



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2025-172

Proposal Title: Diverse Pathways to Place-Based Environmental Stewardship

Project Manager Information

Name: Brennan Blue

Organization: Great River Greening

Office Telephone: (651) 665-9500

Email: bblue@greatrivergreening.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: A robust and diverse site stewardship program connecting Minnesota's diverse public to place-based stewardship and monitoring opportunities designed to nurture conservation ethic and support ongoing restoration work.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$137,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Environmental Education (C)

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

Narrative

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

Minnesotans care about connecting with and conserving our shared natural resources, yet barriers exist to helping our diverse public embrace an action-based conservation ethic. Many people live and work in routines that are disconnected from our natural systems. Many cite a desire to make a difference in caring for the environment but lack support for where to begin or find it difficult to join time-specific conservation events. Others are interested and curious in conservation work, but have had limited exposure or have not felt included or supported in connecting with and caring for natural areas.

The Developing and Supporting Site Stewards program aims to address the above dynamics by creating a diverse suite of well-supported, semi-independent site stewardship opportunities to connect Minnesotans to the conservation movement through flexible, place-based engagements that range from simple and accessible to targeted and technical.

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.

To help meet Minnesotans where they are and when they are available, Great River Greening will develop a suite of site stewardship opportunities to welcome individuals of diverse backgrounds, experience levels, and capacity levels into Minnesota's ongoing conservation work. The Environmental Stewards program of Activity 1 is designed to be as accessible and adaptable as possible, nurturing an action-based conservation ethic in participants by equipping and supporting them to connect with and observe a natural area(s) of their choosing. The Monitoring Stewards program of Activity 2 will train participants in specific monitoring and/or data gathering protocols, inviting these stewards into a community-based participatory science effort that will strengthen their conservation ethic while helping to monitor the health and well-being of a variety of natural areas. The Restoration Stewards program of Activity 3 will train participants to undertake targeted site assessments and minor restoration interventions with the support of staff or site ecologists, naturalists, and resource managers.

Participants for all three programs will be recruited throughout the state. Program materials will be translated into a variety of languages, including Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. The program will be accessible and supportive for those needing a fully virtual/remote option.

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 program will strengthen instill and nurture a place-based, action-based conservation ethic in Minnesota's diverse population. In making a variety of site stewardship opportunities accessible and available, Minnesotans will be welcomed into connecting with and caring for natural areas that inspire them personally and that are being restored, collectively. Participants will view themselves as stewards of Minnesota's shared natural systems and resources. They will be equipped to take the next steps in their personal conservation journey, whether that's connecting with a natural area for the first time, learning a specific data-gathering protocol, or undertaking a targeted restoration intervention.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Welcoming and Supporting Environmental Stewards

Activity Budget: \$36,000

Activity Description:

The Environmental Stewards program is designed to be as broad and welcoming as possible: an opportunity for those interested in enjoying Minnesota’s natural resources while exploring what it means to care for and conserve the environment. Environmental Stewards will be equipped with materials and a simple framework to support environmental stewardship through place-based engagement. Nature journals and introductory framework to natural observation will be provided to support Environmental Stewards in making simple site assessments about the conditions of the natural area, changes observed over time, and species encountered along the way. An introductory orientation to iNaturalist will provide participants the opportunity to participate in a simple, community-based monitoring effort at their own pace. Environmental Stewards will be asked to complete a simple site visit log (through Microsoft Forms) when making a site visit, noting their observations, questions, and any site needs that they see. Each site visit logged will receive a personal, supportive response from Great River Greening’s stewardship team to encourage Environmental Stewards in their conservation learning. Environmental Stewards visiting sites with ongoing restoration work by Great River Greening will be encouraged to assist in monitoring restoration progress and changes in their reports, with personalized support from staff.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop the program infrastructure needed to support Environmental Stewards; begin recruitment	December 31, 2024
Welcome, support and engage 10 Environmental Stewards; receive at least 10 site visit reports	December 31, 2025
Welcome, support and engage 20 Environmental Stewards; receive at least 20 site visit reports	December 31, 2026

Activity 2: Training and Supporting Monitoring Stewards

Activity Budget: \$28,500

Activity Description:

The Monitoring Stewards program will train participants in specific monitoring and/or data gathering protocols, inviting these stewards into a community-based participatory science effort to strengthen their conservation ethic while helping to monitor the health and well-being of a variety of natural areas. Training and participation in standardized monitoring protocols provides a developmental next step for environmental stewardships to begin structured, scientific observation and interaction with natural area.

