Final Abstract

Final Report Approved on September 16, 2026

M.L. 2024 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2026

Project Title: Season Watch: Cultivating Young Naturalists with Phenology Education

Project Manager: Sarah Bignall

Affiliation: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

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Website: https://www.kaxe.org/#stream/0

Funding Source:

Fiscal Year:

Legal Citation: M.L. 2024, Chp. 83, Sec. 2, Subd. 05o

Appropriation Amount: $180,000

Amount Spent: $180,000

Amount Remaining: -

Sound bite of Project Outcomes and Results

Season Watch helped Minnesotans understand and care for the state's wildlife, forests, waters, and changing seasons. Through 42 educator activities reaching 1,819 participants, students and community members contributed 669 nature reports. Radio, podcasts, newsletters, and scientist interviews gave thousands of Minnesotans practical, locally relevant environmental knowledge.

Summary of Project and Outcomes

Season Watch addressed an important opportunity: helping young people and communities develop the knowledge, curiosity, and observation skills needed to understand and care for Minnesota's natural resources. KAXE built upon its successful school-based phenology programming by expanding environmental education through educator training, classroom and community engagement, radio, podcasts, newsletters, and digital resources.

The project exceeded nearly every major production and participation goal. KAXE produced 102 Season Watch audio segments, exceeding the goal of 90; 25 scientist interviews, surpassing the goal of 24; 17 seasonal podcast episodes; 28 interactive discussions; and all 24 planned environmental news stories. Season Watch also developed a longer weekly

podcast format that provided more scientific context, community voices, and detailed storytelling about Minnesota's wildlife, forests, waters, weather, and seasonal changes.

Through 42 educator workshops, follow-up sessions, and classroom visits, the project reached approximately 1,819 participants. Students and community members submitted 669 phenology reports, including 599 student reports, far exceeding the goal of 360. These observations encouraged participants to notice changes in wildlife behavior, plant growth, weather, water, and seasonal timing while strengthening science communication skills.

KAXE distributed 101 newsletters featuring environmental reporting, educational resources, and community observations. The newsletter grew to 5,246 subscribers and maintained open rates above 60%. SpeakPipe provided another accessible way for the public to contribute recorded questions and observations.

Season Watch demonstrated that sustained, locally focused environmental education can help Minnesotans become more attentive and informed stewards of the state's natural resources. Educators reported that students became more curious, confident, and connected to the natural world. Supporting documentation is available in Tab 7, including the Project Outputs Tracking Spreadsheet, educator handouts, classroom and training photographs, community feedback, newsletter samples, and links to the public program archives.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Results were shared through KAXE broadcasts, podcast platforms, newsletters, KAXE.org, Facebook, Instagram, educator training, and classroom visits. Public links in Tab 7 provide access to the Season Watch podcast, phenology pages, newsletter archive, and environmental news coverage. Uploaded attachments include the Project Outputs Tracking Spreadsheet, newsletter samples, educator training and talkback handouts, seasonal watch lists, community feedback, participating classroom and organization information, and photographs of trainings and classroom visits. These resources allow educators, students, families, natural-resource professionals, and lifelong learners to continue using the project's observations, stories, and educational materials.

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2024 Approved Final Report

General Information

Date: October 5, 2026

ID Number: 2024-168

Staff Lead: Erin Barton

Project Title: Season Watch: Cultivating Young Naturalists with Phenology Education

Project Budget: $180,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Bignall

Organization: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

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Web Address: https://www.kaxe.org/#stream/0

Project Reporting

Final Report Approved: September 16, 2026

Reporting Status: Project Completed

Date of Last Action: September 16, 2026

Project Completion: June 30, 2026

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2024, Chp. 83, Sec. 2, Subd. 05o

Appropriation Language: $180,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Northern Community Radio, Inc. to continue to build the next generation of Minnesota conservationists by delivering engaging environmental programming to northern Minnesota through radio and podcasts, hosting phenology training and interactive nature events for K-12 students, and expanding KAXE coverage of environmental topics to a digital audience.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2027

Narrative

Project Summary: This education project will continue building the next generation of conservationists in Minnesota by engaging youths and adults in science and outdoor learning through radio, podcasts, newsletters and schoolyard exploration.

