



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

## 2025 Request for Proposal

### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2025-252

**Proposal Title:** Enhancing Public Access to Habitat

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Tanner Bruse

**Organization:** Pheasants Forever Inc

**Office Telephone:** (507) 865-1163

**Email:** tbruse@pheasantsforever.org

### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** In partnership with state, federal and private agencies, we seek funding to expand public access to an additional 20,000 acres of private lands for hunting and other outdoor recreation.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,470,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2028

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

### 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

## Narrative

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

Lack of access to land is a primary barrier to participation in outdoor recreation. Minnesota is 76.5% privately-owned and accessing lands is challenging for today's recreationalists due to habitat loss, private leasing, and land ownership changes. To address this issue, Minnesota DNR initiated the "Walk-In Access" (WIA) program in 2011. This program provides financial incentives and liability coverage to landowners for allowing public, walk-in hunting access. Beyond the direct benefits to participating landowners and recreational users, this program provides significant economic returns to the state. In 2021, the WIA program generated ~\$12.38 million in total economic activity. During recent years, WIA enrollment has remained steady (~30,000 acres) and the program's scope was expanded to include other recreational activities (e.g., birdwatching, nature photography, etc.). Despite past successes and positive feedback from landowners/users, funding limits program expansion. Given the availability of grassland and wetland habitat on private lands throughout the state, there is great opportunity to expand the program for Minnesotans. This proposal also recognizes the need to improve habitat on enrolled lands to maximize wildlife benefits and recreational experiences. The WIA Program provides a unique opportunity to engage enrollees in stewardship, including habitat improvements.

### **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.**

Pheasants Forever (PF) is seeking funding to enroll an additional 20,000 acres, on private lands, open to public access. This funding will incentivize landowners to enroll new acres of high-quality grassland and wetland habitat in the program. Emphasis will be placed on increasing enrollments within eligible counties (n=56) with limited public access. Currently, WIA properties exist in only 42 counties and many of which offer only 1-2 sites. Current payment rates seem sufficient (\$18/acre), yet this proposal aims to build partnerships around public access and increase program enrollment by 40%. Working in partnership with state, federal and local agencies, the PF delivery team will assist with access program promotion and delivery for voluntary enrollment from private landowners. These interactions between biologists and landowners often lead to discussions about opportunities to improve habitat. A portion of the requested funding will be used to restore and enhance 500 acres of permanently protected (via perpetual easements) habitat enrolled in the WIA program. This will include (but is not limited to) grassland seedings, inter-seeding and renovation; tree removal; wetland excavation/dirt-work; prescribed fire; and controlling invasive plants; among others.

### **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?**

The primary outcome of this proposal is 20,000 acres of new private land acres voluntarily enrolled and open to public access in Minnesota. Expanding public access gets people outdoors and builds an affinity among future generations to value Minnesota's wonderful natural resources. By accelerating the expansion of public access, we will generate an additional \$8.5M in economic activity; create opportunities for all Minnesotans to get outside and improve mental/physical health, leverage the estimated \$12.69:\$1 return on investment for this program, and build a connection to the outdoor world in current generations of Minnesotans.

## Activities and Milestones

**Activity 1: Open an additional 20,000 acres of grassland and wetland habitat for public access to benefit outdoor recreation for Minnesotans.**

**Activity Budget:** \$1,220,000

**Activity Description:**

This initiative will help expand access from the Minnesota DNR's "Walk-In Access" (WIA) Program, while using pre-existing program guidelines, payment rates, and delivery procedure. Pheasants Forever staff will work in partnership with Minnesota DNR, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and the Board of Water and Soil Resources to help promote and deliver the access program. New enrollments will focus on private lands enrolled in conservation programs (i.e., CRP, RIM, WRP, USFWS easements) that offer high-quality habitat and associated outdoor recreational opportunities. Targeted promotion (i.e., newsletters, radio spots, mailers) will occur during the spring sign-up period each year to reach new landowners. Annual payments (\$18/ac) will be issued to landowners and funding secured through LCCMR and associated matching funds (i.e., chapters, donors, corporate partners, etc.) will be used for this purpose over the course of 3 years. Current WIA program agreements with private landowners are up to 3 years in length and provide public, walk-in access from September 1 - May 31 for hunting and other outdoor recreation. Signage acknowledging LCCMR and other funding partners will be posted on properties enrolled through this initiative.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop and distribute promotional and outreach materials to partners and private landowners.	August 31, 2025
Enroll 10,000 acres of new private lands into the voluntary access program.	August 31, 2025
Enroll an additional 10,000-acres of new private lands into the voluntary access program.	August 31, 2026

