



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2025-216

Proposal Title: Thompson County Park Restoration and Accessibility Improvements

Project Manager Information

Name: Niki Geisler

Organization: Dakota County

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Through a “Pollinator Promenade,” stream restoration, and an accessible paddle launch, this project will incorporate accessibility improvements and natural resource restoration to enhance access to nature within an urban setting.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,050,000

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): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

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

Improvements seek to enhance the ecological and recreational value of land situated in an urban area through thoughtful habitat and stream restoration, and increasing the accessibility of recreational activities.

Thompson County Park is a 58-acre park located in West St. Paul near Highway 52 and Butler Ave East and connected to the 7-mile River to River Greenway. The Park serves more than 50,000 residents in the northern part of Dakota County and had an estimated 300,000 visitors in 2022.

Nearly 90% of the park is natural or semi-natural vegetation, which is unusual for a park surrounded by urban development. However, the site is degraded with little native plant growth. The county is well-positioned to restore the landscape and provide educational opportunities to its visitors related to water quality, native ecosystems, and threatened/endangered species like the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee, which is present in the park, and the Northern long-eared bat, which may be present.

As demonstrated through the accessibility evaluation during the planning process, the park is a destination for those with limited mobility. This includes hosting active older adult programming at its Activity Center. Unfortunately, limited ADA-accessible options exist for outdoor activities, especially those on Thompson

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.

The Pollinator Promenade features an ADA-accessible path, natural surface paths, and native plantings paired with sensory and interpretive signage exploring different pollinator species. The Pollinator Promenade will tie into the River to River Greenway at a new ADA-accessible neighborhood gateway. Through its combination of habitat restoration and emphasis on interactive elements, the Pollinator Promenade will provide a perfect area to support natural resources stewardship and outdoor education.

Stream restoration alongside the Pollinator Promenade will enhance visitor experience and provide ecological services including stormwater storage, sediment and nutrient reduction, and increased habitat and species diversity within the park. If possible, portions of the stream may be daylighted. The county is working with water resource professionals, watershed representatives, and the MN DNR Area Hydrologist to develop designs that meet regulatory approval.

An ADA-accessible paddle launch will be added to the existing fishing pier on Thompson Lake, increasing access to water-based recreational activities for all visitors. This location ensures minimal-to-no impact to the shoreline and existing significant trees, offers proximity to the parking lot for users bringing their own equipment, and has good visibility to engage potential users. A self-service trailer will offer easy kayak rentals and streamlined winter storage.

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?

For the Pollinator Promenade, outcomes will include native plantings and enhanced pollinator habitat for threatened and endangered species, like the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee, and increased species diversity. The stream restoration will improve water-quality and provide ecological services that further protect and enhance the existing vegetation of the park, including sediment and nutrient reduction and diversified habitat.

ADA-accessible paths will create spaces for public education and programming that will foster attachment to and stewardship of the outdoors. Similarly, the ADA-accessible paddle launch will unlock access to another outdoor recreation opportunity for all park visitors.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Finalize design elements and bidding for Pollinator Promenade and stream restoration

Activity Budget: \$15,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to finalize the designs, necessary approvals, and advertise the bid for the Pollinator Promenade and stream restoration. Tasks include completing design review with the Department of Administration and SHPO, approving final designs, and going out to bid for the project. Dakota County Park staff will work with design consultants to finalize design plans and prepare all necessary documentation for reviews and going to bid. Park staff will oversee the advertising of the bid and move the project into the pre-construction and construction phase.

The impact of the design phase of this project will incorporate: a) feedback from community and stakeholder engagement, b) input from water resource professionals, watershed representatives, and the MnDNR Area Hydrologist, and c) expertise of park staff into final designs. Achieved goals include: habitat restoration, increased accessibility to outdoor recreation for park visitors, and opportunities for educational engagement in the park.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design review processes with SHPO, Dept. of Administration	October 31, 2025
Approval of final designs	November 30, 2025
Preparation and advertisement of bid	December 31, 2025

Activity 2: Construction of Pollinator Promenade and implementation of stream restoration

Activity Budget: \$735,000

Activity Description:

This activity will bring the Pollinator Promenade and stream restoration from design through construction to project completion.

Tasks include contractor selection, acquiring all necessary permits, and site preparation.

Construction of the Promenade includes installing native seeding and plug plantings, constructing ADA-accessible paths, installing interpretive signage throughout the area, and adding ADA-accessible paving, curb cuts, and seating where the Promenade meets the River to River Greenway.