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

John Latimer has hosted the Phenology Show on KAXE for nearly four decades. KAXE is a public radio station in Grand Rapids, MN. Latimer's work has inspired thousands to observe and share nature in their backyards and woodlots. Children who grew up listening on the school bus have gone on to get PhDs in the sciences.

Latimer shares his phenology data and recent findings on the weekly Phenology Report broadcast on radio, mobile devices and podcasts. The Phenology programming includes Minnesota school children and listeners sharing observations on the radio each week. These reports encompass a wide range of observations like bobcat tracks, downy woodpeckers, and even the giant snowdrift covering a classroom window that was cleared away by a hero-custodian. These personal, often funny and touching stories about nature provide a connection to nature that is powerful. This deep connection fosters pro-environmental and conservation behavior.

Latimer's phenology legacy and our work with "Engaging Minnesotans with Phenology" has succeeded in reaching students throughout the school year. Our next phase of the project aims to reach K-12 students and listeners during summer recreation. We believe it can further foster solid relationships to the land and water of Minnesota for future generations.

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.

Our opportunity is to foster curiosity of natural resources in young people which could lead to change in the future. Studying seasonal changes in Minnesota's nature and comparing them to historical records is an immediate understanding of how climate is changing. This act of comparing nature year to year is critical to future generations taking action and protecting natural ecosystems for a healthier future. It has the potential to lead to innovation in sustainability, carbon emissions and energy conservation to combat climate change.

KAXE's phenology programming has already shown success in fostering appreciation, understanding, and investment in Minnesota's natural resources. Currently, 80% of our partnerships are with K-12 schools during the school year. Summer is no doubt the most popular time for Minnesotans to engage and enjoy the outdoors! KAXE will:

- Expand radio programming and podcasts that inspire listeners to engage with the outdoors and share their experiences
- Grow current partnership programs between KAXE and K-12 schools to include Environmental Learning Centers, Summer Camps, State and Local Parks, and other locations that engage K-12 students during the summer months
- Spotlight journalism and conversations on KAXE of environmental topics like water quality, sustainable lifestyles, energy, and nature conservation.

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?

- Create environmental programming for Northern Minnesota by broadcasting captivating content on radio and podcasts.
- Expand the reach of the phenology training program aimed at school children across the state by integrating phenology observation with radio broadcasting reaching students outside in the summer months.

- Broaden the scope of KAXE's newsroom reporting on environmental subjects such as water quality, sustainable living, energy, and conservation of nature, while also expanding a newsletter centered around nature-based topics.

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: Deliver engaging environmental programming to Northern Minnesota through radio and podcasts

Activity Budget: $66,397

Activity Description:
We will increase the frequency of our Season Watch podcast and continue to focus on natural experiences in daily commutes, walks in town or in forests, and time spent on the water. We will continue our current programs including monthly interviews with environmental scientists, and podcasts related to the seasons of the year. These radio programs and podcasts will educate and engage people in northern MN — and throughout the state — about environmental science and its relationship to observable nature. Radio segments and podcasts about statewide phenology will be made available to other public radio stations in Minnesota via the public media exchange.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
24 radio segments that present interviews with scientists (approx 12 segments/year)	June 30, 2026
90 weekly 'Season Watch' podcast (45 episodes/year)	June 30, 2026
8 seasonal 'Season Watch' podcasts (spring, summer, fall, winter each year)	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Host phenology training events and interactive nature events