**Activity 2: Restore and enhance 500 acres of habitat enrolled in the access program.**

**Activity Budget:** \$250,000

**Activity Description:**

Pheasants Forever biologists and our partners will identify and prioritize potential access properties (new and existing enrollments) in need of habitat restoration and management. Restoration plans will be developed for selected projects by August 31, 2025. Once planning is complete, PF staff will contract this work with landowners and private contractors. Best management practices required by each agency holding protection of project sites will be utilized to enhance project sites (i.e., BWSR's Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines on RIM easements). These practices will include (but are not limited to) wetland excavation, grassland seeding and renovation, prescribed fire, tree removal, brush removal, and chemical treatments. Project sites will be visited by PF and partner staff immediately upon completion to ensure satisfactory work. Additional site visits conducted during years 1-3 will be used to monitor plant responses and identify any additional management needs.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Work with private landowners and partners to identify restoration and enhancement projects.	August 31, 2025
Complete restoration and enhancement on 500 acres of habitat enrolled in the access program.	August 31, 2027
Complete site visits to evaluate completed restoration and enhancement projects (500 acres).	June 30, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Kevin Roth	Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)	Partner: Enhancement dollars on RIM easements enrolled in access as funding allows.	No
Amber Knutson	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	Partner	No
Ben Brettingen	onX Maps	Partner	No
Troy Daniell	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Partner	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?**

Through an existing successful program administered by Minnesota DNR, funded by USDA, and supported by many partners and landowners across the state, we will use existing program guidelines to enroll an additional 20,000 acres of access and enhance 500 acres of habitat. We will use existing technical service providers at SWCDs, USDA Service Centers, and partner biologists to promote, enroll and successfully increase participation in voluntary public access by Minnesota landowners. Further, habitat enhancement opportunities will be promoted to enhance stewardship of existing habitat through BMPs for wildlife and habitat management.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Minnesota Bee and Beneficial Species Habitat Enhancement II	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08a	\$876,000
Conservation Cooperative for Working Lands	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08k	\$2,611,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Tanner Bruse

**Job Title:** Minnesota State Coordinator

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

A.A. General Education – South Central College, Mankato, MN. 2007

B.S. Wildlife & Fisheries Science – South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD. 2012

Tanner has been with Pheasants Forever, Inc. for 10 years and currently serves as Minnesota's State Coordinator. In his current role, Tanner provides supervision and guidance to Minnesota's conservation delivery team (n=33 staff) that delivers a wide variety of wildlife habitat initiatives and conservation programs across the state, while working towards

the organization's mission. Tanner has experience working directly with private landowners through his previous roles as a Farm Bill Biologist and Ag & Conservation Program Manager, where he provided habitat consultation and delivered voluntary conservation programs. As the project manager, Tanner will be tasked with working directly with the staff and partners involved in this project. This includes supervision of staff, tracking daily activities, best management practices for working with landowners, coordinating with partners, identifying potential partners, and helping track outcomes. Tanner will be responsible for all required reports for LCCMR funding.

**Organization:** Pheasants Forever Inc

**Organization Description:**

Pheasants Forever (PF) is a non-profit 501(c)3 conservation organization. Pheasants Forever's mission is to conserve pheasants, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy. Pheasants Forever has over 750 local chapters and >425,000 members, supporters, and partners doing grassroots conservation across the country. Since 1982, PF has impacted over 26.5 million acres, completed 580,400 habitat projects, and permanently protected 229,846 acres. PF has invested \$929 million dollars on habitat projects and education programs.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Program promotion and enrollment and maintaining landowner relationships (\$250/contract).				0		\$125,000
TBD - Private Contractors or Landowner Re-Imbursement	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Pheasants Forever and partner staff will contract out all habitat restoration and enhancement activities. This could include assisting private landowners to do the work themselves and/or hire a private contractor. Additionally, private landowners could enlist Pheasants Forever to hire a contractor utilizing their procurement policy.				0		\$250,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$375,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-

