



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2025-081

Proposal Title: Mesabi Trail Aurora to Hoyt Lakes

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Ciochetto

Organization: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority

Office Telephone: (218) 744-6150

Email: sarah@rrauth.com

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The construction of an approximately 4.5 mile-long segment of the Mesabi Trail beginning at the intersection of Main Street (CR 100) and Forestry Road in Aurora toward Hoyt Lakes.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$2,000,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2027

LCCMR Funding Category: Land Acquisition, Habitat, and Recreation (G)

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.

Running from the Mississippi to the Boundary Waters, the Mesabi Trail, owned and maintained by the St Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority (RRA), is a planned 10 ft wide, 165 mile-long paved trail that serves as an alternate transportation corridor and recreational facility for non-motorized use namely pedestrian, bike, ski, snowshoe and in designated areas, winter snowmobile use. Since inception year 1995, approximately 150 miles of the trail have been constructed in cooperation with local landowners and governments, and State and Federal lands with no eminent domain proceedings. The trail will connect twenty-nine (29) communities across two counties starting in Grand Rapids and ending in Ely. Seeing over 250,000 users each year, a number which is steadily growing, the trail is becoming a sought after tourist destination which can help drive economic development in NE Minnesota. This proposed project will connect the community of Hoyt Lakes to the trail corridor and will positively affect trail users through access to lodging, restaurants, and other amenities. This will also benefit Hoyt Lakes as more tourism dollars will come to their community and local residents will also gain a safe environment to encourage more activity for healthier lives.

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.

Completion of an entire planned 165-mile-long trail, requires smaller, more manageable trail segments to be constructed over time. The Main Street (CR 100) to Hoyt Lakes Segment (hereafter known as the "Project") is an approximately 4.5-mile long segment of 10-foot wide bituminous paved surface with 2-foot gravel shoulders designed to MnDOT Bicycle Facility Manual standards and ADA compliant. The Project will begin at the intersection of Main Street (CR 100) and Forestry Road in Aurora and then traverse East and South approximately 4.5 miles to the city of Hoyt Lakes where an access point and kiosk will be added near the ball fields. The preferred route for this Mesabi Trail segment is located away from the highway right of way crossing privately owned land through a similar corridor where atv and snowmobile trails are currently located. There will be enough separation of the trails that no conflict of users should occur. The trail route will emerge into the Hwy 110 right of way to cross the Partridge River on the bridge shoulder and will remain within the county right of way the rest of the distance into town.

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?

Offering a defined corridor, the Mesabi Trail protects and enhances the state's many and varied natural resources as it traverses the arrowhead region. Following the trail allows users to experience nature without damaging fragile vegetation. The route touches varied landscapes, state parks, state, county, and federal forests, lakes, streams and many cultural settings. Many trail segments follow historic transportation corridors where interpretive signage shares cultural aspects from Indigenous peoples to loggers and iron miners. Current mining operations can be viewed as well. The trail connects communities, provides a defined transportation corridor, and promotes healthy lifestyles.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Environmental and Permitting (Act. 1)

Activity Budget: \$170,000

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 locate alternative trail routes, survey cultural resource locations, survey wetland boundaries, establish property lines and identify land ownership.

Geotechnical work may occur if unsuitable soils or ledge rock is encountered.

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
1. Approvals and permits from various agencies	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Engineering survey, design, planning and construction management (Act. 2)

Activity Budget: \$130,000

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
1. Support for environmental work	April 30, 2025
2. Plans and specifications	April 30, 2026

3. Construction management	June 30, 2027
4. Final Inspection and project documentation	June 30, 2027

Activity 3: Trail construction (Act. 3)

Activity Budget: \$1,700,000

Activity Description:

Construct a 10' wide bituminous surfaced trail approximately 4.5 miles in length built in accordance with the engineering plan. 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 MN State Bond grant of \$1,138,000 applied towards trail construction.

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
1. Construct approximately a 4.5 mile long bituminous surface trail	June 30, 2027

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?

Long term strategy for the Mesabi Trail has not changed since 1995 which is to construct a trail from Grand Rapids to Ely connecting 29 communities along the way. Seeking eligible grants to complete the trail is an on-going process. A key component is to maintain the trail to last for a period of 20 years. The Regional Railroad Authority has committed to maintain the trail and currently employs 1 full-time and 4 part-time employees to maintain the trail with an annual budget of \$390,000.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Mesabi Trail Development - Soudan to Ely Segment	M.L. 2014, Chp. 226, Sec. 2, Subd. 07c	\$1,000,000
Mesabi Trail Development Soudan to Ely - Phase II	M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 09i	\$1,000,000
Mesabi Trail Segment from Highway 135 to Town of Embarrass	M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09e	\$1,200,000
Mesabi Trail Development	M.L. 2017, Chp. 96, Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$2,269,000
Develop Mesabi Trail Segment From County Road 88 to Ely	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 09b	\$600,000
Mesabi Trail Extensions	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$3,000,000
Historic Bruce Mine Park and Mesabi Trailhead	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09q	\$1,000,000

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.

Sarah Ciochetto has worked for the Rail Authority for 3 years under the guidance of the executive director, Bob Manzoline and the Rail Authority board. During her time with the Rail Authority, Ms. Ciochetto brought several projects to completion and closed out the grants with the expected time frame. Prior to working with the Rail Authority, she worked for a civil engineering firm on the design engineering and construction side of the trail work helping to complete these same projects. In addition, the executive director and board have an excellent record for managing grants and funding for multiple project types having built 150 miles since 1995 as discussed in the organization information.

Organization: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority

Organization Description:

The St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority is a local government unit of Minnesota organized and operating under MN Laws M.S. 398A.

The Regional Railroad Authority has been working on the development of the Mesabi Trail since year 1995 and has constructed 150 miles to date. 10 miles are under construction this summer.

The 2025 proposal includes a new approximate 4.5 mile segment of the Mesabi Trail similar to most other trail segments

constructed to date. The Regional Railroad Authority is experienced with all aspects of this project including public involvement, agency contacts, environmental, engineering, construction, budgets and funding.

The Regional Railroad Authority has worked with many granting agencies over the years including LCCMR, MN State Bond, MN Legacy, MN DEED, MN IRRRB and Federal Enhancement, TAP and Recreational Trails grants.

The Regional Railroad Authority has hired a full-time employee to track, report and maintain grant records and the St. Louis County Auditors Office for grant accounting purposes.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
Widseth	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Contract with firm Widseth for environmental work and permitting				6.3		\$170,000
Widseth	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Engineering and construction management for trail				2.88		\$130,000
							Sub Total	\$300,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
		Construct bituminous surface trail	For completion of the Mesabi Trail	X				\$1,700,000
							Sub Total	\$1,700,000
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	\$2,000,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Expenditures		Construct bituminous surface trail	all materials and labor used to build the trail Additional Explanation : Mesabi Trail construction is a capital improvement with a useful life of 25 years.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership (NEMNATP) Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program (Federal)	Used for trail construction	Secured	\$450,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$450,000
			Funds Total	\$450,000

Total Project Cost: \$2,450,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [e9ca2924-073.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Mesabi Trail: segment map from Main Street (CR 100) in Aurora to community center in Hoyt Lakes...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2022 Audit Report	6a6b7dbe-269.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
RRA Board Resolution	e18c71c3-c04.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Hoyt Lakes Letter of Support	716d772e-0b2.pdf
Engineer's Cost Estimate	2d6aa9bb-bad.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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:

Bill Dahl and Bob Manzoline, St Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority