



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-181

Proposal Title: Engaging Landowners in Conservation Easement Stewardship

Project Manager Information

Name: Sara Reagan

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Office Telephone: (651) 539-2533

Email: sara.reagan@state.mn.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Providing technical guidance on best management practices for maintaining and enhancing RIM easements by engaging and empowering landowners and the SWCDs that they work with.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,307,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Land (F)

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.

In the face of environmental challenges including climate change, invasive species, and biodiversity loss, private landowners in Minnesota play an essential role in the stewardship of conservation easements. A major barrier for landowners is a lack of knowledge about actions that can lead to meaningful ecological improvements of their easements. The ecological integrity of an easement can be lost due to misinformation or a lack of awareness of best management practices. Stewardship activities, such as prescribed fire, large-scale removal of invasive species, and increasing biodiversity can be intimidating to landowners with no prior experience or knowledge. While a wealth of broad information on land management exists, it remains difficult for private landowners to sort through multiple resources when seeking guidance on issues and goals specific to their conservation easement. Without knowledge of best management practices, biodiversity can be lost, resulting in minimized benefits to wildlife, decreased infiltration from large weather events, and an increased spread of invasive species. Additionally, many existing conservation easements were restored at a time when the standard for biodiversity was much lower than restoration work being done today. This presents a significant opportunity to enhance these sites by landowners empowered with new knowledge and goals.

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.

To address the challenges presented, this project will launch a new outreach initiative focused on technical guidance that engages landowners in the management and enhancement of the over 300,000 acres that have been protected through the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program over the last 40 years. This initiative can be achieved through a variety of activities including demonstrations showcasing conservation-focused management techniques, online trainings centered on conservation-focused management plans (and steps to protect at-risk wildlife), update of "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements", resources for Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff on assisting landowners with the management of conservation easements, mailings highlighting management opportunities, and site-specific stewardship plans. A key outcome of this outreach will be to increase landowner engagement in easement enhancement based off new knowledge resulting from this outreach. Easement enhancement funding will be made available through an application process for projects meeting program priorities and eligibility criteria.

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?

A training series on conservation-focused management strategies to protect at-risk wildlife will build the knowledge and capacity of at least 50 landowners and 25 SWCD staff. The update of "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements" will be publicly accessible as a resource for potential, new, and current landowners. Resources and outreach materials will create continuous connections between landowners and SWCD staff.

At least 10 stewardship plans will be written providing long-term ecological goals and strategies for success. Enhancement funding will enhance at least 1000 acres of permanently protected easement lands, building environmental resiliency and bringing economic benefits to rural communities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Development and publication of outreach materials

Activity Budget: \$37,000

Activity Description:

BWSR currently holds almost 8,000 perpetual easements with nearly as many private landowners. Landowners vary in their knowledge, initiative, efforts, and goals toward land stewardship. In the past, knowledge of easement stewardship has been inconsistent and not always planned based on specific goals for environmental improvements or benefits to at-risk wildlife species. This project will address these needs through a training series on conservation-focused management plans to protect at-risk wildlife, the update of "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements", the development of resources for SWCD staff on assisting existing easement landowners, and the development of mailing materials that specify management opportunities based on site inspections. All of these materials will be accessible to landowners on the BWSR website or through direct contact with SWCD staff.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Training series on conservation-focused management plans to protect at-risk wildlife	June 30, 2030
Update and publication of "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements"	June 30, 2030
Development of resources for SWCD staff on assisting existing easement landowners	June 30, 2030
Development of mailing materials highlighting management opportunities	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Land management stewardship plans

Activity Budget: \$55,000

Activity Description:

Cost-share assistance for developing up to 10 land management stewardship plans state-wide will empower the management and enhancement efforts of landowners by defining long-term landowner goals tied to site characteristics and needs. Landowner's increased knowledge of a site's ecological history, unique characteristics, management techniques, and creation of their own land goals will provide the ability to be effective stewards of these privately-owned lands.

BWSR will develop and revise plan templates to allow easier completion of stewardship plans in the future. Sites will be selected based on collaboration with SWCDs and landowner interest. Certified plan writers and ecologists will be utilized to complete the stewardship plans. Once completed, BWSR will review to ensure alignment of management recommendations to the terms of the easement and conservation plan. Landowners will submit receipts for reimbursement.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Development of stewardship plan standards focused on this initiative	June 30, 2028
Outreach and publication to SWCDs and landowners regarding this opportunity	June 30, 2028
Review and approval of requests for assistance	June 30, 2029
Stewardship plans are completed and landowners submit materials for reimbursement	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Vegetative enhancement

Activity Budget: \$1,215,000

Activity Description:

Approximately 1,000 acres of land will be enhanced by increasing vegetative biodiversity through inter-seeding, re-seeding, and/or the installation of pollinator plots across the state. Many existing easements were previously restored with much lower biodiversity standards compared to restorations completed today. Low species richness or the installation of monocultures was common practice, presenting an excellent opportunity to enhance the vegetation of these sites. Enhanced sites will have increased resilience to extreme weather events and weed pressure, as well as improved habitat for at-risk wildlife species.

