



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

## General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2027-207

**Proposal Title:** Spring Lake Schaar's Bluff Prairie and Woodland Restoration

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** Shannon Montante

**Organization:** Dakota County

**Office Telephone:** (952) 891-7503

**Email:** shannon.montante@co.dakota.mn.us

## Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Restore 93 acres of land in Spring Lake Park Reserve (SLPR) by converting disturbed grassland to prairie and restoring woodlands to create habitat, improve water quality, and enhance ecosystem health.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,031,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31, 2030

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Resiliency (A)

## Project Location

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

Region(s): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Narrative

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

Spring Lake Park Reserve (SLPR) is a 1,100-acre regional park located in the City of Rosemount and Nininger Township. With 5 miles of Mississippi River shoreline, rare ecosystems, and expansive views, SLPR is a destination with local, regional, state, and national significance. The park is within the NPS Mississippi River National River Recreation Area and serves as part of the Mississippi Flyway, a migratory corridor for 40% of North America's waterfowl and shorebirds. It is also host to local, regional, state, and national trails and greenways and is home to a small herd of bison, managed as part of the Minnesota Bison Collaborative.

SLPR's Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan identify many areas of the park as Lowest Quality Native Plant Communities, which require aggressive stewardship to increase biodiversity and aesthetic value. Additionally, SLPR's natural systems are contaminated by the release of PFAS, a bioaccumulating chemical toxic to animals and humans and which damages the quality of groundwater and surface water, from local manufacturing. Through this grant, the County seeks to restore and enhance biodiversity and the ecological functioning of the park, restore critical habitat for wildlife, and improve water quality of the area including the Mississippi River.

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

The proposed project will restore 93 acres of parkland in the Upper Spring Lake area of SLPR near Schaar's Bluff:

- 73 acres of old field/disturbed grassland will be converted to prairie. High diversity, showy prairie seed mix will be used in the 16 acres near the Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center and along the park entrance drive. Mesic prairie seed mix will be used on the remaining 57 acres east of the Gathering Center and south of 127th Street East.
- 21 acres of conifer plantation located south of 127th Street East will be restored by removing invasive species, pine thinning, and increasing species diversity with woodland understory.

The restoration of lower quality natural areas along the Mississippi River and within SLPR will help to improve water quality and provide critical animal habitat that increases ecological function and biodiversity. Restoration in these areas also serves to protect the existing higher quality natural areas nearby and supports the overall health and visitor experience of SLPR.

### **What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

The restoration and enhancement of 93 acres of parkland will provide the following outcomes:

- Increased critical habitat for wildlife species at risk from PFAS contamination including the field sparrow, eastern towhee, brown thrasher, loggerhead shrike, and northern long-eared bat.
- Improved ecosystem functioning due to increased biodiversity which leads to enhanced water and air quality.
- Protection for existing high quality natural resource areas within SLPR due to the restoration of and removal of invasive species from lower quality areas.
- Implementation of the SLPR Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Site Restoration

**Activity Budget:** \$1,031,000

**Activity Description:**

The objective of this activity is to restore 93 acres of former cropped areas, old fields, and a conifer plantation within SLPR to native prairie and woodland that provides habitat for pollinators and wildlife. The activities will be to prepare the sites and install native plant material. Prairie: site preparation includes broadcast herbicide applications, light tillage, and site prep burns to ensure adequate seed-to-soil contact. The land will then be seeded and plugged with native plants grown in Dakota County’s greenhouse. Establishment mowings will occur following the installation of native seed. Woodland: exotic woody brush will be removed. Canopy thinning will focus on thinning pine trees and creating canopy gaps from oak wilt infections and pockets of dying ash trees. Native species will then be planted in the canopy gaps created by the tree removals. Following the initial activities, the County will manage establishment through supplemental invasive species management, additional seeding, and watering if needed. Dakota County staff with expertise in natural resource management will manage the project by advertising the project to bid, awarding the contract, and overseeing the restoration implementation. Staff will also coordinate at least one volunteer event to engage the public in the restoration.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Advertisement for bid	June 30, 2028
Contractor selected	September 30, 2028
Tree/brush removal	May 31, 2029
Site preparation and seeding	October 31, 2029
Establishment management	December 31, 2030
Dissemination efforts	December 31, 2030

