels.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Executive Director		Hire and manage real estate professionals, contractors, and staff. Perform grant reporting, reimbursement tasks, and coordination with DNR.			25%	0.36		\$70,200
Habitat restoration staff		Assess fishery and habitat quality and restoration needs for prioritization.			25%	0.15		\$22,500
							Sub Total	\$92,700
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Acquisition services	All title examination, legal, real estate closing, and title recording services				1.5		\$150,000
TBD	Service Contract	Meet with landowners, calculate length and area of easements, map easements, calculate purchase price using DNR formula, secure commitments, create baseline easement reports, coordinate with DNR, post completed easements, and other necessary tasks.				0.96		\$150,000
							Sub Total	\$300,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	GPS unit for mapping location and area of conservation easement.	Used to map easement boundaries and area to determine purchase price per state formula and to locate boundaries for posting and reporting.					\$1,000
	Equipment	Computer capable of running ARCGIS	Needed for mapping easements and parcel using ARCGIS software					\$1,400
							Sub Total	\$2,400
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
	Conservation Easement Acquisition	Acres: 128 Parcels: 21						\$880,000
	Stewardship Funds	MNDNR						\$168,000
							Sub Total	\$1,048,000
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Numerous trips to parcels and for real estate transactions; approximately 14,000 combined miles at 0.725 = \$10,150; at least 3 individuals; some overnight stays with combined estimate of \$2,050.	Assess parcels and measure, meet with landowners, acquire easements, post easements.					\$12,200
							Sub Total	\$12,200
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Direct and Necessary Support Services	To cover a portion of MNTU/TU's internal services associated with undertaking this project.					\$40,700
							Sub Total	\$40,700
							Grand Total	\$1,496,000

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: \$1,496,000

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
Hay Creek 1 to 7	Goodhue	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	29	1.8	\$202,400	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Hay Creek 8	Goodhue	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	16	1	\$110,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Rocky Run 1 to 7	St. Louis	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	26	1.6	\$176,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Rocky Run 8 to 12	St. Louis	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	18	1.1	\$211,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Stewart River 1 to 7	Lake	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	18	1.1	\$121,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Stewart River 8 to 13	Lake	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	19	1.2	\$132,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Vermillion River 1 to 8	Dakota	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	27	1.7	\$340,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Vermillion River 9	Dakota	Trout stream corridor, important for habitat, public angling access and habitat restoration	Conservation Easement	13	0.8	\$160,000	Private	MNTU; later transfer to MNDNR	Has Not Begun
Totals				166	10.3	\$1,452,400			

Conservation Easement 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.

Parcels along the highest priority trout streams are prioritized using the following criteria: quality of the fishery, need for access to conduct habitat restoration or enhancement projects with potential to improve the fishery, proximity to large population areas, scarcity of other trout streams in the area, potential to link with existing easements to increase protected corridors.

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.

Minnesota's Aquatic Management Area Acquisition Plan 2008–2033

3. For any conservation easement acquired, 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.

MNTU's stream habitat restoration plan for each stream segment will be developed with DNR and a qualified environmental design firm we hire to design and oversight construction of the project. A detailed plan that includes long term maintenance strategies will be developed and retained by MNTU.

MNTU's coldwater aquatic habitat restoration and enhancement projects are designed for long-term ecological and hydraulic stability. Construction contracts include maintenance/warranty provisions to ensure habitat work is well established. After this period and once riparian vegetation is well established, major maintenance work is not typically required in order to sustain the habitat outcomes for decades. Reconnected floodplains allow flood water to quickly spread out and dissipate energy, reducing the destructive impact of a flood. Flood waters typically flatten streamside vegetation temporarily and do not damage the in-stream structures.

We anticipate that long-term monitoring of the integrity of the improvements will be done in conjunction with routine inspections and biological monitoring conducted by MNDNR staff, MNTU members, and landowners as appropriate. This monitoring will not require separate OHF or other constitutional funding. In the event that there are other maintenance costs, potential sources of funding and volunteer labor include MNTU, MNDNR AMA maintenance funding, and other grant funds and organizations. MNTU volunteers will help provide long-term monitoring and periodic labor.

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.

The MNDNR does not seek county board approval for trout stream conservation easements. This is not required in statute. We will use the DNR easement template, the same easement purchase price formula spelled out in statute, and DNR's typical procedures and disclosures to landowners.

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.

If required by M.S. 116P.17 we will obtain written approvals from the DNR Commissioner 10 business days prior to closing.

6. Provide a statement addressing how conservation easements will address specific water quality protection activities, such as keeping water on the landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, protecting groundwater, and not permitting artificial hydrological modifications.

The trout stream conservation easements will remain vegetated to slow overland flow, filter out excess nutrients and contaminants, and allow for infiltration. The easement terms prohibit hydrological modifications by the landowners, but grant MNTU and DNR access to design and undertake restoration and enhancement projects. Our projects reconnected

floodplain access to allow flood waters to quickly spread out and dissipate energy, restore hydrologic function, halt bank erosion and sedimentation, in-stream and riparian habitat, and restore native vegetation.

7. Describe the long-term monitoring and enforcement program for conservation easements acquired on parcels by your organization, including explanations of the process used for calculating conservation easement monitoring and enforcement costs, the process used for annual inspection and reporting on monitoring and enforcement activities, and the process used to ensure perpetual funding and implementation of monitoring and enforcement activities.

MNTU will transfer completed easements to the DNR and transfer easement stewardship funding to a dedicated easement monitoring and enforcement account maintained by the DNR. DNR's Easement Stewardship Account is an interest-bearing account authorized in MS 84.69. Funds will support easement monitoring to be conducted following DNR Operational Order 128 and Division of Fish and Wildlife Easement Monitoring Guidelines.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [56629bd1-258.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Maps of priority parcels on four key streams...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
FY25 Audited Financial Statement on Minnesota Trout Unlimited - 2-9-26	9b4d6221-a70.pdf
FY25 990 of Minnesota Trout Unlimited - 2-10-26	574d6e66-53d.pdf
Certificate of Good Standing of MNTU - 2-10-2026	3427ec8d-267.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Resolution supporting LCCMR proposal for easement funding	4110477b-2bd.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Conservation Easement 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?

Yes, Trout Unlimited, Inc.

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:

John Lenczewski

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