Activity Budget: $75,411

Activity Description:
Host training sessions targeted towards Environmental Learning Centers (ELCs), Summer Camps, State and Local Parks, and other locations that engage K-12 students during the summer months, as well as continuing our trainings with educators and classroom volunteers. We would provide training for our phenology and radio curriculum twice per year (4 workshops) rotating the location around the state and provide follow-up sessions for enhanced training twice per year (4 sessions). Follow up sessions will be open to all prior trainees. The curriculum involves basic phenology observations combined with developing short school phenology reports for radio broadcasts. We will offer a helpline, assist with the setup and identification of species along phenology trails, and provide 1:1 follow-up meetings to ensure strong support of implementation. In addition, we will host quarterly interactive live discussions with KAXE news team on topics like water quality, sustainable lifestyles, energy, and nature conservation. Currently we average 5-12 student reports per week during the school year and 1-2 per week during the summer. We are looking to increase reports over the summer to 4-6 per week.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
8 workshops/follow-up sessions (4 workshops per year)	June 30, 2026
360 radio segments created by kids in the phenology programs (approximately 160 radio segments/year)	June 30, 2026
8 Interactive discussions (4/year)	June 30, 2026

Activity 3: Expand KAXE's coverage of environmental topics to a digital audience

Activity Budget: $38,192

Activity Description:

KAXE's newsroom is broadening its environmental reporting on important topics like water quality, sustainable living, energy, and conservation of nature, all of which are crucial for the future health of our state. In addition to enhancing reporting, KAXE is also increasing the focus on the successful nature-based newsletter, Season Watch. In this expanded newsletter, subscribers can expect regular updates and in-depth articles on everything from wildlife conservation to climate change to recommendations on what to look for in our daily lives. By expanding the scope while maintaining its personal, local feel, KAXE is positioning itself as a leading voice to educate and inspire sustainability in Minnesota.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
24 news stories on environmental topics (12 stories/year)	June 30, 2026
90 Season Watch Newsletter Issues (45/year)	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Stephan Carlson	University of Minnesota	Stephan Carlson is an Adjunct Professor at the U of MN who will advise us on trainings for this project.	No
Rebecca Montgomery	University of Minnesota	Rebecca will collaborate on phenology efforts throughout the state for U of MN staff	No
Dave McMillan	Long Lake Conservation Center	Dave McMillan will help to advise us on meeting targeted groups (e.g. summer camps and other state wide ELC)	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.
The ENRTF logo will located on the footer of our website (kaxe.org) and links to the LCCMR webpage. Acknowledgement of the grant will be read during phenology segments live on-air and in podcasts. Acknowledgement will be made at the teacher training. There will also be an acknowledgement block added to the phenology podcast page and phenology articles. The logo and credit will prominently added to the Season Watch Newsletter. Segments and podcasts will be included in the Season Watch Newsletter, shared on social media and posted on kaxe.org.

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: Radio broadcasts, podcasts, reporting and newsletters will be available through KAXE website. We will work to make this program self-sufficient through sponsored ads on the newsletter, individual donations and additional grant funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Engaging Minnesotans With Phenology: Radio, Podcasts, Citizen Science	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	$198,000

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	$ Amount	$ Amount Spent	$ Amount Remaining
Personnel										
Production supervisor - Radio		Work with producer to train, coordinate, and assist with all aspects of radio production			29%	0.18		$16,716	-	-
Administration		Coordinate and administer the grant to be sure outcomes are achieved, bills are paid, reporting is accomplished			33%	0.1		$7,968	-	-
Phenologist		Host weekly phenology show, conduct teacher trainings and follow-ups and classroom visits			0%	0.42		$20,790	-	-
Producer		Produce 24 statewide phenology episodes, weekly 'season watch' podcast and newsletter. Identify and set up interviews, enter data and produce segments from schools, produce web stories			30%	1.52		$101,912	-	-
Production Supervisor - Digital		Work with producer to train, coordinate, and assist with all aspects of digital content			28%	0.04		$3,560	-	-
Digital Producer		Distribute and promote nature content on social media and other digital media			30%	0.18		$12,196	-	-
Reporter		will produce 24 stories on environmental topics and host interactive discussions			28%	0.04		$12,100	-	-
							Sub Total	**$175,242**	**$175,242**	**-**
Contracts and Services										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Capital Equipment										

							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Acquisitions and Stewardship										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Travel In Minnesota										
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	8 training sessions @ 375 miles/session, 2 person @ .655/mile; per commissioner's plan for lodging, 8 sessions, 1 person @ $94/night; per commissioner's plan for food, 8 sessions, 1 person @ $46/day	teacher training and teacher follow-up training					$4,758	$4,758	-
							Sub Total	**$4,758**	**$4,758**	**-**
Travel Outside Minnesota										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Printing and Publication										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Other Expenses										
							Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
							Grand Total	**$180,000**	**$180,000**	**-**

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	$ Amount	$ Amount Spent	$ Amount Remaining
State						
			State Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
Non-State						
			Non State Sub Total	**-**	**-**	**-**
			Funds Total	**-**	**-**	**-**

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: f2783e32-cc4.pdf

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Handout contains an overview of the Season Watch project and its outcomes. Includes some photos and links to project materials....

