



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-092

Proposal Title: Caring for Minnesota's Premier Hiking Trail

Project Manager Information

Name: Lisa Luukkala

Organization: Superior Hiking Trail Association

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Renew 12 miles of the oldest section of the Superior Hiking Trail and professionally assess the next five trail sections in most need of rehabilitation and renewal.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$653,000

Proposed Project Completion: December 31, 2029

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): 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.

SHTA seeks to renew and rebuild sections of the Superior Hiking Trail to minimize environmental damage, increase resistance to impacts of traffic and climate change, meet or exceed expectations of public managers to responsibly manage the SHT, and enhance users' experience and safety. Much of the SHT was built before national trail building standards were established. The SHT is hugely popular and was not built to withstand the impact of an estimated 400,000 user visits it sees annually. As a result, there is considerable environmental impacts to the Trail, and damage caused by users of the Trail, particularly in the oldest sections of trail.

In 2018, ENRTF funding allowed SHTA to hire trail experts to evaluate root causes of environmental damage and user dangers on the SHT. Their findings: the problems on the SHT were not limited to the miles they evaluated but are endemic along the entire 300-mile length of the Trail. This led to the adoption of national hiking trail construction standards; change organizational systems and processes to support sustainable trail building; and focus on managing water. This advice led to the SHTA's own Trail Renewal Program, launched that same year.

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.

SHTA will prioritize the renewal of the final two sections of the "Big Bad Five," a total of 12-miles between Britton Peak and Lutsen Mountains. Using information from 2018 ENRTF-funded trail assessments and asset inventory data collected through SHTA's Master Plan, these sections will be rehabilitated using the most modern, sustainable methods to ensure our visitors do not cause unnecessary harm to surrounding lands and waters. This includes renewal of four campsites, an often overlooked element of the Trail experience. Additionally, we will complete a portion of the Cascade River Loop renewal that fell short of incompleteness due to funding constraints in 2026.

Since the launch of our Trail Renewal Program eight years ago, we've had great success in analyzing aging infrastructure and identifying solutions to make the Trail more resilient. But the real impact has taken place when we've implemented those solutions. Remarkable projects like Split Rock River Loop, Bean and Bear Loop, Pincushion Mountain, Gooseberry Reroute and so many more demonstrate proactive, resilient trail design. Eight years ago was only the beginning of SHTA aligning fully with the most modern trail-building techniques, we still have many more miles to go.

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?

SHTA's Trail Renewal Program uses the most modern, sustainable methods to ensure the Superior Hiking Trail, which sees 400,000 user visits/year, doesn't cause unnecessary harm to surrounding lands and waters. Our efforts to make the SHT resilient to climate changes and withstand increase visitor use will help protect and preserve the sensitive habitats and ecosystems through which the Trail traverses, along with increasing user safety and the overall recreation experience.

The Trail is a space for exploration and education -- it's where many Minnesotans start their lifelong connection to the outdoors.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Renew the 12-mile section of the Superior Hiking Trail from Britton Peak Trailhead to Lutsen Mountains

Activity Budget: \$400,000

Activity Description:

The oldest sections of the Superior Hiking Trail, this 12-mile stretch of Trail is need of renewal due to age of trail infrastructure and erosion caused by storms and heavy visitor use. Improvements will include tread repair, drainage work, puncheon (boardwalk) replacement and even a short reroute to avert challenging areas of the original alignment. These measures will help repair the existing footpath and allow water to stay off the trail. Improvements by section:

Britton Mountain to Oberg Mountain - 5.5 miles:

- 1,800 LF puncheon/elevated boardwalk
- 100 LF rock steps, hardening
- 45 LF elevated tread
- 771 LF reroute
- 15 drainage/treadwork/water bars

Oberg Mountain to Lutsen Mountains - 6.5 miles:

- 1,268 LF puncheon/elevated boardwalk
- 873 LF causeway/turnpike/elevated tread
- 16 drainage ditches/treadwork
- 3,821 LF Reroute

