



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-231

Staff Lead: Noah Fribley

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 20, 2026

Project Title: YES! Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability

Project Budget: \$199,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Kalley Pratt

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

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Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 17, 2026

Reporting Schedule: April 1 / October 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2029

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2029

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2026, Chp. 104, Sec. 2, Subd. 05r

Appropriation Language: \$199,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center to empower Minnesota youth to lead sustainability projects and expose them to environmental and natural resource career opportunities through hands-on environmental education, natural resource-based recreation, and partnerships with local schools and communities.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2029

Narrative

Project Summary: YES will engage and connect diverse students across Minnesota in hands-on environmental education and natural resource-based outdoor recreation to promote youth-led sustainability projects and partnerships in local schools and communities.

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

Youth Eco Solutions (YES) is eager to offer an exciting opportunity to reconnect Minnesota's youth with the state's abundant natural resources. In a world dominated by technology, many young people have easy access to digital entertainment but face barriers to accessing outdoor spaces and environmental education.

The "YES Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability" initiative is designed to bridge these gaps by providing immersive outdoor education experiences. We aim to empower students to engage with Minnesota's unique landscapes and waters through hands-on activities that promote environmental literacy, foster leadership skills, and encourage peer connections from across the state. Students will also benefit from near-peer mentorship opportunities, inspired by YES's partnership with the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment through the National Science Foundation Grant 2147839.

This initiative is committed to providing equitable opportunities for all youth, including those from indigenous, local, BIPOC, and underserved communities. By collaborating with local communities, YES ensures that every student has the chance to access nature, deepening their connection to the environment and cultivating future environmental stewards. Ultimately, this program will inspire youth to take responsibility for their planet, build resilience, and foster community connections.

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.

Youth Eco Solutions (YES) is an award-winning, student-driven program that empowers students to tackle ecological challenges through hands-on projects. Since its inception in 2007, YES has engaged over 5,085 students and collaborated with more than 7,330 local businesses, organizations, and experts, positively impacting an additional 366,333 students and community members.

The "YES Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability" initiative aims to provide middle and high school students across Minnesota with direct exposure to the state's diverse ecosystems. Through hands-on outdoor activities, students will explore key ecological sites such as wetlands, forests, and prairies, enhancing their understanding of environmental science. Field trips will be supplemented by workshops focused on sustainability practices, conservation, and ecological preservation. Students will engage in activities like tree planting, water quality monitoring, and wildlife tracking, all while being encouraged to lead their own eco-friendly projects in their local schools and communities.

Funding for the initiative will cover transportation, materials, expert facilitation, and program administration. Offering immersive outdoor education, we will cultivate environmental stewardship and responsibility for Minnesota's natural resources. This project will empower youth to become eco-conscious advocates, fostering a lasting impact on environmental awareness and action in their schools, neighborhoods, and future.

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 project will engage youth in protecting and conserving Minnesota's natural resources by encouraging active stewardship of local environments. Through outdoor experiences, students will gain a deeper understanding of ecological processes, species protection, and conservation. By promoting environmental literacy, the project will inspire sustainable behaviors and advocacy in the next generation. It will also connect like-minded students across the state,

fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for the environment. Long-term, this initiative will strengthen public connection to Minnesota's diverse ecosystems, ensuring the preservation of natural landscapes for future generations.

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: YES Engaging Students with Minnesota Outdoors and Empowering Sustainability Initiatives

Activity Budget: \$125,000

Activity Description:

This activity engages students with Minnesota’s natural resources while empowering them to lead sustainability initiatives in their schools and communities. Each year begins with the YES Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, where students participate in hands-on workshops, build peer connections, strengthen environmental knowledge, grow in leadership skills, and cultivate a sense of belonging.

To further engagement, YES will host Winter Weekend Retreats at a Minnesota Environmental Learning Center, providing outdoor learning opportunities for students with limited access to nature. Additionally, three large-group recreational events bring diverse students together for outdoor experiences and peer connection.

Guided by YES Staff, more than 150 students on YES Teams, designated by their school districts, will implement at least 20 sustainability projects over two years. Each team may receive up to \$200 annually, reimbursed upon receipt submission, to purchase approved materials for project implementation (supplies, native seed/plants, tools and services). These hands-on experiences foster leadership, environmental stewardship, and community engagement, inspiring students to become eco-conscious leaders who create meaningful, lasting change.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
In Year 1, engage 100+ students at the Fall Summit to address participation barriers.	November 30, 2026
In Year 1, host a YES Winter Retreat for 75+ students to foster leadership.	March 31, 2027
In Year 1, host three regional recreational events to connect diverse students with the outdoors.	May 31, 2027
In Year 1, support and mobilize 150 students to create and implement 20 sustainability projects	June 30, 2027
In Year 2, engage 100+ students at the Fall Summit to address participation barriers.	November 30, 2027
In Year 2, host a YES Winter Retreat for 75+ students to foster leadership.	March 31, 2028
In Year 2, host three regional recreational events to connect diverse students with the outdoors.	May 31, 2028
In Year 2, support and mobilize 150 students to create and implement 20 sustainability projects	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Educating YES Students and Connecting Them to Green Career Pathways