Stream restoration tasks include installing a pipe or weir in Thompson Lake; excavating the new stream channel; constructing depressional wetlands, miniature step-pools, and extended riffles, as needed; and installing native vegetation along the stream channel and in wetlands to provide soil stability and water retention and filtration.

County Park staff will oversee the selection of contractors during the bidding process and help as agreed upon with construction administration and oversight. Contractors will complete pre-construction and construction tasks.

The completion of these improvements will create pollinator habitat for Rusty Patch Bumble Bees and other pollinators and improved ecological services including stormwater storage, sediment and nutrient reduction, and increased habitat and species diversity within the park. Additional impacts include increased accessibility and interactive opportunities for park visitors to explore new park features.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Selection of contractors for pre-construction and construction of project	January 31, 2026
Pre-construction processes, permit acquisition, all funds secured, Construction, Oversight, & Administration Begins	April 30, 2026

Construction, Oversight, & Administration Ends	May 31, 2027
Project closeout and opening of stream restoration and Pollinator Promenade for public use.	June 30, 2027

Activity 3: Install an ADA-accessible paddle launch on Thompson Lake

Activity Budget: \$300,000

Activity Description:

The activity objective is to install an ADA-accessible paddle launch for Thompson Lake at the existing fishing pier. The final outcomes will include an ADA-accessible paddle launch/dock attached to the existing pier and a self-service trailer offering kayak rentals.

Tasks include finalizing design plans and location of kayak rental trailer, installing a short gangway from the fishing pier to the paddle launch, modifying the fishing pier rail to accommodate the new launch, preparing the pad site for the rental trailer, and acquiring the rental trailer.

County Park staff will work with contractors as needed to install the paddle launch and prepare the site for the kayak rental trailer.

The impact of these outcomes will be increased accessibility to water-based activities and overall enhanced recreational value to park visitors while ensuring minimal to no additional impact to the shoreline and existing significant trees.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Finalize design plans for paddle launch and site location of trailer	November 30, 2025
Bid process for consultants and contractors	January 31, 2026
Construction/installation of paddle launch	April 30, 2027
Acquisition of rental trailer, project closeout, and opening paddle launch to the public	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jody Rader	HKGi	Planner	No
Rita Trapp	HKGi	Associate	No
Mia Colloredo-Mansfeld	HKGi	Planner	No

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 results of the projects identified in this grant include full construction and implementation of each improvement. Additional capital improvements identified in the park plan will be funding through the annual capital improvement budgeting process. Long term maintenance and management of these improvements will be performed by the Dakota County Parks and Facilities Department as part of the County’s ongoing management program. These activities are funded by tax levy and external grant funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Reintroduction Of Bison To Spring Lake Park Reserve	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08q	\$560,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Niki Geisler

Job Title: Dakota County Parks Director

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

As the Dakota County Parks Director, Niki directs and administers all operations, personnel, public relations, policies, and budgets for a nature-based Parks department. Prior to joining Dakota County, Niki served as the Vice President of Camping for YMCA of the North and has 20+ years as a professional in the non-profit sector where she also held positions of Executive Director, Professional Fundraiser, Senior Program Director, and Program Director. She is an accomplished professional in community-based youth development, family camping, outdoor engagement strategy advancement, grant management, and fundraising. She has a passion for connecting communities to nature and a deep commitment to equity in outdoors.

Organization: Dakota County

Organization Description:

Located in the southeast corner of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area, the Dakota County Park System serves the state’s third most populous county with more than 400,000 residents, as well as the Region. Dakota County Parks is a nature-based system with more than 6,000 acres and a rapidly growing network of greenways. Dakota County Parks oversees park development to give residents facilities that enable natural resource-based recreation; operates a natural resource program that is restoring, maintaining, and enhancing hundreds of acres of prairie, forest and woodland; and operates a professional outdoor education program that manages and interprets the cultural sites within the Dakota County Park System.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Park design and engineering contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will develop the site design, engineering, and construction specifications for natural resources restoration elements (pollinator promenade, stream restoration, sensory gardens).				0		\$15,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Natural resources restoration contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will perform all restoration work. Contractor will provide site preparation, installation of native plantings, stream restoration, erosion control, and other restoration tasks.				0		\$735,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Contractor will be selected by competitive bid and will prepare the site and construct all recreation and access features (accessible paddle launch) according to the construction plans and specifications. Contractor will provide site preparation, construction, erosion control, and other construction tasks.				0		\$225,000
							Sub Total	\$975,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Purchase of a rental trailer	Self-service watercraft rental trailer to allow for easy rental process and streamlined winter storage					\$75,000
							Sub Total	\$75,000
Capital Expenditures								
							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	\$1,050,000

