



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

## General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2027-276

**Proposal Title:** Northern Minnesota Integrated Reforestation and Climate Resilience Initiative

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** James Harding

**Organization:** Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Bemidji State University

**Office Telephone:** (218) 755-2781

**Email:** james.harding@bemidjistate.edu

## Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Restore forests and urban canopy in northern Minnesota following the 2025 derecho through coordinated county, city, and university efforts to improve habitat, resilience, and long-term ecological function.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,555,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2031

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Land (F)

## Project Location

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

Region(s): NW

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

Region(s): NW

**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.**

On June 21, 2025, a powerful derecho caused widespread forest loss across northern Minnesota, including the Bemidji region, where thousands of acres of forest and hundreds of urban trees were destroyed. This event represents a stand-initiating disturbance, resulting in the loss of mature canopy that provided critical ecological functions, including habitat, temperature regulation, air quality improvement, and watershed protection. While natural forest systems will regenerate over time, recovery is slow and uncertain, particularly in areas where seed sources are limited or where competition from invasive species is present. In urban and community settings, natural regeneration is even less reliable, requiring intentional reforestation to restore canopy, ecological function, and public safety. Delays in reforestation increase risks of soil degradation, invasive species establishment, and long-term loss of ecosystem services. Across Beltrami County, the City of Bemidji, and the BSU/NTC campuses, there is a shared need to restore forested lands in a coordinated manner that improves ecological outcomes and long-term resilience. This project addresses that need by accelerating recovery, enhancing habitat, and re-establishing forest structure across natural, community, and institutional landscapes.

### **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 proposes a coordinated reforestation and land restoration effort across Beltrami County, the City of Bemidji, and the Bemidji State University/Northwest Technical College campuses to accelerate recovery following the 2025 derecho. The project will implement site preparation, replanting, and multi-year maintenance to restore forest structure, improve ecological function, and increase long-term resilience across natural and community landscapes. In the Bear Den area, the County will restore approximately 215 acres of forestland through site preparation, planting of native pine species, and ongoing maintenance to support successful establishment and reduce wildfire risk. The City of Bemidji will restore urban canopy within City Park through debris removal, invasive species management, and phased planting of climate-appropriate seedlings. BSU and NTC will support implementation through demonstration plantings, species diversification strategies, and long-term monitoring to inform effective reforestation practices in northern climates. Together, these coordinated efforts will restore canopy, enhance habitat, and provide a scalable model for post-disturbance forest recovery across Minnesota.

### **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?**

This project will restore approximately 215 acres of forestland, re-establish more than 172,000 trees, and replant over 600 urban trees, improving habitat, biodiversity, and long-term forest health. Outcomes include reduced wildfire risk, enhanced watershed protection, and increased carbon sequestration. Urban and campus canopy restoration will improve air quality, reduce heat impacts, and enhance public spaces. Demonstration plantings and monitoring will inform climate-resilient reforestation practices. Coordinated implementation across county, city, and institutional lands will strengthen ecological connectivity and long-term resilience across northern Minnesota.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Site Preparation and Forest Restoration Across County and City Lands

**Activity Budget:** \$475,000

**Activity Description:**

Objective: Prepare storm-impacted lands for successful reforestation by improving site conditions and reducing ecological risk. This activity will include removal of storm-damaged trees, reduction of hazardous fuel loads, invasive species management, and site preparation such as trenching, scarification, and limited grading. Work will be completed by qualified contractors and public works staff under the direction of Beltrami County and the City of Bemidji. In the County, approximately 215 acres in the Bear Den area will be treated to support large-scale reforestation and reduce wildfire risk. In City Park, work will focus on debris removal, invasive species control, and preparation of designated planting areas. Outputs include acres treated, debris removed, invasive species addressed, and fully prepared planting sites. Impact: Improved site conditions will increase tree survival, reduce fire risk, and enhance ecological recovery. Evaluation: Completion will be measured by acreage treated, site readiness for planting, and contractor verification of completed work.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
County site preparation (215 acres) completed	June 30, 2028
City Park debris removal and invasive control completed	June 30, 2028
Planting areas prepared and verified	June 30, 2028

### Activity 2: Reforestation Implementation Across County, City, and Campus Lands

**Activity Budget:** \$850,000

**Activity Description:**

Objective: Restore forest structure and canopy through coordinated planting of native and climate-adapted tree species. This activity will implement reforestation across County, City, and campus lands. Beltrami County will plant approximately 172,000 pine seedlings across 215 acres following site preparation. The City of Bemidji will conduct phased planting of approximately 600 trees between 2028 and 2030 to restore urban canopy. BSU and NTC will support targeted planting and establish demonstration areas that incorporate species diversification strategies suited to northern Minnesota conditions. Planting will be completed by contractors, staff, and supervised crews, with maintenance activities including bud capping, wildlife protection, and early-stage care to support establishment. Outputs include number of trees planted, acres restored, and canopy coverage improvements. Impact: Reforestation will enhance habitat, improve ecological function, reduce wildfire risk, and increase long-term forest resilience. Evaluation: Success will be measured by planting completion, survival rates during early establishment, and adherence to planting specifications.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
City Park Phase 1 planting completed	December 31, 2028
County planting (172,000 seedlings) completed	July 31, 2029
Campus and demonstration plantings completed	December 31, 2029
City Park final planting phase completed	December 31, 2030