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, with the Project Manager ensuring all applications meet eligibility and use best management practices. Applications will be prioritized based on age of easement, adjacency to existing habitat, quality of the original seeding, and quality of existing cover. Applicants will be required to develop long-term management plans covering the next ten years as a component of the application.

Pesticides will not be an approved expense with this funding.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Revision of enhancement application materials, publication to website, communication to SWCDs	August 31, 2027
Ongoing review and approval of applications	May 31, 2030
Landowners conduct site preparation, purchase seed, plant seed, implement post-planting maintenance	June 30, 2030
Landowners submit materials for reimbursement	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.

Trainings, publications, and outreach materials will all be accessible either on the BWSR website or in local SWCD offices.

All materials will appropriately use the ENRTF logo and/or attribution language.

All easements with stewardship plans created as a result of this proposal would display ENRTF signage.

All easements receiving enhancement funding would display ENRTF signage.

This proposal would be featured on the BWSR website, in the quarterly RIM Rundown newsletter, and one BWSR Snapshots article.

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?

This proposal would increase the impacts of land management activities on conservation easements by using best management practices based on specific ecological and landowner goals. The outreach materials developed will be accessible for landowners and SWCDs to use until a time when the information must be updated to meet current standards and likely not need updating for ten years. Stewardship plans would be relevant for at least ten years.

Enhancement projects will require landowners to develop of long-term management plans for at least ten years into the future to ensure that the benefits of the enhancement persist.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Lawns To Legumes Program Phase 2	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08p	\$993,000
Strategic Framework to Guide Local Water Storage Implementation	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 03o	\$200,000
Watershed and Forest Restoration: What a Match!	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08j	\$3,318,000
Conservation Reserve Program State Incentives	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 10e	\$750,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sara Reagan

Job Title: Easement Programs Coordinator

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

The Project Manager currently manages funds for the purpose of enhancing existing easements and provides information and training to local staff, maintains the content of application materials, reviews work plans and seed mixes, assists in project planning, and tracks funds.

The Project Manager has 8 years of experience managing contracts and projects for grassland restorations and enhancements through local, state, and federal programs, as well as over a decade of experience creating and developing public outreach. The Project Manager has considerable experience in planning site specific seed mixes as well as best management practices for management and enhancement projects.

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Organization Description:

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Mission Statement and Charge: Improve and protect Minnesota's water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners. BWSR is the state soil and water conservation agency, and it administers programs that prevent sediment and nutrients from entering our lakes, rivers, and streams; enhance fish and wildlife habitat; and protect wetlands. The 20-member board consists of representatives of local and state government agencies and citizens.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Program Manager Staff		To manage the program, conduct the training series, manage contractors, develop SWCD resources and landowner outreach materials, and review conservation plans and requests for conservation funding.			15%	0.39	X	\$44,000
							Sub Total	\$44,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD Graphic Contractor	Service Contract	Graphic designer assisting in formatting, accessibility, and publication of "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements."				0		\$5,000
TBD Certified Plan Writers and/or Ecologists	Service Contract	Up to 10 land management stewardship plans detailing site characteristics, ecological management/enhancement recommendations, and long-term landowner goals.				0		\$50,000
TBD Landowners	Service Contract	Site preparation, seed costs, seeding, and/or post-seeding maintenance.				0		\$1,200,000
							Sub Total	\$1,255,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	ENTRF signs and hardware	Produce and add ENTRF signage to approximately 40 project sites					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	SWCD & easement landowner resources	Printing "A Landowner's Guide to Conservation Easements" and other resources for easement landowners and SWCDs to support the project.					\$7,000
							Sub Total	\$7,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$1,307,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
<p>Personnel - Program Manager Staff</p>		<p>To manage the program, conduct the training series, manage contractors, develop SWCD resources and landowner outreach materials, and review conservation plans and requests for conservation funding.</p>	<p>Classified : This proposal represents a new initiative/program. Project Coordinator duties associated with this new program is above and beyond the job responsibilities associated with this classified position.</p>

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$1,307,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [aad7c45a-7ed.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

PDF of visual aid for Engaging Landowners in Conservation Easement Stewardship, summarizing activities and total project cost....

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?

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?

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:

N/A

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