<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Landowner Outreach Materials (estimated ~5,000)	A variety of outreach materials (e.g., postcard mailers, flyers, handouts, and other forms of media) will be developed and distributed to private landowners to increase program enrollment and promote habitat restoration opportunities.					\$15,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Financial Incentives for Private Landowners	The majority of funding requested through this proposal will be used to provide annual rental payments to private landowners for allowing access for hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation (\$18/ac x 20,000 acres x 3-year contract = \$1,080,000).					\$1,080,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$1,080,000</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,470,000</b>

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
<b>State</b>				
Cash	Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR)	Potential partner funding for habitat enhancement on RIM easements enrolled in access program.	Potential	-
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	Potential partner funding for habitat enhancement on Federal easements enrolled in access program.	Potential	-
Cash	onX Maps	Potential partner funding for increasing public access.	Potential	-
Cash	Pheasants Forever, Inc. (chapter funding)	Funding to increase public access and restore/enhance enrolled habitat (\$20K estimated).	Pending	-
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	-
			<b>Funds Total</b>	-

**Total Project Cost: \$1,470,000**

**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
				-	-	-			
<b>Totals</b>				<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	-			

## 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.**

All habitat restoration and enhancement activities will be completed on permanently-protected, private lands (i.e., RIM, USFWS, or WRE easements) that are open to public access.

**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.**

Pheasants Forever will work with private landowners to complete restoration and management plans in accordance to state statute. All habitat work completed as part of this initiative will be in compliance with existing conservation easement language requirements (e.g., compatible use authorization on WRE easements). These plans will likely be housed by both Pheasants Forever and the agency/entity that owns the conservation easement on the land. Long-term implementation of these plans will be the responsibility of the land owner/manager of the property.

**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.**

All habitat restoration and enhancement efforts will follow BWSRs "Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines" as well as best practices established by the Minnesota DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

**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.**

Our efforts will focus primarily on restoring wetland hydrology and native plant communities on lands that are permanently protected through pre-existing conservation easements. Although this funding doesn't allow for the financing of future management needs, careful design and planning will ensure long-term benefits to the sites. For example, if hydrology is adequately restored, this will improve wetland function and help promote desirable plant communities, thus reducing future management needs and costs. Likewise, using proper techniques and native species to establish and renovate existing grasslands will limit or reduce encroachment by invasive plants species and improve the long-term health and overall resiliency of the sites moving forward. Long-term maintenance and management of these sites will be the responsibility of the land owner/manager.

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

We will notify the Conservation Corps of Minnesota if we are funded and make them aware of opportunities to assist with the habitat restoration and enhancement activities we will be completing.

**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.**

All sites restored or enhanced through this initiative will be evaluated both before (planning) and after completion. After the habitat work is completed, a "walk-through" with the contractor is required to ensure all components of the restoration plan were completed to the satisfaction of Pheasants Forever, our partners, and participating landowners. Future site visits conducted annually by local biologists will be used to evaluate habitat improvements and determine if any follow-up management is necessary.

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Map*

File: [0d858e75-906.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Map*

Map of counties eligible for Minnesota DNR's "Walk-In Access" (WIA) Program in 2024. This represents the project area for this LCCMR proposal....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Pheasants Forever, Inc. (IRS Form 990)	<a href="#">783414ab-79d.pdf</a>
Pheasants Forever, Inc. (audit report)	<a href="#">da1fe13f-f1a.pdf</a>
Pheasants Forever, Inc. (SOS good standing)	<a href="#">db3b6d74-dcd.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
PF CEO Authorization Letter	<a href="#">a630b116-741.pdf</a>
Resolution of PF Board of Directors (effective 03.01.2023)	<a href="#">8389f343-318.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support (onX Maps)	<a href="#">dcaa048d-710.pdf</a>
EXHIBIT A - Wetland Restoration Example	<a href="#">b084d90e-6fd.docx</a>
EXHIBIT B - Prairie Restoration Example	<a href="#">7f578178-d34.docx</a>
NRCS Letter of Merit	<a href="#">d3576461-fc9.pdf</a>

## 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:**

Matt Holland, Vice President of Grant Development (Pheasants Forever); John Laux, Permanent Habitat Protection Programs Manager (Pheasants Forever)