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Rita Trapp	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Beth Richmond	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	No
Ryan Kadet	HKGi	Grant Writing Assistance	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.**

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

## Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?**

The elements of this grant will be accomplished through full restoration as proposed. Long-term maintenance of the restored acres will be performed by the Dakota County Parks Department and/or the County will contract with professional ecological restoration firms that provide experienced crews to maintain these sites as part of the County's ongoing management program. These activities are funded by County dollars derived from the Environmental Legacy Fund.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

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

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Shannon Montante

**Job Title:** Natural Resources Supervisor

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

Shannon Montante is a Natural Resources Supervisor with the Dakota County Parks Department. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology and wildlife management, and she has worked in the field of natural resources for 15 years. In her current role, she leads and supports a team responsible for implementing natural resource restoration, stewardship, and monitoring projects across Dakota County parks, greenways, and conservation areas. Shannon oversees program planning, project prioritization, and staff coordination to advance ecological restoration and long-term resource management goals. Her work includes managing grant-funded projects, developing natural resource management strategies, coordinating with contractors and partner organizations, and supervising staff, seasonal employees, and volunteers engaged in restoration and stewardship efforts. She is passionate about connecting people to the outdoors and advancing collaborative, science-based approaches to land stewardship that support healthy ecosystems and resilient communities.

**Organization:** Dakota County

**Organization Description:**

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the Dakota County Park System serves the state’s third most populous county. With more than 6,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways, Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system that exists to help meet the needs of over 400,000 county residents. Dakota County Parks has an active and professional capital development program that oversees park development to provide residents with facilities to enable natural resource-based recreation, a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing thousands of acres of prairie, forest and woodland, and a professional outdoor education program that manages and interprets cultural sites within the Dakota County Park System.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
2 Natural Resources Specialists		Community engagement, volunteer coordination, project management, contractor oversight.			25%	0.39		\$38,000
2 Natural Resources Supervisors		Assist with grant administration and project management.			25%	0.06		\$6,500
4 Natural Resources Technicians		Invasive species removal, native plant installation, volunteer event support, and other restoration tasks.			25%	0.2		\$13,000
5 Seasonal Natural Resources Technicians		Invasive species removal, native plant installation, volunteer event support, and other restoration tasks.			25%	0.24		\$12,500
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$70,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
TBD	Service Contract	Tree/brush removal, site prep and seeding, enhancement burn and overseed, establishment management.				0		\$826,700
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$826,700</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Native plant material	Planted for restoration					\$134,300
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$134,300</b>
<b>Capital Equipment</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								

							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,031,000</b>

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
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	Dakota County	17,000 plugs of plant material	Secured	\$59,500
In-Kind	General Public	Volunteer planting event labor hours	Potential	\$9,540
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$69,040</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$69,040</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,100,040**

**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
#300130050010	Dakota	This parcel is primarily dominated by non-native grass which will be converted to mesic prairie. A portion of this parcel is a prairie restoration which will be enhanced by a prescribed burn and overseed to increase diversity. Another portion is dominated by a black walnut stand and invasive Siberian elm trees. This area will be converted to mesic prairie/savanna. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.	Restoration	38.83	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
#300130051010	Dakota	One portion of this parcel is dominated by non-native grass. This area will be converted into native mesic prairie. Another portion of this parcel is currently a pine plantation that will be restored to a more diverse and ecologically appropriate oak woodland plant community. This will be the beginning of a phased restoration utilizing canopy gaps rather than removing all of the pine trees at once. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.	Restoration	55.23	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
#300140075010	Dakota	The portion of this parcel that is within the proposed project boundaries borders the Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center parking lots. These areas will be restored with a showy, high diversity	Restoration	39.47	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun

		seed mix and plant plugs. Special consideration will be given to adding species of cultural significance to indigenous communities. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.							
#300140078010	Dakota	The portion of this parcel that is within the proposed project boundaries is primarily dominated by non-native grass which will be converted to mesic prairie. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.	Restoration	38.48	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
#300230001012	Dakota	The portion of this parcel that is within the proposed project boundaries is primarily dominated by non-native grass which will be converted to mesic prairie. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.	Restoration	34.16	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
#300240027010	Dakota	This parcel is currently dominated by a pine plantation that will be restored to a more diverse and ecologically appropriate oak woodland plant community. This will be the beginning of a phased restoration utilizing canopy gaps rather than removing all of the pine trees at once. This site holds ecological significance, conservation value, and community benefit as part of the Spring Lake Park Reserve and containing a portion of the Mississippi River Greenway.	Restoration	14.98	-	-	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
<b>Totals</b>				<b>221.15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>			