Utilizing a professional trail assessment conducted in 2018 (funded in part by ENRTF) as a blueprint for the improvements, SHTA has a scope of improvements that have been further validated by our 2023 Trail-wide asset inventory. These two documents will help us prepare our scope of work for our paid contractors and our volunteers who will conduct the improvements on this trail section.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Permits/permission with land managers complete for 2028 construction season	December 31, 2027
Volunteers recruitment for 2028 project work complete	April 30, 2028
Contractors secured & materials ordered for 2028 work	April 30, 2028
Volunteer recruitment for 2029 projects complete	April 30, 2029
Contractors secured & materials ordered for 2029 work	April 30, 2029
3,068 LF of puncheon/elevated boardwalk replaced/installed	October 31, 2029
31 treadwork elements such as drainage ditches or water bars installed	October 31, 2029
918 LF causeway/turnpike/elevated tread	October 31, 2029
ENRTF signage installed	October 31, 2029
4,592 LF of reroutes to more sustainable alignment	November 30, 2029

Activity 2: Installation of 24-foot Rollins Creek Bridge, replacing existing structure that has been cited for replacement.

Activity Budget: \$45,000

Activity Description:

Rollins Creek Bridge was cited for replacement by the land manager, US Forest Service, and SHTA. Erosion of the banks of the creek require a longer span bridge for this location. Rollins Creek Bridge falls within the larger footprint of the 12-mile section of Britton Peak to Lutsen Mountains that will be renewed as part of this project.

This bridge installation will be led by SHTA staff and volunteers, with an estimated 1,000+ hours of volunteer labor to this singular improvement. SHTA has a long history of completing bridge installations. We plan to use bridge manufacturer, Arete, a product we have experience installing.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Permits/permission with land managers complete for 2028 work	December 31, 2027
Bridge materials ordered	March 31, 2028
Volunteer recruitment for 2028 bridge installation	May 31, 2028
Volunteers install 24 foot bridge over Rollins Creek	November 30, 2028

Activity 3: Renewal of 4 campsites along the 12-mile Britton Mountain to Lutsen Mountains section of the Superior Hiking Trail

Activity Budget: \$12,000

Activity Description:

SHTA staff and volunteers will lead in the renewal of four SHT backcountry campsites. The campsites are all located along the 12-mile section of trail to be renewed, this section sees heavy use and a lot of wear and tear. Just like any other piece of trail infrastructure, campsites require not only annual maintenance but also more intensive repair and renewal over time. The goal will be to reset the tent pads within the campsite to more clearly delineate the campsite boundary, repair/replace camp benches and fire ring, clear away unwanted brush and dead trees from the perimeter of the campsite, repair connector trail, and address any campsite signage needs. The work will be conducted by volunteers who will backpack in with all their equipment and materials and stay on-site for 3 days at a time to complete the work, anticipating a total of 4 trips.

The four campsites to be renewed are:

- Springdale Creek Campsite
- Leveaux Pond
- Onion River
- Rollins Creek

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Rehab plan is finalized and permissions in place with land manager	December 31, 2027
Two campsites renewed during 2028 trail season	October 31, 2028
Two campsites renewed during 2029 trail season	October 31, 2029

Activity 4: Conduct professional trail design assessments on five sections of the Superior Hiking Trail in need of future renewal.

Activity Budget: \$76,000

Activity Description:

SHTA will engage professional trail designers to assess five sections of the Trail that have been identifying as having a high number of poor quality pieces of trail infrastructure. Using our existing asset inventory, SHTA was able to identify the five, 5 to 7 mile sections of the Trail that are in need of additional study to determine what improvements are necessary and understand the complexity and cost associated with each section renewal project.

In 2018, SHTA conducted comparable professional trail assessments on five of the worst-for-the-wear sections of the SHT. We have often referred to these at the "Big Bad Five." The completed assessment reports have been used by SHTA over the last 8 years to complete rehabilitation and renewal on all five of those sections. These reports have served as blueprints for our organization in determining the most innovative and resilient trail design applications to reset the lifespan of our most worn out, eroded and unsafe sections of the Trail.