Financial Capacity

File: 9eecc0e6-48f.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Northern Community Radio BOD Approval Letter	648116cd-dee.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Training Handout	e2bcb61e-70d.pdf
Talkback Script Handout	63d5903a-6db.pdf
John Latimer with Students	1594c5e1-de9.jpe
John Latimer at Classroom visit	d7a000cc-cfb.jpe
Watch List - August Handout	91e4e119-877.docx
Watch List - July Handout	339a510b-923.docx
Season Watch Newsletter	b157deef-8e8.pdf
Community FeedbackFeedback 2024-168	e1480c5f-b33.docx
Participating Classrooms and Community Organizations	1bb16957-b44.docx
Project Outputs Tracking Spreadsheet	a5339738-8e4.xlsx

Media Links

Title	Link
KAXE Phenology Page	https://www.kaxe.org/podcast/phenology
New Phenology Page	https://www.kaxe.org/show/phenology-john-latimer
Season Watch Podcast	https://www.kaxe.org/season-watch
Season Watch Newsletter Archive	https://www.kaxe.org/science-nature/2024-11-20/season-watch-newsletter-archive-oct-2023-present-mn-nature-seasons-phenology
News Coverage	https://www.kaxe.org/lccmr-funded
Phenology Talkbacks/ Student & Community Reports	https://www.kaxe.org/tags/phenology-talkbacks

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Made changes to the workplan including specifying target of training sessions, clarified long-term funding plans, and number of class rooms engaged with on a weekly basis.

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 understand that travel expenses are only approved if they 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 understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

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")?

Yes

Do you certify that background checks are performed for background check crimes, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 299C.61, Subd. 2, on all employees, contractors, and volunteers who have or may have access to a child to whom children's services are provided by your organization?

Yes

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

N/A

Work Plan Amendments

Amendment ID	Request Type	Changes made on the following pages	Justification For Amendment Request (word limit 75)	Date Submitted	Approved	Date of LCCMR Action
1	Amendment Request	• Budget • Attachments • Other • Budget - Personnel • Budget - Travel and Conferences	We request a budget amendment to transfer $1,242.23 from Travel Expenses to Personnel. Actual project travel costs were lower than originally anticipated, while additional staff time was needed to successfully complete project activities, deliverables, and reporting requirements. Following this amendment, the total Personnel budget will be $175,242.23, and the total Travel Expenses budget will be $4,757.77. This transfer will not change the total project budget.	August 4, 2026	Yes	August 14, 2026

Status Update Reporting

Final Status Update August 14, 2026

Date Submitted: August 4, 2026

Date Approved: August 14, 2026

Overall Update
The project successfully completed all grant-funded activities, meeting or exceeding nearly every major outcome. Over the course of the project, we produced 102 Season Watch audio segments, exceeding our original goal of 90, as well as 25 scientist interviews, surpassing our goal of 24. We produced 17 seasonal-themed podcast episodes and distributed 101 newsletters building an audience of over 5000 subscribers.

Education and community engagement were central to the project's success. Through 42 educator workshops, follow-up sessions, and classroom visits, we reached approximately 1,819 participants. Students and community members submitted 669 phenology reports, including 599 student reports, far exceeding our original goal of 360 submissions.

Educator feedback indicates that the project helped students observe seasonal changes more closely, ask deeper scientific questions, and develop stronger connections to the natural world. Overall, Season Watch expanded access to locally relevant science programming, strengthened educators' capacity to incorporate phenology into their teaching, elevated student and community observations, and created an enduring collection of audio, digital, and educational resources for audiences across Minnesota.