Monitoring Stewards will be trained in a data-gathering protocol(s) that fits their interest and the opportunities presented on-site. Data-gathering protocols will include timed meander sampling plant surveys, 3-category pollinator insect surveying, critical invasive species monitoring, iNaturalist surveys, and tree health monitoring. Field trainings will be offered in spring, summer and fall in order to accommodate as many people as possible. Adapted virtual trainings will also be available. Learning materials and a support kit for field use will be provided. Data sheets to record the observations will be adapted from the Xerces Society Habitat Management log and through digital forms designed by staff ecologists.

Monitoring may take place a site of the stewards’ choosing or at pre-determined sites where additional community-based data gathering will be particularly beneficial for ongoing research and monitoring.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop the program infrastructure needed to support Monitoring Stewards; begin recruitment	December 31, 2024
Train and engage at least 10 Monitoring Stewards; receive at least 10 data-gathering reports	December 31, 2025
Train and engage at least 20 Monitoring Stewards; receive at least 20 data-gathering reports	December 31, 2026

Activity 3: Training and Supporting Restoration Stewards

Activity Budget: \$63,500

Activity Description:

Great River Greening will engage and train 6 restoration stewards to provide targeted site assessments and minor restoration interventions at natural areas that would benefit from additional support. Restoration Stewards will receive personal training and orientation to targeted natural area sites, including a joint site visit or virtual meeting with staff to discuss critical site issues and dynamics to monitor. Restoration Stewards will then conduct periodic site assessments to monitor key areas, report early signs of changing conditions, and undertake minor restoration interventions where appropriate (i.e. lopping an invasive shrub species before it produces seed; no power tools or herbicides may be used by participants). These Restoration Stewards will provide an extra set of eyes, ears, and hands, helping to address the need for additional site assessment and management for remote restoration sites and/or sites at which a grant-supported restoration initiative has concluded. When an assessment provided by a Restoration Steward signals the need for a robust engagement, the individual will be invited to partner with Great River Greening to co-design and assist in leading a volunteer restoration event at the site: an opportunity that will provide further learning experiences for the participant while restoring the natural area.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop the program infrastructure needed to support Restoration Stewards; begin recruitment	December 31, 2024
Train and engage at least 3 Restoration Stewards; receive at least 6 site assessments	December 31, 2025
Co-design and implement at least 1 restoration events with Restoration Stewards	December 31, 2025
Train and engage at least 6 Restoration Stewards; receive at least 12 site assessments	December 31, 2026
Co-design and implement at least 3 restoration events with Restoration Stewards	December 31, 2026

Activity 4: Recruiting a Representative Cohort of Site Stewards

Activity Budget: \$9,000

Activity Description:

Great River Greening believes that Minnesota’s natural areas and environmental careers should be accessible to and enjoyed by our diverse and changing population. In pursuit of this vision, we recognize that historic and present-day inequities have created systemic barriers of access to natural areas and conservation careers for communities of color, Indigenous peoples, and lower-income communities. Likewise, environmental conservation careers and opportunities are often more available to those living in the seven-county metropolitan area, despite the breadth of vital natural areas presenting conservation opportunities and needs through the state.

We approach our recruitment strategies with these disparities in mind and with the goal of achieving representation that, at minimum, reflects Minnesota’s diverse population in terms of race/ethnicity, geography, and age/stage in life. Recruitment will prioritize population demographics traditionally underrepresented in the conservation space. Working throughout the state to engage Minnesota’s diverse public, we intentionally pursue partnerships with trusted community partners rooted in the populations we are recruiting and supporting (examples: affinity organizations, like

Huellas Latinas and Division of Indian Work, public schools, and SWCDs). This approach helps to strengthen solidarity with volunteers and partners alike, while also supporting the development of locally-led stewardship for our shared restoration work.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Begin program recruitment with preexisting community partners; identify and outreach to new community partners	December 31, 2025
Review program demographics, identify priority recruitment demographics for year ahead; outreach to new community partners	December 31, 2026
Review demographics; identify priority recruitment areas; analyze program for systemic barriers; outreach to underrepresented groups	December 31, 2027
Review demographics; consult with community leaders on potential barriers to program participation and outreach strategies	June 30, 2028

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 program will build and implement a modern, diverse Site Stewardship program that is supportive, responsive, and accessible to a wide variety of Minnesotans. Once established, we plan to build upon the anticipated success of the program, leveraging the supportive framework and program infrastructure to welcome more Minnesotans into a model of site stewardship that meets their learning needs, desires, and schedules. We anticipate returning to LCCMR to support this effort to engage Minnesotans in site stewardship and conservation work, if this program proves successful.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Pollinator Central II: Habitat Improvement With Community Monitoring	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08c	\$631,000
Engaging a Diverse Public in Environmental Stewardship	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05d	\$300,000
Biochar Implementation in Habitat Restoration: A Pilot	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 07b	\$185,000
Pollinator Central III: Habitat Improvement with Community Monitoring	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$190,000
Restoring Forests and Savannas Using Silvopasture - Phase2	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$674,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Brennan Blue