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				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Dakota County Parks Capital Improvement Program	25% match	Secured	\$350,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$350,000
			Funds Total	\$350,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,400,000

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
Pollinator Promenade and Stream Restoration	Dakota	The pollinator promenade and stream restoration area is today comprised of natural vegetation, however primarily as non-native species. The restoration of the area will provide habitat for pollinators (specifically Rusty Patch bumblebee), along with bird and aquatic species habitat.	Restoration	3.2	0.5	\$735,000	Public	Dakota County	Has Not Begun
				-	-	-			
Totals				3.2	0.5	\$735,000			

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.

Dakota County owns the parkland where these proposed restoration activities will take place.

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.

We are proposing to restore or “daylight” part of a stream that was previously forced underground into a pipe. In addition, we are proposing to install a variety of native plants within the riparian corridor of this stream. These plants will be planted and arranged in such a way that will attract the senses of visitors and at the same time provide nectar and pollen resources for pollinators. We are calling it “sensory gardens” and a “Pollinator Promenade.” The entire area will occupy approximately three acres; the length of the corridor will be approximately one-thousand feet long; and the length of daylighted stream will be approximately five-hundred feet long.

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.

Dakota County utilizes and follows the guidelines of BWSR’s “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in all of our restoration and enhancement efforts in the County parks, greenways, and conservation easements. We will continue to restore and enhance these proposed projects in accordance with these guidelines. For instance, we will be in keeping with the guidelines for seed and plant source, diversity levels, cultivar use, protecting plant communities, preventing the introduction of invasive species, and planting and management strategies for climate change.

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.

For all of our restoration and enhancement projects that we implement in Dakota County, we are committed to long-term maintenance and management. Once a project site is finished with a grant period, this is just the beginning. In the subsequent and following years, we give special attention to making sure that these sites continue to establish well and do not revert to their former degraded condition. The County hires and contracts with professional ecological restoration firms that provide experienced crews to maintain these sites. We also use volunteers and Conservation Corps Minnesota crews to help us with these efforts. Funding for ongoing maintenance and management is done entirely with County money. Dakota County has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars maintaining our restored and enhanced sites in the County over the past several years, and the Dakota County Board is committed to maintaining these sites in perpetuity. The sites proposed in this application are no exception, and will be maintained by the County perpetually into the future.

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

Dakota County has an ongoing, multi-year partnership with Conservation Corps Minnesota. We host a crew full-time to perform project work within our parks. Our approach for these projects will be to include them where the required tasks align with their skills, mission and equipment.

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.

We have a robust monitoring and evaluation program that we use at Dakota County for all of our restoration and enhancement project sites. We monitor vegetation in these sites by established scientific methods, including using

relevés, transects, and timed-meanders. We collect data and evaluate it by the Floristic Quality Assessment method. We collect data each year during, and then for at least ten years following project completion. In addition, we record everything that is done to a site, include site preparation methods, seeding rates, seed mixes/lists, planting methods, watering methods, establishment management efforts during the project, prescribed burning, mowings, etc. We also evaluate what seemed to work well and what did not, and make notes on how we can improve in the future. We use the Adaptive Management approach for all of our projects, which helps guide our implementation work. For these proposed projects, we will, initially after activity completion, closely evaluate whether the activity was successful or not, and take notes regarding this. If something was not successful, we will venture to find out why, and then remedy the situation in the future. Three years later, we will continue to intentionally monitor and evaluate the sites annually.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [36408784-66e.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

This map highlights two project site locations, both within Thompson County Park, and includes an inset map of the park location in the broader region including Dakota County and its surrounding counties....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2022 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	41a23d8e-0ac.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution	c9a82f40-857.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Capital Project Questionnaire	7b5cc825-82f.pdf
Capital Construction Budget Addendum	854b056e-955.xlsx
SHPO Review Process Confirmation	46172470-db3.pdf
Project and Design Overview	7d642a47-bd0.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

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:

Jody Rader, Rita Trapp, and Mia Colloredo-Mansfeld from HKGi