Activity 1
Activity 1 was completed successfully and exceeded all major content-production milestones. Since our last update, we produced five additional Season Watch segments, bringing the cumulative total to 102 and exceeding the original goal of 90. We completed 25 scientist interviews, surpassing the goal of 24, and produced one additional seasonal-themed podcast episode, bringing the final total to 17.

Throughout the project, Season Watch combined timely observations, scientific expertise, and personal stories to help audiences understand and connect with seasonal change. Content explored topics such as owls, hibernation, fungi, wildfire patterns, native plants, northern lights, and other seasonal phenomena relevant to Minnesota.

During the final phase, Season Watch continued in the longer weekly podcast format introduced in fall 2025. This format allowed for greater context, deeper conversations, and more detailed storytelling. Audience feedback indicated that listeners valued the expanded approach.

Overall, Activity 1 created a substantial and enduring collection of accessible, locally relevant audio content. The final outputs exceeded the proposed production goals while strengthening public awareness of phenology and encouraging audiences to observe seasonal changes in their communities.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Activity 2
Activity 2 was completed successfully, with strong participation from educators, students, and community members. Since our last update, we conducted five additional educator workshops, follow-up sessions, or classroom visits and reached approximately 200 additional participants. Cumulatively, we completed 42 engagement activities reaching approximately 1,819 participants through training, classroom visits, and individualized support.

Students and community members submitted 31 additional phenology reports, bringing the project total to 669, including 599 student reports. This substantially exceeded our goal of 360 reports. Observations were shared through broadcasts, newsletters, digital platforms, and the Season Watch podcast, helping participants develop observation and science communication skills while celebrating local knowledge.

SpeakPipe proved to be an especially effective addition to the project, providing an easy, accessible way for listeners to record and share observations, questions, and comments directly with the Season Watch team. These recordings brought more community voices into our programming and strengthened connections with listeners.

We also completed 28 interactive discussions exploring seasonal observations and environmental topics. Teachers consistently reported that participating students became more curious, confident, and attentive observers of seasonal change and the natural world.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Activity 3
Activity 3 was completed successfully, creating a strong digital network connecting listeners, readers, educators, students, and community members. Since our last update, we distributed three additional Season Watch newsletters, bringing the cumulative total to 101 and exceeding our original goal of 90. At the project's conclusion, the newsletter had 5,246 subscribers.

We also completed all 24 planned environmental news stories. Coverage addressed timely regional issues, including the proposed manganese mine in Emily, Minnesota lake data and classification, the wild rice sulfate standard and U.S. Steel permit request, environmental review of the proposed Hermantown data center, and the Leech Lake Band's PFAS lawsuit. Stories were shared across newsletters, podcasts, broadcasts, and other digital platforms, extending their reach and accessibility.

Newsletter open rates averaged above 60% during the project, demonstrating sustained audience interest and trust. Each issue combined seasonal observations, environmental reporting, educational resources, and community storytelling.

Overall, Activity 3 exceeded its newsletter production goal, met its environmental reporting milestone, and established an effective digital platform helping audiences across northern Minnesota stay informed about seasonal changes and environmental issues affecting their communities.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Dissemination
Season Watch content was distributed through multiple channels, including weekly radio broadcasts on KAXE/KBXE, podcast platforms, newsletters, KAXE.org, and social media. This multi-platform approach reached listeners, educators, students, and community members across Minnesota and beyond.

New podcast episodes, environmental news stories, student phenology reports, and seasonal observations were promoted through Facebook, Instagram, and the weekly newsletter. Podcast episodes and supporting resources remain archived at KAXE.org/seasonwatch, creating a long-term educational resource for classrooms and lifelong learners.

Expanding Season Watch into a longer podcast format provided more room for scientific context, community voices, and detailed storytelling. The newsletter also grew to 5,246 subscribers while maintaining open rates above 60%, demonstrating sustained audience interest and engagement.