## Restoration

### **1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.**

The entire project is proposed to take place within the boundaries of SLPR, which is publicly owned and freely open to the public from 5am to 10pm daily.

### **2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.**

Proposed restoration in this grant is specific to mesic prairie grassland and oak woodlands within the Upper Spring Lake area of SLPR. The primary goals of the restoration will be reseeded and replanting to support prairie restoration, managing nonnative species, and thinning the canopy of non-representative trees to support native woodland restoration.

The Master Plan and Natural Resources Management Plan for SLPR which was completed by Dakota County in 2021 included foundational engagement and goal setting that informs this project. The Plans guide restoration priorities and activities and are updated as needed and/or approximately every five to seven years. Plans include sections on: geology and soils, natural and cultural history, an assessment of current conditions, ecological quality, issues and opportunities, water resources, prioritized goals and objectives, and management recommendations. Plans are kept on file electronically and are available to the public on our website. The Natural Resources program includes 5.5 full-time restoration project managers who work together to identify and conduct projects based on natural resources management plan priorities.

### **3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.**

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

### **4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.**

Dakota County is committed to long-term maintenance and management for all of its restoration and enhancement projects. Once initial restoration of a project site is finished within a grant period, this is just the beginning. In the subsequent years, the County gives special attention to making sure that these sites continue to establish well and do not revert to their former degraded condition. The County hires and contracts with professional ecological restoration firms that provide experienced crews to maintain these sites. Funding for ongoing maintenance and management is done entirely with County money. Dakota County has spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining our restored and enhanced sites in the County over the past several years, and the Dakota County Board is committed to maintaining these sites in perpetuity. The park improvements proposed in this application are no exception, and these areas will be maintained by the County perpetually into the future.

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

Dakota County has a longstanding relationship with Conservation Corps of Minnesota, and has partnered with them on many past restoration and natural resource management projects. Dakota County plans to notify the Conservation Corps of Minnesota about this project opportunity and will give consideration to a summer crew from Conservation Corps of Minnesota to work on this project where it aligns with their skills, mission and equipment.

**6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.**

The County has a robust monitoring and evaluation program that is utilized for restoration and enhancement project sites. After the proposed project is completed, the County will make an initial evaluation of whether the activity was successful or not. If something was not successful, the County will work to uncover the issue, and then remedy the situation in the future. We will continue to intentionally monitor and evaluate the sites annually for the first three years, and then reduce monitoring frequency to every 2-3 years. Per recommendations from the NRMP, Dakota County conducts regular vegetation monitoring surveys to track the effectiveness of completed restoration projects and monitor conditions of future restoration locations. Our vegetation monitoring program utilizes transects, relevés, meander surveys and photo monitoring. The data from the transects and relevés is analyzed using the Floristic Quality Index to track changes in plant community over time. These points will continue to be monitored post restoration to monitor effectiveness. The county will also establish photo points pre-project implementation, to be monitored before, during and after the project implementation to track effectiveness of the restoration.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Map*

File: [8a7d1012-d86.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Map*

Map of parcels and restoration areas colored by restoration type, with 127th Street E and Schaar's Bluff Gathering Center labeled....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Dakota County 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	<a href="#">3112850a-456.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution, Dakota County	<a href="#">22b34f1a-e8b.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Spring Lake Park Reserve Master Plan	<a href="#">40f1f26b-ade.pdf</a>
Project Summary	<a href="#">0233c6f7-cdb.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

Yes: Restoration,

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

N/A

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

No

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

N/A

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

N/A

**Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?**

No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

No

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

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:**

Shannon Montante, Rita Trapp, Ryan Kadet, Beth Richmond

**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