



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-341

Proposal Title: Mesabi Trail Multiple Segments Eveleth, Gilbert, and Tower

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Ciochetto

Organization: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority

Office Telephone: (218) 744-6150

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: (1.) Construct the final 2.5 miles from West Two River to Tower and (2.) Reconstruct a 3.68-mile segment between Eveleth and Gilbert, including a 0.32-mile relocation

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,650,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 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

Narrative

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

This request seeks funding to complete two key segments of the Mesabi Trail, which will significantly enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the Iron Range trail system. The first project, spanning 2.5 miles, will complete the final stretch of the Mesabi Trail from West Two River into Tower. This section will connect two important communities and provide easier access to recreational and tourism opportunities along the trail. The Tower segment is developing new trail through the Tower Forest where only ski and ATV trails existed before.

The second project, a 3.68-mile section, will extend from Eveleth, through Sparta, and into Gilbert, linking these communities to the broader Mesabi Trail network. These areas offer local attractions such as campgrounds, lakes, museums, and other outdoor amenities, drawing both residents and visitors alike. The Eveleth to Gilbert segment will involve resurfacing existing trails, upgrading signage, and improving safety features to ensure all users, including those with disabilities, can enjoy the area. These improvements will also address trail wear and tear caused by weather conditions. Funding is essential to continue this long-standing regional development project, which will ultimately boost local economies through increased tourism and create a sustainable, active transportation corridor across

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.

(Project 1.) New 10-ft-wide bituminous trail will be constructed into Tower with full support of city staff, other trail clubs, and the DNR. Collaboration has made this alignment possible as multiple trails come into town.

(Project 2.) The deteriorating trail segment needs to be fully reconstructed. The plan is to reclaim the existing bituminous surface and repurpose it as base material for the new trail. This recycled material will enhance the segment's durability and help prevent future cracking and upheaval. During freeze/thaw cycles, larger rocks beneath the surface are displaced, disrupting the trail. These rocks will be removed during the reconstruction process. Additionally, relocating a 0.32-mile section of the trail away from the mine pit edge will eliminate the risk of further sloughing. Given the increasing severity of storms and changing climate conditions, the steep mine slopes give way under the erosive conditions of running water and ice melt. These seasonal shifts in temperature cause multiple freeze/thaw cycles, further destabilizing the subsurface, leading to the erosion seen near the Ore-Be-Gone mine pit. The corridor will also be evaluated for drainage improvements that can be made during the project, ensuring the continued longevity of the bike trail.)

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?

(Project 1.) The 2.5-mile segment will link West Two River to Tower fully completing the master planned trail alignment.

(Project 2.) The 3.68-mile section will connect Fayal Township, Eveleth, Sparta, and Gilbert to the larger trail network. Key outcomes include Bituminous surfacing, improved signage, and safer, more accessible pathways for all users. Upgrades will address wear from weather conditions, enhancing user experience and ensuring year-round use. These improvements will foster tourism, promote outdoor recreation, and boost local economies by increasing visitation to surrounding attractions and promoting sustainable active transportation across the Iron

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Environmental Review and permitting

Activity Budget: \$55,000

Activity Description:

Environmental work needed to comply with the Federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State of Minnesota Environmental Protection Act (MEPA).

Primary oversight and permitting agencies include the Federal Army Corps of Engineers, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Local Board of Soil and Water Conservation, MN Department of Natural Resources, and the MN State Historic Preservation Office.

The environmental work will be supported by engineering work to survey cultural resource locations, survey wetland boundaries, establish property lines and identify land ownership.

Work will be performed by a person or firm accredited by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) hereafter known as "Consultant". Consultant will perform work needed to comply with NEPA and MEPA documenting trail route alternatives, cultural resource identification, wetland delineation & mitigation, endangered species, social impacts, economic impacts, state waters impacts, land use (4f) and other. Consultant will further evaluate and assure compliance with local ordinances, planning, zoning and codes.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Prepare wetland delineation, applications, and requests for review, consultation w SHPO, Agency reviews	June 30, 2027
Work with agencies on any revisions or modifications required	June 30, 2027
Approvals and permits from required agencies	June 30, 2027

Activity 2: Engineering predesign, design, approvals and construction bids

Activity Budget: \$150,000

Activity Description:

Engineering will be done in accordance with the MN DOT Standards for Bicycle Trails. Engineering work begins with route(s) identification and support of environmental work and then to more specific survey work once a preferred trail route alternative is selected. The project engineer will design the trail in accordance with MN DOT and ASHTO standards while taking into account on-site conditions such as waterways, wetlands, hills, valleys and other features to determine the final trail location and design.

Engineer, working in cooperation with the environmental consultant, will perform design, provide construction plan and specifications. Engineer will also perform construction management, on-site inspections, testing oversight and other functions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Support for any Environmental Work required	January 31, 2027
Approval of draft plans and specifications	March 31, 2027

Activity 3: Trail Construction, Reconstruction, and Relocation

Activity Budget: \$1,445,000

Activity Description:

Construct the final 2.5-mile segment of the Mesabi Trail from West Two River to Tower. This will be a 10-ft-wide, bituminous surface bike trail following Hwy 135 before winding through the Tower forest and into town. Construction includes sub base preparation, grading, gravel base, ditches, slopes, culverts, fencing, signing, landscaping, and all else necessary for a complete trail. This project has other funding from GMPT Legacy and IRRRB.