Building off that success, our goal is to identify and develop a blueprint of how to address the next "Big Bad Five" sections on the Superior Hiking Trail, ensuring we are providing a high-quality, safe trail user experience.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop RFP for scope of work and post publically	January 31, 2028
Review proposals and select contractor(s) to conduct assessments	February 28, 2028
SHTA staff and contractor(s) conduct preliminary site visits to five trail sections	July 31, 2028
Contractor(s) complete assessments on five sections of the SHT	November 30, 2028
Contractor(s) present findings to SHTA for feedback	December 31, 2028
Contractor(s) submit final trail assessment reports	March 31, 2029

Activity 5: Complete Renewal of Cascade River Loop

Activity Budget: \$120,000

Activity Description:

From 2024 through 2026, SHTA took on the renewal of the Cascade River Loop trail section, unfortunately because of financial limitations the full renewal of the loop was not realized during that time frame.

The work planned on the Cascade River Loop will see a completion to the renewal of the very scenic and popular section--it will focus on the northwest portion of the trail where a series of long reroutes have been identified that will move the trail out of perpetually problematic low and poorly drained wet areas, eliminating the need for costly infrastructure and constant maintenance. Another major focus of the project is installing new steps leading into and out of a very steep drainage, stopping erosion on the hillside and protecting the creek below from runoff and sedimentation.

The remaining scope of work to complete the renewal is as follows:

- 177 LF of Puncheon
- 152 Wood Steps
- 96 Wood C-Steps
- 6 water checks
- 70 LF of Rock Work (steps, Hardening)
- 1,098 LF of Treadwork
- 5,770 LF Reroute

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Contractors secured & materials ordered for 2028 work	January 31, 2028
Any winter freighting complete	April 30, 2028
5,770 LF Reroute Complete	October 31, 2028
Rock work, treadwork, puncheon, checks and steps installed	October 31, 2029
ENRTF signage installed	October 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Ryan Blaisdell	Superior National Forest -- Tofte Ranger District	Recreation Specialist	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.

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 ENTRF Acknowledgment Guidelines. ENRTF funded projects will be acknowledged through the following 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 supports 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?

SHTA continues to diversify funding streams and strengthen partner relationships with land managers to guarantee a high-quality recreational experience now and into the future. Each year, over half our budget is secured by our generous members and donors. SHTA's 2024 Master Plan outlines a road map to secure the trail corridor for future generations of users, address emerging needs around visitor use management all while ensuring adequate resources are in place to support the longevity of the Trail and support people to safely and respectfully use Minnesota's lands. Additionally, with 600 dedicated volunteers engaged annually, many hands make light work.

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 construction projects for infrastructure projects along the Superior Hiking Trail Corridor 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 20 years Lisa Luokkala has secured grant funding and executed grant-funded project and programs from private, state and federal sources. Luokkala has over 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 protects 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, 60 trailheads, and several loops and spurs. A beloved and popular Minnesota recreational amenity, the SHT hosts over 400,000 user visits annually between May and November. The Trail is enjoyed by people ages 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 Operations Director		Hire and oversee all subcontractors, identify scopes of work, problem-solve issues in the field			25%	0.5		\$45,221
Volunteer & Education Manager		Recruit, train, and support volunteers related to project			25%	0.2		\$15,342
Trail Stewardship Director		Coordinate all land manager permits, permissions, closures and associated GIS mapping and technical documents needed for the project			25%	0.1		\$7,522
Trail Operations Coordinator		Construction volunteer project oversight, material purchase and transport			25%	1		\$28,684
Administrator		Administrative activities related to grant			0%	0.1		\$7,000
							Sub Total	\$103,769
Contracts and Services								
TBD Professional Trail Assessment Contractor(s)	Service Contract	Professional trailbuilders will conduct assessments on "the next Big Bad Five" sections of the SHT to determine a slate of rehabilitation projects and/or reroutes needed to fully renew and make each section more resilient and safe.				0.4		\$60,000
TBD Construction Contractor(s)	Service Contract	Trail construction contractors will be experts in recreational trail building. They will be sourced via competitive RFP process. Services would include trail construction, trail rehabilitation, boardwalk and stairway construction (wood or stone), reroutes.				3		\$377,526
							Sub Total	\$437,526
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Lumber: Lutsen to Oberg elevated boardwalk (28 linear feet)	Style of boardwalk elevate to help trail users traverse wet areas of the Trail.					\$1,078
	Tools and Supplies	Lumber: Oberg to Britton elevated boardwalk (44 linear feet)	Elevated boardwalk keep trail users out of wet areas.					\$1,694