### Activity 3: Monitoring, Demonstration, and Reforestation Knowledge Sharing

**Activity Budget:** \$230,000

**Activity Description:**

Objective: Evaluate reforestation success and inform future forest restoration practices through monitoring and demonstration. BSU will lead monitoring and evaluation across project sites, including assessment of tree survival, growth, and site conditions. Demonstration areas will showcase species diversification and planting strategies to support climate-resilient reforestation. Students and staff will assist with data collection and maintenance, integrating applied learning with project implementation. Monitoring protocols will be established to ensure consistency across sites. Outputs include survival rate data, monitoring reports, and demonstration site results. Impact: Findings will inform future reforestation efforts, improve planting strategies, and support broader application of effective practices across Minnesota. Evaluation: Success will be measured through survival rates, monitoring data quality, and completion of reports summarizing outcomes and best practices.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Monitoring protocols established	December 31, 2028
Year 1 survival assessment completed	December 31, 2029
Final report and best practices summary completed	June 30, 2030
Year 2 survival assessment completed	December 31, 2030

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
James Harding	Bemidji State University	Associate Professor of Forestry at Bemidji State University	Yes

## 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.**

Project results, including reforestation outcomes, survival rates, and effective restoration practices, will be shared with local governments, natural resource professionals, and regional stakeholders. Findings will be communicated through summary reports, presentations, and coordination with project partners, including Beltrami County and the City of Bemidji. Demonstration plantings on the BSU/NTC campuses will serve as applied learning sites to inform future urban and community reforestation efforts. Results will also be integrated into academic programming at Bemidji State University, supporting student learning and workforce development. Public-facing updates will be shared through partner websites and community engagement. All materials will acknowledge support from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

## 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?**

Following project completion, long-term maintenance and monitoring will be sustained through existing operational budgets and staff capacity within Beltrami County, the City of Bemidji, and BSU/NTC. The County and City will continue forest management activities, including maintenance and protection of established plantings. BSU will integrate monitoring and demonstration sites into ongoing academic programming, supporting continued data collection and applied learning. Project findings and best practices will be shared with regional partners and natural resource professionals to inform future reforestation efforts. Any additional restoration work will be pursued through local, state, and philanthropic funding opportunities.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** James Harding

**Job Title:** Associate Professor of Forestry

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

Dr. James Harding, Associate Professor of Forestry at Bemidji State University, will serve as Project Manager for this effort. Dr. Harding brings extensive expertise in forest ecology, silviculture, and applied forest management, with a focus on northern forest systems. His academic and professional experience includes designing and implementing reforestation strategies, evaluating forest health, and working with diverse tree species suited to changing environmental conditions. Dr. Harding has experience leading field-based projects that integrate planning, implementation, and evaluation. He regularly oversees student-supported fieldwork, coordinates with land managers, and ensures that project activities are completed according to established standards and timelines. His role at BSU includes teaching and mentoring in forestry and natural resource management, which directly supports the applied components of this project, including demonstration plantings and monitoring. As Project Manager, Dr. Harding will provide technical leadership across all project activities, including site preparation, species selection, planting design,

and evaluation of outcomes. He will coordinate closely with Beltrami County and the City of Bemidji to ensure alignment across project sites and will be responsible for project reporting, deliverables, and overall project success.

**Organization:** Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Bemidji State University

**Organization Description:**

Bemidji State University (BSU) and Northwest Technical College (NTC) are public institutions within the Minnesota State system, serving learners and communities across northern Minnesota. Together, BSU and NTC provide accessible, high-quality education that supports student success, workforce development, and regional vitality. BSU offers undergraduate and graduate programs grounded in the liberal arts, sciences, and professional fields, with a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship, sustainability, and community engagement. NTC provides career and technical education aligned with regional workforce needs, preparing students for in-demand careers through hands-on, applied learning. Both institutions are deeply connected to the natural resources and communities of northern Minnesota, including partnerships with tribal nations, local governments, and industry. Through education, applied research, and community collaboration, BSU and NTC are committed to advancing economic opportunity, environmental responsibility, and the long-term well-being of the region.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Faculty Project Lead (Co-PI)		Provide technical leadership for reforestation implementation, including species selection, planting design, and oversight of site preparation and planting activities. Support development of demonstration plantings and contribute to monitoring protocols and evaluation of project outcomes.			30%	0.45		\$89,000
Graduate Research Assistant		Support reforestation monitoring and evaluation activities, including data collection, survival assessments, maintenance support, and documentation of demonstration plantings to inform best practices and project outcomes.			0%	1.5		\$60,000
Student Field Technicians		Assist with planting, maintenance, and monitoring activities, including watering, tree protection measures, and field data collection to support successful establishment of plantings.			0%	0.9		\$38,000
Project Administrator (Grant Management and Coordination)		Provides comprehensive grant management and coordination across Bemidji State University, the City of Bemidji, and Beltrami County for a large-scale, multi-site reforestation initiative. Responsibilities include project coordination, partner communication, financial tracking, disbursements, procurement coordination, and required ENRTF reporting and compliance. This role ensures alignment across project activities, supports timely implementation, manages documentation, and maintains accountability for public funds across multiple jurisdictions and restoration sites.			30%	0.9		\$125,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$312,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Beltrami County	Subaward	Beltrami County will implement site preparation, planting, and multi-year forest restoration activities across approximately 215 acres in the Bear Den area. Work includes trenching, site preparation, planting				1.5		\$226,524

		of native pine seedlings, and ongoing maintenance activities such as bud capping and vegetation management to ensure successful establishment and long-term forest health.						
City of Bemidji	Subaward	The City of Bemidji will implement urban forest restoration activities within City Park, including removal of storm-damaged trees, invasive species management, site preparation, and phased planting of approximately 600 trees between 2028 and 2030. These efforts will restore canopy, improve ecosystem health, and enhance public safety and recreational use.				0.9		\$266,500
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$493,024</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Native and climate-adapted tree stock for reforestation, including approximately 172,000 seedlings for County lands, 600 trees for City Park, and additional trees for campus restoration and demonstration plantings.	To restore forested and urban canopy following the 2025 derecho, improve habitat, enhance ecological function, and increase long-term forest resilience across project sites.					\$599,976
	Tools and Supplies	Materials to support tree establishment, including bud caps, wildlife deterrents, stakes, mulch, and related supplies for planting and early-stage maintenance.	To increase survival rates of planted trees by protecting against wildlife browsing and supporting successful early establishment across all project areas.					\$120,000
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies to support site preparation and restoration activities, including materials for invasive species management and ground preparation.	To improve site conditions prior to planting, reduce competition from invasive species, and support successful reforestation outcomes.					\$30,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$749,976</b>
<b>Capital Equipment</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</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>\$1,555,000</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>				
In-Kind	City of Bemidji (In-Kind Contribution)	Staff time and materials to support tree protection activities, including bud capping and application of wildlife deterrents to improve survival of planted trees.	Potential	\$20,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	-
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,575,000**

**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
Beltrami County Bear Den Area	Beltrami	Heavily used forested area near the Mississippi River; extensive storm damage to mature pine stands.	Restoration	215	-	\$226,524	Public	N/A	In Progress
Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College Campus Lands	Beltrami	Campus urban forest providing ecological, educational, and community benefits; significant mature tree loss from 2025 derecho.	Restoration	100	-	\$937,056	Public	N/A	Has Not Begun
City of Bemidji Park	Beltrami	Public park with heavy recreational use; loss of over 600 trees impacting canopy, safety, and ecosystem function.	Restoration	35	-	\$266,500	Public	N/A	Has Not Begun
<b>Totals</b>				<b>350</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$1,430,080</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.**

All restoration activities funded through this project will occur on lands that are publicly owned, including property owned by Bemidji State University/Northwest Technical College, the City of Bemidji, and Beltrami County. These lands are permanently protected through public ownership and will remain available for long-term ecological management and public benefit.

**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.**

Restoration activities will be guided by established land management practices and site-specific planning conducted by project partners. Efforts include site preparation, reforestation with native and climate-adapted species, and multi-year maintenance to support successful establishment. Expected outcomes include improved forest canopy, enhanced habitat, reduced fire risk, and increased ecological resilience. Management plans and practices are maintained by each land-owning entity (BSU, City, County) and will guide implementation and long-term stewardship of restored areas.

**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.**

All restoration efforts will follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines. Species selection will prioritize native and regionally appropriate trees, shrubs, and understory vegetation to support biodiversity, pollinator habitat, and ecological integrity. Site preparation and planting methods will be designed to promote successful establishment while minimizing disturbance and preventing invasive species.

**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.**

Long-term maintenance and management will be supported by each project partner as part of their ongoing land stewardship responsibilities. The City of Bemidji and Beltrami County have committed staff time and resources for continued management, including tree protection and monitoring. Bemidji State University will integrate maintenance into campus grounds operations and academic programming. These combined commitments ensure sustained care, monitoring, and adaptive management beyond the grant period.

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

The project will consider opportunities to engage Conservation Corps Minnesota in restoration activities where appropriate and feasible. Their involvement may include assistance with planting, site preparation, and maintenance activities, providing both project support and workforce development opportunities aligned with the goals of the initiative.

**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.**

Evaluations will be conducted following initial project implementation and again approximately three years after completion. These evaluations will assess tree survival rates, site conditions, and progress toward restoration goals. Findings will be used to identify any challenges, inform adaptive management strategies, and improve future restoration efforts both within the project area and in similar landscapes across Minnesota.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### Map

File: [26cf1c19-5b4.pdf](#)

#### Alternate Text for Map

BSU Campus Map...

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Fiscal Agent Designation	<a href="#">165db6c6-1a6.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?**

Yes, Beltrami County Soil and Water Conservation District

**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:**

Shane Foley, Scott Schroeder, Samantha Jones, Henoc Preciado

**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**

N/A