Job Title: Environmental Stewardship Director

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

Brennan Blue is responsible for developing and implementing Great River Green's diverse stewardship goals by supporting individuals, organizations, and community partners to connect with and care for the natural world. Brennan is a Master Naturalist and Certified Tree Inspector who joined Great River Greening after spending 11 years as a faith community leader and 9 years as a nature center summer camp leader. Brennan has a Doctor of Ministry in community-based anti-racism identity development work and is particularly interested in formational education and the intersections of racial justice and climate justice work.

Organization: Great River Greening

Organization Description:

Great River Greening's mission is to secure the legacy of Minnesota land and water through community-based restoration, stewardship and partnership, striving to improve Minnesota's natural resources, protect clean air and water, and increase community access to sustainable open space. Since 1995, Great River Greening has engaged 47,000 volunteers (12,500 of them youth) in hands-on education and stewardship activities, helping restore over 12,000 acres of habitat in 400 communities across Minnesota. Great River Greening focuses our work in locations and on activities that provide conservation impact, ecosystem services, and community benefits, with projects including: developing planting designs and/or restoration management plans for natural areas; planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses; stabilizing shorelands and ravines; conducting ecological inventories; implementing conservation practices on farmland; and completing restoration and management activities including exotic species removal, prairie seed

collection, and prescribed burns. In addition, Great River Greening engages community members from schools, faith groups, civic groups, businesses, and veterans groups in public volunteer events and engages over 100 youth per year through targeted service-learning programs. Through community education and engagement, Greening is restoring natural resources, while building environmental leaders and stewards of tomorrow.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Program Manager		Grant and project management, recruitment, strategy and direct support to stewards			21%	0.18		\$24,000
Education and Outreach Coordinator		Recruitment, program development, trainings, and ongoing support of site stewards			21%	0.54		\$37,500
Volunteer Events Coordinator		Recruitment, event development and leadership with restoration stewards			21%	0.15		\$10,000
Ecologist		Support monitoring stewards in data gathering and analysis, support restoration stewards in site assessments and interventions, design restoration event initiatives			21%	0.3		\$24,000
Field Crew		Site preparation, leadership and support for restoration events			21%	0.06		\$5,000
Grant administration		Administrative assistance in billing, reporting, invoicing			21%	0.06		\$5,000
Communications Coordinator		Assist in designing, printing and posting stewardship program materials, forms, and website			21%	0.03		\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$108,500
Contracts and Services								
Proprio Language Services	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Translation support for program recruitment, materials, and in-person trainings				0.15		\$2,500
							Sub Total	\$2,500
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Restoration supplies (plants, seeds, erosion mats, etc)	Habitat restoration for co-designed restoration events					\$8,500
	Tools and Supplies	Restoration and training event supplies (tools, work gloves, volunteer infrastructure, healthy snacks)	Equipping and supporting volunteers at restoration events and stewardship trainings	X				\$1,000

	Tools and Supplies	Site steward support and training kits/supplies	Supportive kits for each steward: ecological stewards kit is based around nature journaling and observation, monitoring kit based around data-gathering and training, restoration kit based around site assessment and minor ecological interventions					\$7,000
							Sub Total	\$16,500
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Recruitment efforts and training events provided throughout Minnesota. Restoration events will occur in different regions of the state. Meals and lodging for sites across Greater MN. All mileage, meals, and lodging expenses will abide by the Travel Reimbursement and Documentation Guide for OHF and LCCMR projects	Bringing site stewardship programming and support to Minnesotas throughout the state					\$9,500
							Sub Total	\$9,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$137,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		Restoration and training event supplies (tools, work gloves, volunteer infrastructure, healthy snacks)	Healthy snacks provided for events as volunteers will be engaging in physical work in remote places

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
Cash	Great River Greening	Cash match from Great River Greening	Pending	\$90,000
			State Sub Total	\$90,000
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	\$90,000

Total Project Cost: \$227,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [c7aa5395-eb9.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Proposal summary and overview flyer with inspiring images of Minnesotans engaging in place-based environmental stewardship initiatives...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
990 Form Great River Greening	c82fbb0d-3b1.pdf
Great River Greening Audit	675ee151-d74.pdf
Sec of State, In good standing	549c1ee1-c37.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Letter	d0395fb9-2ad.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?

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:

Melissa Greenwood, Grants Administrator for Great River Greening