



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2023 Draft Work Plan

## General Information

**ID Number:** 2023-142

**Staff Lead:** Corrie Layfield

**Date this document submitted to LCCMR:** February 22, 2023

**Project Title:** Conservation Cooperative for Working Lands

**Project Budget:** \$2,611,000

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** Tanner Bruse

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## Project Reporting

**Reporting Schedule:** April 1 / October 1 of each year.

**Project Completion:** June 30, 2026

**Final Report Due Date:** August 14, 2026

## Legal Information

**Legal Citation:**

**Appropriation Language:**

**Appropriation End Date:** June 30, 2026

## Narrative

**Project Summary:** Increasing federal conservation dollars coming to Minnesota by expanding technical expertise for working lands programs available to landowners. This project enhances our natural resources providing public benefits for every Minnesotan.

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

Minnesota's 25-million acres of agricultural land play a crucial role in the health of our economy, quality of life, and natural resources. Minnesota's farmers and ranchers have a strong interest in working lands conservation practices such as grassland/wetland restoration, pollinator plantings, grazing, regenerative agriculture, and soil health. These practices often increase farm profitability while providing public benefits of reduced erosion, carbon sequestration, improved water quality, and increased habitat.

With a high demand for voluntary programs from private landowners, Minnesota is well-positioned to increase federal conservation dollars coming to Minnesota that address natural resource concerns. At the current annual rate of \$250 million (NRCS) coming to Minnesota, these conservation programs boost jobs, businesses, and rural economies. In 2017, Minnesota NRCS estimated that program implementation in 2016 contributed \$411,012,678 to Minnesota's economy. The total multiplier for conservation delivery is 1.35 meaning each federal conservation dollar spent generates an additional 35 cents to Minnesota's economy. To maximize investments, it takes boots on the ground delivering technical assistance to landowners. Together, these efforts will help private landowners increase farm profitability, stimulate local economies, and create habitat while providing public resource benefits for every Minnesotan.

**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.**

We understand that technical assistance to landowners is one of the key limiting factors to USDA conservation program enrollment across the country. To increase federal funding and to address our natural resource concerns in Minnesota, it takes a broad partnership to deploy conservation professionals who provide quality technical assistance to Minnesota's landowners.

In collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD), Department of Natural Resources (DNR) we propose to place 32 staff in USDA/SWCD Service Centers to:

- Increase enrollment in federal, state, and local conservation programs.
- Provide technical assistance to Minnesota's farmers, ranchers, and landowners interested in working lands programs that increase grassland, wetland, grazing, soil health and regenerative agriculture practices.
- Leverage and increase federal funding for conservation implementation in Minnesota.
- Increase the quality of grasslands through management practices.
- Use technologies such as precision agriculture for data driven agriculture and conservation.

Collectively, these efforts increase opportunity for farmers to enroll in state programs like the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP). Last, this proposal provides opportunities for public-private partnerships, making Minnesota a national leader in innovative conservation delivery.

**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 proposal provides Minnesota landowners access to quality technical expertise to inform land use decisions and meet their conservation goals. The primary outcomes of this proposal will be accelerated program enrollment to impact between 100,000-120,000 acres. This will be accomplished through working lands programs that provide substantial

public benefits that include: improved farm profitability, diversified agricultural economy, cleaner water, increased carbon storage and increased habitat quality and quantity to benefit pollinators and wildlife (both game and non-game species). Where applicable, the partnership will look for opportunities to use applied science to quantify and explain economic, environmental, and habitat.