Support from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund was acknowledged throughout the project in

newsletters, podcast episodes, website content, and related materials. Feedback from educators, students, scientists, and listeners was overwhelmingly positive, reflecting strong interest in environmental education, seasonal change, and community science programming.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update June 1, 2026

Date Submitted: August 4, 2026

Date Approved: August 14, 2026

Overall Update
Since our last report, the Season Watch project has continued to build momentum through consistent programming, strong educator participation, and growing audience engagement.

We completed all project activities as of June 1, 2026, and exceeded nearly every major benchmark outlined in the grant proposal. Since the previous update, we released additional weekly audio segments, expanded the podcast, published new student reports, and completed all 16 seasonal episodes. We also surpassed our goal for weekly phenology updates, producing 97 episodes toward our original goal of 90, and completed 28 scientist interviews, exceeding our goal of 24.

Educator and student participation has remained especially strong across Minnesota. As of June 2026, we have published 638 student- and community-submitted phenology reports, far surpassing our goal of 360 submissions. Our newsletter audience has grown to 5,221 subscribers while maintaining an open rate above 60%, demonstrating continued audience interest and engagement.

Feedback from educators continues to be overwhelmingly positive. Teachers report that students are asking deeper scientific questions, observing seasonal changes more closely, and feeling increasingly connected to the natural world around them.

Overall, the project has successfully expanded public engagement with phenology and seasonal observation across Minnesota.

Activity 1
Activity 1 is focused on creating engaging content that helps people connect with seasonal change, and the project continues to exceed goals. Since launch, we have produced 97 of 90 planned weekly Season Watch segments and 23 were produced in the last 6 months, 28 of 24 scientist interviews and 8 of those were produced in the last 6 months, and all 8 seasonal theme episodes, expanding that total to 16 episodes and 4 of those were produced in the past 6 months. Topics have included owls, hibernation, fungi, wildfire patterns, native plants, and the northern lights.

This fall, we reimagined Season Watch into a longer weekly podcast format to better match audience listening habits. The change has helped grow engagement, and listeners have shared that they appreciate the added context, storytelling, and deeper conversations.

The project remains on schedule and continues to successfully connect local observations, scientific expertise, and personal stories in ways that resonate with audiences across northern Minnesota.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Activity 2
Activity 2 focuses on direct engagement with classrooms and communities, and the impact continues to grow. As of June, we have hosted 37 educator workshops and follow up visits, reaching approximately 1,619 participants through trainings, classroom visits, and one on one support.

We have also exceeded our goal of 360 phenology reports, with 638 reports submitted by students and community members to date. These reports are shared on air and through digital platforms, helping participants build science communication skills while encouraging pride in local knowledge and observation. Some reports are also featured in the Season Watch podcast. This year, we also added SpeakPipe as a new tool for listeners to easily submit comments and observations.

In partnership with former Aitkin County Land Commissioner Mark Jacobs, we produced 28 live interactive interviews focused on topics such as elk reintroduction, wildfire, and forest bird habitat. Guests included DNR forest health coordinators, wildlife biologists, and University of Minnesota researchers. Listeners participated live through text questions.

Teachers continue to share positive feedback, noting that students are becoming more curious, confident, and engaged observers of the natural world.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Activity 3
Activity 3 focuses on connecting listeners, readers, educators, and community members through digital platforms. The project continues to see strong growth and engagement. To date, we have distributed 98 of 90 planned Season Watch newsletters, and newsletter subscriptions have grown to 5,221, more than doubling since the project began.

We have also completed 24 of 24 planned environmental news stories, many of which are featured across the newsletter, podcast, and digital platforms. Coverage has included topics such as the proposed manganese mine in Emily, Minnesota lake data and classification, the wild rice sulfate standard and U.S. Steel permit request, environmental review of the proposed Hermantown data center, and the Leech Lake Band's PFAS lawsuit.

Newsletter open rates continue to average above 60%, showing strong audience engagement and trust. Each issue combines seasonal observations, environmental reporting, educational resources, and community storytelling. The newsletter has become an important way for audiences across northern Minnesota to stay connected to both seasonal change and environmental issues impacting their communities.
(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Dissemination
Season Watch content continues to be shared across multiple platforms to reach listeners, educators, and community members throughout Minnesota. Weekly segments air on KAXE/KBXE and full podcast episodes are distributed on major podcast platforms. New episodes, newsletter content, and student reports are also promoted through Facebook and Instagram to help expand audience reach and engagement.