Reconstruct a 10' wide bituminous surfaced trail approximately 3.68 miles in length built in accordance with the engineering plan. 0.32 miles will be new construction as part of the relocation. Trail construction will include 2' wide gravel shoulders, base preparation, grading, gravel base, ditch ways, slopes, culverts, fencing, signing, landscaping, seeding, and all else necessary for a complete trail. We have included with other funds a Federal Recreational Trail program grant of \$200,000, should it be received.

Construction will be performed by a licensed and bonded contractor. Project bidding, contractor selection and contracts will be performed in accordance with the St. Louis County Public Project Procurement Process administered by the St. Louis County Purchasing Department.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Award contract, obtain permits, precon meetings, staking, mobilization, and site prep	June 30, 2028
Construction, oversight and administration	June 30, 2028
Change Orders, final grading, and substantial completion	June 30, 2028
Close out: stabilization, punch list items, asbuilts, NOFR, cert of Occupancy equivalent	June 30, 2028
Signage installed, open for intended use	June 30, 2028

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.

We have acknowledged the funding support from ENRTF through signage on our kiosks, logos on our maps, and a call out on the website. We have also tagged ENRTF on social media posts.

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 Rail Authority sets aside \$75,000 every year for long term maintenance. That account is currently at \$1.1 M for emergency situations. We also have an annual budget of \$272,000 to cover daily maintenance including bituminous repair, crack sealing, herbicide, brushing, mowing, equipment, and staff among other expenses. Staff is out in the field seasonally to monitor the condition, blowing debris, clearing gravel, rocks, or branches of the trail surface, and in general taking care of daily needs to ensure the experience is good for trail users.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Mesabi Trail Csah 88 To Ely	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 09b	\$1,650,000
Mesabi Trail: Wahlsten Road (CR 26) towards Tower	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 09a	\$1,307,000
Mesabi Trail Aurora to Hoyt Lakes	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09b	\$1,325,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sarah Ciochetto

Job Title: Deputy Director

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

I have worked for the Rail Authority since 2021. In that time, I have been in charge of 8 trail projects from full trail construction to reconstruction to small repairs. I have prepared the status reports and ensured the projects were completed per the engineering plans and specs and within budget limits. The projects have never defaulted on the grant requirements. Prior to working for the Rail Authority, I worked for a private civil engineering firm that prepared the engineering plans for the Mesabi Trail, so I have experience from both sides of the projects. I know what is needed in the field and I understand what is needed from the grant side. Not only does my work ethic show that I will not mishandle the funds I receive for trail building, but I also have the executive director of the Rail Authority and the board backing up my work.

Organization: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority

Organization Description:

The Rail Authority was created with the intention of acquiring and maintaining abandoned rail corridors for transportation purposes. Planning began in the early 1990s for a bike trail to make use of the rail corridors through the

Iron Range. This year will see the final segment of that master plan come to fruition. The bike trail provides another means of transportation between small northern Minnesota communities and brings tourism to help drive the economy.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
Engineering firm	Service Contract	Contract with engineering firm (TBD) for environmental work and permitting				6.3		\$55,000
Engineering firm	Service Contract	Engineering design and construction management for the trail				3		\$150,000
Contractor	Service Contract	Reconstruct bituminous surfaced trail				6		\$945,000
Contractor	Service Contract	Construction of new trail segment from West Two River to Tower				6		\$500,000
							Sub Total	\$1,650,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								

							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$1,650,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
Cash	GMPT Legacy Funds	For Predesign, design, environmental review, engineering and construction	Secured	\$750,000
Cash	IRRRB	Predesign, design, environmental review, engineering and construction	Secured	\$250,000
			State Sub Total	\$1,000,000
Non-State				
Cash	Federal Recreational Trail Program grant	Design and construction	Potential	\$200,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$200,000
			Funds Total	\$1,200,000

Total Project Cost: \$2,850,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [a0b259b0-9d7.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

3.68 mile reconstruction of the Mesabi Trail from the intersection of Hwy 37 and US 53 to the existing trail kiosk in Gilbert. Map for West Two River to Tower following Hwy 135 north, then winding through the Tower Forest to end at the Depot in town. Attached below...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2024 RRA audit	60ae5c8c-f56.pdf
2024 RRA audit results letter of no finding	8ddcef6a-ca1.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board resolution	c686466d-7e5.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
West Two to Tower cost estimate	9d4b7c43-5a2.pdf
Letter of support - Eveleth	e00e7da5-29e.pdf
Letter of support - IRHM	484e9f9b-51a.pdf
Letter of support - Fayal Twp	9a0b0f82-316.pdf
West Two River to Tower location map	be459214-0eb.pdf
Eveleth to Gilbert Cost Estimate	cb1c2e31-704.pdf
Capital Construction Questionnaire	073a19cb-a2e.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?

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?

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:

Bob Manzoline, St Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority, Executive Director

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