## 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

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Conservation Implementation

**Activity Budget:** \$2,525,400

**Activity Description:**

Adding professional FTEs across Minnesota will result in more acres enrolled in conservation programs. By increasing program adoption, enrolling acres, and showcasing landowner interest, Minnesota will further leverage federal conservation investments. Over three years, the goal of this project, is to impact 100,000-120,000 acres working with 5,000-8,000 landowners. These staff will use new technologies and practices such as precision agriculture, regenerative agriculture and soil health practices to meet both producer and resource goals. Staff will also use and promote traditional programs and management techniques (such as grazing and prescribed fire to improve grassland health). Staff will deliver USDA farm bill programs that include easements, rental agreements, stewardship payments, cost-share, and technical assistance. Additional federal programs will be recommended and implemented such as the USFWS Partners Program that provides financial assistance for landowners restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat. Staff will also work with state programs including BWSR's Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easement program, the Minnesota Ag Water Quality Certification Program, and the DNR's Native Prairie Bank easement program. An additional public benefit will be promoting and enrolling private lands in Walk-In-Access. Programs implemented range in contract length from 3-15 years (dependent on program rules) to perpetual easements.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Deliver 4,000-5,000 site visits leading to 2,500-3,000 conservation plans completed.	June 30, 2026
Work with 5,000-8,000 farmers and landowners for technical assistance and program enrollment	June 30, 2026
Positively impact 100,000-120,000 acres through technical assistance and conservation delivery to landowners	June 30, 2026

### Activity 2: Outreach and engagement

**Activity Budget:** \$44,000

**Activity Description:**

Farmers and landowners need to know what the opportunities are to provide conservation and meet their goals and on their land. State, Federal, and local programs are ever changing from availability and rules to payments and terms. This is where the professionals in this funding opportunity help landowners as subject experts in navigating programs that will work with the landowners goals. To do this it will take outreach and engagement in a variety of forms from tours and workshops to mailings and radio spots. Increased outreach will lead to more conservation outcomes that benefit all Minnesotans. In addition we have an opportunity to train existing staff on working lands programs that provide benefits for wildlife and pollinator habitat. Staff will use a variety of ways to deliver outreach events in-person that showcase implemented practices through local tours and workshops. Utilizing statewide opportunities, such as FarmFest (among others), will be used to get in front of decision makers to promote programs and overall conservation benefits. Social media and other tools such as newspapers will also be used to promote programs and reach landowners with conservation opportunities. Through these activities it will build networks and lead to more conservation plans developed.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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12 train the trainer workshops to provide a training opportunity for other conservation professionals.	June 30, 2026
32 landowner workshops and or tours to showcase conservation opportunities and hear from program participants.	June 30, 2026

### Activity 3: Strengthening Minnesota's Conservation Workforce

**Activity Budget:** \$41,600

**Activity Description:**

By maintaining and adding conservation professionals through this funding opportunity it will create opportunity and strengthen Minnesota's conservation workforce. With already high workloads, to increase conservation adoption and provide the deserved time and attention to farmers and landowners, added positions are needed. The positions through this project will be highly trained and well versed for many conservation initiatives in Minnesota. This leads to more opportunity to maintain graduates within the state and recruit talent from outside of the state. Job advancement from within these positions will also create opportunities for existing partners (NRCS, USFWS, BWSR, DNR, SWCD) to add trained conservation professionals and strengthen the candidate pool for future positions and create future conservation leaders in the State. These positions will work with various partners and programs to strengthen opportunities for farmers and landowners to enroll in conservation priorities along with strengthening coordination with other conservation partners both within the office and out. To recruit talent we will work with Universities and job fairs to showcase careers that work with voluntary conservation practices on private lands. In addition we will continue to make efforts towards showcasing conservation career and degree opportunities to high school students.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit and maintain biologists to provide technical assistance and financial assistance to farmers and landowners.	October 31, 2023
Provide training opportunities for biologists to provide knowledgeable conservation professionals and boots on the ground.	October 31, 2024
Provide job shadowing opportunities to allow for diverse knowledgebase and understanding of all conservation opportunities.	October 31, 2025