All podcast episodes are archived and maintained on KAXE.org/seasonwatch, creating an accessible resource hub for educators, students, and listeners. The expanded podcast format and enhanced newsletter have allowed for deeper storytelling and improved accessibility for classroom use and lifelong learning.

Support from LCCMR is acknowledged in each newsletter, podcast episode, and on the website. This ongoing visibility helps reinforce the importance of public investment in environmental education and community engagement.

Audience response continues to be positive, with listeners and educators sharing strong feedback about the value of the program and its impact on curiosity, learning, and connection to the natural world.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update December 1, 2025

Date Submitted: January 30, 2026

Date Approved: February 3, 2026

Overall Update
We've made great progress since our last report. The Season Watch project continues to hit its stride, with consistent programming, strong educator participation, and growing audience engagement.

Since the last update, we've released more weekly audio segments, grown our podcast, published student reports, and wrapped up all 8 of our seasonal episodes and are currently at 12. We're well on our way to hitting the full 74 of 90-episode goal for weekly phenology updates, and we've already completed 20 of 24 scientist interviews. We also continue to see strong engagement from educators and schools across Minnesota.

As of December, we've published 473 student and community-submitted phenology reports—well over our goal of 360. Our newsletter has grown to 1,269 subscribers and still sees open rates above 61%. We're also hearing great feedback from teachers, who say students are asking better questions and feel more connected to the seasons.

In short: the show's growing, the audience is learning, and more Minnesotans are paying attention to the natural world around them. We are on-track to complete all of our activities by June 30, 2026.

Activity 1
Activity 1 is all about creating engaging content that connects people to seasonal change, and we're right on track. Since launch, we've produced:

- 74 of 90 weekly Season Watch segments
- 20 of 24 scientist interviews, covering everything from loons and fungi to wildfire patterns and native plants
- All 8 of our seasonal theme episodes (done early!) and currently sitting at 12!

This fall, we reimagined the podcast into a longer weekly format to better match how people listen. It's helped grow the audience, and listeners have told us they appreciate hearing more context and deeper conversations. Some of the topics have included, owls, hibernation and northern lights just to name a few.

Our team is staying on schedule, and we're finding new ways to connect the dots between local observations, scientific insight, and personal storytelling. It's working and people are noticing more and engaging more.

Activity 2
This part of the project is where we see real impact in classrooms and communities. As of December, we've hosted 20 educator workshops and follow-ups, reaching about 1,230 participants. These range from formal trainings to one-on-one support and classroom visits.

We've already surpassed our goal of 360 phenology reports with 473 reports submitted by students and community members so far. These reports are aired and shared, helping build science communication skills and pride in local knowledge. Some of these talkbacks are being included in the new Season Watch Pod as well. We also rolled out a new way for listener to provide comments via SpeakPipe.

We hold monthly interactive interviews produced with Mark Jacobs, former Aitkin County land commissioner. Topics included elk reintroduction, wildfire, and enhancing forest bird habitat. Guests included DNR forest health coordinators, wildlife biologists, and University of Minnesota researchers. Listeners texted questions live. Our goal was eight interviews; we have completed 22 to date so far overall.

The feedback has been great: teachers say kids are more curious, more confident, and better observers. We'll continue visiting classrooms through the school year, keeping the focus on long-term relationships with educators and hands-on learning for students.

Activity 3

This is where everything comes together, connecting listeners, readers, and educators through digital platforms. As of December:

- 76 of 90 Season Watch newsletters have gone out
- Newsletter subscribers have grown to 1,269 (more than double what we started with)
- We've published 20 of 24 planned environmental news stories, which are also featured in the newsletter and podcast

Topics we've covered so far include:

- Updates on the proposed manganese mine in Emily
- How many lakes are actually in Minnesota and how they're counted
- The wild rice sulfate standard and U.S. Steel's permit request
- Environmental review of the proposed Hermantown data center
- The Leech Lake Band's PFAS lawsuit over contamination

Newsletter open rates remain strong consistently above 61% and audience feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Each issue weaves together real-time seasonal updates, in-depth stories, and resources for teachers and curious nature-lovers alike. It's become a trusted hub for our audience.