	Tools and Supplies	Lumber: Cascade River Puncheon (177 linear feet)	Puncheon is a style of boardwalk to elevate the trail users in wet areas					\$3,505
	Tools and Supplies	Checks: Cascade River section - 6 total	Checks are made of lumber and are a management device to divert water of the Trail					\$149
							Sub Total	\$6,426
Capital Equipment								
		Rollins Creek Fiberglass Bridge (24 feet)	replace failing bridge at this creek location	X				\$28,600
		Lumber: Lutsen to Oberg Puncheon (1,774 linear feet)	Puncheon is a style of boardwalk to elevate the trail users in wet areas	X				\$35,125
		Lumber: Oberg to Britton section of 1,224 Linear Feet of Puncheon	Puncheon is a style of boardwalk to elevate the trail users in wet areas	X				\$24,235
		Lumber: Cascade River section, 152 Lumber steps and 63 C-Steps	Lumber Steps are used to help traverse steep grades and reduce trail erosion	X				\$9,460
							Sub Total	\$97,420
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Staff Mileage for project management oversight and project implementation for two years of project management and construction implementation. Meals and lodging (as needed) pending on the distance from staff to project site.	With a 300-mile trail corridor, travel and associated project expenses related to mileage, staff meals and lodging are critical elements to the success of projects.					\$7,859
							Sub Total	\$7,859
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-

Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$653,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Equipment		Rollins Creek Fiberglass Bridge (24 feet)	Bridges are a necessity for safe water crossings Additional Explanation : Bridges typically have a 30+ year lifespan with decking replacement and routine bridge inspections on the abutments. This will serve SHT hikers for decades to come.
Capital Equipment		Lumber: Lutsen to Oberg Puncheon (1,774 linear feet)	Boardwalk is a commonly deployed trail infrastructure to both protect the adjacent land and water and for the safety of hikers. Additional Explanation : Once installed, puncheon and boardwalk is maintained by our trail volunteers and will last the lifespan of the timber.
Capital Equipment		Lumber: Oberg to Britton section of 1,224 Linear Feet of Puncheon	Boardwalk is a commonly deployed trail infrastructure to both protect the adjacent land and water and for the safety of hikers. Additional Explanation : Puncheon boardwalk is maintained by maintenance volunteers for the lifespan of the lumber.
Capital Equipment		Lumber: Cascade River section, 152 Lumber steps and 63 C-Steps	Lumbers steps are proven trail design application for natural surface footpaths to provide a quality hiking experience. Additional Explanation : Trail volunteers and staff provide annual maintenance to the trail infrastructure for the lifespan of the lumber.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	SHTA Volunteer Hours	Volunteers will be used for portions of the project, including campsite renewals and bridge installation, and trail renewal. 4,500 hours x \$34.79	Secured	\$156,555
Cash	NCTA Field Grant	Construction	Potential	\$5,000
Cash	SHTA Cash Donations	staff travel and contingency cost	Secured	\$26,500
Cash	US Forest Service RAC Grant	Construction	Potential	\$30,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$218,055
			Funds Total	\$218,055

Total Project Cost: \$871,055

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [3c7f7393-f71.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The map highlights the section in need of renewal and the associated photos depict the problems (failing steps, boardwalk, erosion) we will address. This stretch of the SHT is among the first to be built, and was identified for improvements in 2018 by ENTRF-funded professional trail assessments....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
FY2025 Audited Financial Statements	667fbd51-bc5.pdf
FY2025 SHTA 990	192c4476-1fe.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Letter from SHTA Board	289d3514-c41.pdf
SHTA Board Resolution in Support of Funding	13c1ddfe-820.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	78444b0c-0f0.pdf
Capital Construction Budget Addendum	a8a9e7e0-33a.pdf
Superior National Forest Support Letter	aae91006-17d.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

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

No

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

N/A

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

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

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

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:

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