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dusty Van Thuyne	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources	BWSR will 1) maintain a position to coordinate with PF on the day-to-day operations, 2) assist PF in soliciting grant interest annually, 3) be involved in the hiring of staff, and 4) provide the partnership with the necessary tools, training, and information.	No
Ryan Galbreath	Natural Resources Conservation Service	NRCS will provide 1) access to federal program tools and delivery process, 2) access to the necessary tools, training, and information and technical certification as warranted, and 3) staff with appropriate technical leadership and other standards for conservation practices.	No
LeAnn Buck	MN Assoc. of Soil and Water Conservation Districts	MASWCD will 1) assist with the ranking, prioritizing, and approval of RFPs submitted, and 2) provide the partnership with the necessary tools, training, and information needed to achieve program goals.	No
Greg Hoch	MN Department of Natural Resources	DNR will provide 1) technical guidance on habitat restoration, 2) training to staff, and 3) coordination with the MN Prairie Conservation Plan, the Pheasant and Duck Action Plans, and Wildlife Action Plan. DNR will coordinate with the Joint Ventures and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Midwest Landscape Initiative.	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.**

Dissemination will be completed through workshops, tours, press releases and story telling. Farmers and landowners will be made aware of events through local newspapers, radio, newsletters, flyers and emails. Working within the local community will be instrumental in making sure the audience is aware of not only events but also conservation opportunities through program enrollment. Local workshops and tours will highlight voluntary conservation programs and practices available to farmers and landowners while also utilizing previous success stories to showcase what these programs and practices look like on the landscape. Recognition of ENRTF will be provided in the outreach of events and handouts provided at the event. Press releases and story telling of successful application of conservation will highlight this project and the support of ENRTF to make it possible. Together, this will showcase the conservation efforts and the impacts of conservation for multiple benefits to the public. This dissemination will also encourage more adoption of conservation practices and how ENRTF contributes and supports these efforts. Acknowledgement of ENRTF funds will be provided through language, media tags and the ENRTF logo. 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 ENRTF Acknowledgment Guidelines.

## 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 enhances existing investments in long-term conservation implementation in Minnesota. It has a positive impact on our natural resources providing a public benefit to all Minnesotans. This project addresses many current and ongoing state priorities geared toward environmental resiliency, and wildlife/pollinator initiatives. As shown with match provided in this proposal, we will continue to pursue other funding sources for the program such as federal grants, private industry, local partners, and foundation funding to keep this program moving into the future. In addition, we will seek a long-term Minnesota investment through legislature and dedicated funding resources.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

<b>Name</b>	<b>Appropriation</b>	<b>Amount Awarded</b>
Minnesota Bee and Beneficial Species Habitat Restoration	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$732,000
Economic Assessment of Precision Conservation and Agriculture	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 08j	\$400,000

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Pheasants Forever Project Coordinator		Supervise and coordinate staff along with grant management.			22%	1.5		\$100,667
Conservation Cooperative Biologist		Conservation Cooperative Biologists or Specialists located in USDA/SWCD Service Centers. May include certified conservation planners. Positions will leverage federal dollars through in-kind support from NRCS. Subject matter experts/specialists to provide technical assistance to farmers/landowners for work on private lands. In addition, may coordinate with local partners to determine workload needs and ensure project completion.			22%	96		\$2,273,246
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,373,913</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)	Sub award	BWSR Project Coordinator. Provide leadership at the field level in hiring, training, tracking, and reporting all project activities. This includes salary and benefits of 0.5 FTE over 3 years.				1.5		\$100,667
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$100,667</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								



							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Personal mileage reimbursement over all positions at IRS rate per commissioner's plan. Current rate of 62.5 cents per mile will be used (subject to rate changes) for a total of 59,017.6 miles or 1,844.3 miles per position for in state travel.	Personal vehicle use for site visits, monitoring, project implementation and landowner meetings.					\$36,886
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Lodging for overnight stays over all positions per commissioner's plan. At an average rate of \$130 per stay this equates to around 140 overnights or around 4 nights per position.	Overnight stays during work travel for trainings, meetings and work performed outside of normal work territory.					\$18,200
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Meals during work travel over all positions per commissioner's plan. At an average rate of \$15 per meal this equates to around 560 meals or around 17 meals per position.	Meals during work travel for trainings, meetings and work performed outside of normal work territory.					\$8,400
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$63,486</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Staff Training	General training budget of \$1,300 per FTE for trainings and workshops. Trainings will be focused on job duties and equipping staff to be successful. Trainings will include topics on conservation restoration (prairie plantings, wetland restoration, etc.), working lands (soil health, living cover, etc.) and how to effectively work with private landowners. Trainings and workshops may be hosted by, but not limited to: Pheasants Forever, SWCD's,					\$41,600