Dissemination

We're getting the word out through every channel we have. Season Watch content airs weekly on KAXE/KBXE and is available as a podcast on all major platforms. We promote new episodes, newsletter links, and student reports on Facebook and Instagram.

All newsletters and podcast episodes are archived on KAXE.org/seasonwatch, which we keep updated regularly. The longer podcast format and expanded newsletter have helped us engage more deeply with our audience and make content more accessible to educators.

We credit LCCMR support in each newsletter, podcast episode, and on the website. This visibility helps reinforce that public support is powering this statewide learning tool.

Listener and educator feedback continues to be positive, and we're excited to keep growing participation this spring.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update June 1, 2025

Date Submitted: June 9, 2025

Date Approved: July 8, 2025

Overall Update
We've made strong, measurable progress toward our outcomes, with all core activities being actively underway. Over the past year, we've completed 19 educator trainings, received 346 student and community-submitted phenology reports, and published 48 of 90 planned Season Watch newsletters. We've also produced 46 of 90 weekly podcasts, 9 of 8 seasonal podcasts, 10 of 24 scientist interviews, and 11 of 24 environmental news stories. The program's impact continues to grow; we now have 805 newsletter subscribers with a 62% open rate, and feedback from educators and listeners consistently highlights the value of our content. One teacher shared that a former student credited the program with creating their "first and most meaningful dataset," while another educator said the program helps their students "see themselves as scientists."

Activity 1
We've made strong progress on Activity 1. So far, we've produced 10 of 24 scientist interviews, 47 of 90 weekly Season Watch podcasts, and 9 of the 8 seasonal podcasts (exceeding our target). Interviews and podcasts have featured local scientists and covered timely topics like native bees, seasonal migrations, water quality, and sustainable practices. The content is shared on KAXE radio, via podcast platforms, and embedded in the Season Watch newsletter. Listeners and educators have shared how this content inspires curiosity and supports classroom learning. One educator said, "It's crazy how excited the kids get knowing their report will be on the radio!"

Activity 2
We conducted 19 educator workshops and follow-up trainings throughout the grant period, equipping teachers across Minnesota with the tools to integrate phenology into their classrooms. Educators consistently expressed enthusiasm and appreciation, with many returning year after year. One teacher noted that "after adding the show and Instagram to our repertoire, the engagement and excitement has multiplied." These trainings supported hands-on science learning, built a sense of environmental awareness, and fostered real-world observation skills. A total of 346 phenology reports from students and community members were submitted and featured across platforms.

Activity 3
We've completed 49 of 90 planned Season Watch newsletters and 12 of 24 environmental news stories. The newsletter now reaches 805 subscribers and maintains a 62% open rate, demonstrating high interest and ongoing engagement. Topics include seasonal phenomena like bird migrations, snow fleas, and frog choruses, with links to podcasts and educational resources. One reader wrote, "Your April guide with links is a lifesaver — thank you!" The KAXE newsroom has published environmental stories covering issues such as forest management, invasive species, and local conservation efforts, elevating rural and underrepresented perspectives. Content is distributed via email, KAXE.org, and on-air broadcasts.

Dissemination
We've actively shared project content through radio, podcasts, newsletters, social media, and our website. Student audio reports and scientist interviews are aired on KAXE, archived online, and shared via podcast and newsletter. Season Watch newsletters are emailed weekly and promoted on Facebook and Instagram, often alongside audio clips and classroom photos. Funding is credited in all audio content and clearly listed and linked in newsletters and online stories. Educators and listeners frequently write in to express appreciation. One teacher noted, "The newsletter makes it easy to bring current, local science into my classroom each week." Another listener said a student report "reminded me of my

own son doing the same thing 40 years ago.” These connections highlight the power of shared seasonal observation and lifelong learning.