			BWSR, NRCS, SFA, Understanding Ag, and others. Additional cost accounted for potential staff turnover and other in-depth training expenses.					
		Cell Phone Plan	\$65/month cell phone allowance for staff over 2 years. Provide a direct line from producers to staff and use for other work functions.	X				\$31,334
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$72,934</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$2,611,000</b>

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Cell Phone Plan	Cell phones are a crucial need for positions working in the field and traveling within the state to be available for landowner calls and getting to sites both safely and efficiently.

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
<b>State</b>				
Cash	MN DNR Section of Wildlife	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support.	Pending	\$200,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support. We anticipate federal match to leverage the LCCMR contribution pending available funds. We will also seek other federal contributions to match and leverage ENRTF dollars.	Pending	\$2,000,000
In-Kind	Natural Resources Conservation Service	In-kind office space, furniture, supplies, computer, network, IT, vehicle use, and associated expenses valued at \$7,400 per person per year. 20 spaces x 7,400 x 2 years.	Pending	\$296,000
Cash	General Mills	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support	Pending	\$200,000
In-Kind	General Mills	In-kind contributions totaling \$100,000 including train-the-trainer workshops and licenses to online resources for conservation technicians, remote sensing and modeling capabilities to assess adoption of conservation practices and associated environmental impact, and communications support to amplify the learnings and resources generated throughout this program to the variety of farmer groups, food industry peers, supply chain partners, and wide variety of other stakeholders we are connected to as a global food company.	Pending	\$100,000
In-Kind	Soil and Water Conservation Districts	In-kind office space, furniture, supplies, computer, network, IT, vehicle use, and associated expenses valued at \$7,400 per person per year. 20 spaces x 7,400 x 2 years.	Pending	\$296,000
Cash	Local Matching Funds (Pheasants Forever, SWCD, Others)	Financial support for staff employment and associated expenses for position support.	Pending	\$100,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,992,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$3,192,000</b>

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [93b6d7a3-7eb.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

In 2017 MN NRCS conducted a study using (IMPLAN) software to estimate conservation investment impacts on the state's economy. Conservation implementation in 2016 contributed \$411,012,678 to Minnesota's economy. For each conservation dollar spent it generates 35 cents to the economy plus the conservation benefits for all Minnesotans....

#### *Financial Capacity*

File: [5738b934-730.pdf](#)

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Resolution Letter	<a href="#">d0bbcd10-081.pdf</a>
CEO Authorization	<a href="#">fa32c1b5-bc3.pdf</a>

### Optional Attachments

#### *Support Letter or Other*

Title	File
General Mills Letter of Support	<a href="#">fc916208-9d9.pdf</a>
Minnesota Farmers Union Letter of Support	<a href="#">8c5a263e-e99.pdf</a>
Minnesota Soil Health Coalition Letter of Support	<a href="#">4ba6e51b-2a2.pdf</a>
Minnesota Department of Ag (MAWQCP) Letter of Support	<a href="#">1c125986-028.pdf</a>
MN DNR Letter of Support	<a href="#">2c06ee5a-823.pdf</a>
Monarch Joint Venture Letter of Support	<a href="#">a4d6eb86-528.pdf</a>
The Nature Conservancy Letter of Support	<a href="#">ed9efd49-5f3.pdf</a>
USFWS Letter of Support	<a href="#">e909cc85-149.pdf</a>
Background Check Certification Form	<a href="#">9000f66d-297.pdf</a>

## Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

### *Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage*

The changes made reflect the reduction in staffing numbers and corresponding accomplishments. The budget also reflects the change in funding from the original proposal of \$3,174,000 down to \$2,611,000. Questions and comments addressed. Corrected the 3 bulleted items. Let me know if you have any additional questions or comments. THANKS!

## Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

**Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?**

N/A

**Do you agree travel expenses must 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 agree to the Commissioner's Plan.

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

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