Activity Budget: \$74,000

Activity Description:

YES Students in grades 6 through 12 will engage with 50 local and state environmental experts from organizations like Clean Energy Resource Team (CERTs), Climate Generation, Emily Ford, Friends of the Boundary Waters, National Loon Center, and others. These experts will lead hands-on training sessions focused on sustainability topics relevant to students' community projects and future careers. Students will explore a variety of key sustainability practices, including energy conservation, renewable energy, water conservation, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, pollution prevention, biodiversity protection, green building practices, sustainable transportation, climate change mitigation, eco-friendly product design, sustainable fisheries, forest management, and social sustainability, all of which are vital to environmental stewardship. To further support the students' growth, YES will host 10 annual environmental career workshops across the state, offering industry insights, inspiration and green career pathway connections. To conclude each season, YES will host an optional competition where teams receive feedback and mentorship from green career professionals and compete for an environmental education field trip.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
In Year 1, connect students with 50 green career professionals.	May 31, 2027
In Year 1, host 10 workshops connecting students with experts on sustainability and green careers.	May 31, 2027
In Year 1, host optional student competition featuring feedback and mentorship from green career professionals.	May 31, 2027
In Year 2, connect students with 50 green career professionals.	May 31, 2028
In Year 2, host 10 workshops connecting students with experts on sustainability and green careers.	May 31, 2028
In Year 2, host optional student competition featuring feedback and mentorship from green career professionals.	May 31, 2028

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Students and Teachers	School Districts in Minnesota	School Districts will be key project partners in supporting youth in participating in natural resource projects. Funds will help support project seed funds and enable students and teachers to attend events as indicated in the budget.	Yes
Volunteers	Lake Associations, Community Groups	Lake associations and other community groups are a big part of our resource base for volunteers who support our youth-led projects.	No
Emily Pavlisich	Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	Host a weekend retreat in which a diverse group of students participating in Youth Eco Solutions will be engaged in hands-on environmental education and natural resource-based outdoor recreation.	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.

Communicating the YES Teams' amazing accomplishments is a top priority. The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund is accredited throughout as a major funder. We share Bi-Weekly email updates with our YES Coaches to create a sense of community and encouragement between the teams. We also send our monthly e-newsletter to our YES supporters highlighting team accomplishments, YES events, website, new blog posts and our social media platforms. Along with our online presence, we produce our annual digital and printed YES Team Accomplishments that features the year's highlights. Externally, YES continues to participate in the MN Science Teachers conference, the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center Earth Day, the MN State Fair and building relationships with local media and politicians.

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?

YES is completing its 18th year of working with Minnesota's youth by leveraging over \$1.4 million in local support of projects in the form of in-kind contributions, matching funds, major grants, and volunteer hours. In addition, YES will seek private and public partnerships, individual donors and sponsorships to continue the work. But it is the projects themselves that will have everlasting results.

One student commented, "Our YES Team is leaving a legacy." The results from this project will leave a lifetime legacy of improved waterways, preserved and restored natural environments, and informed citizens throughout Minnesota.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Youth-Led Sustainability Projects in 50 Minnesota Communities – Phase III	M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 05c	\$400,000
YES! Students Take on Minnesota Water-Quality Challenge	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$213,000
Yes! Students Take On Water Quality Challenge II	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000
YES! Students Take Action to Complete Eco Projects	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000

YES! Students Step Up To Reduce Carbon Footprint	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05m	\$199,000
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Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		To manage project budget, reporting and staff to achieve desired project outcomes, and provide strategic and collaborative leadership in carrying out the mission of the statewide Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) program.			25%	1.2		\$86,560
Team Manager		To coordinate and support student-driven teams to complete sustainability projects.			25%	1		\$53,100
Office Manager/Administrator		The office manager/administrator budget will be used solely for functions necessary to administer this appropriation and project. This includes providing bookkeeping, processing payroll, managing project seed fund distributions, and completing other essential office duties directly related to the implementation and oversight of this project.			25%	0.14		\$12,800
							Sub Total	\$152,460
Contracts and Services								
School District (Substitute Teacher Pay)/Community Expense Allowance	Subaward	To facilitate student participation, funds will be available for reimbursement to support: 1. coaches/adult advisors to attend YES! events during the school day, and 2. transportation expenses for buses. \$600 per team X 15 teams = \$9,000 X 2 years = \$18,000.				0.36		\$18,000
							Sub Total	\$18,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Funds will support supplies for YES educational events and workshops, including the Fall Summit, workshops, and YES Weekend Retreat. Supplies may include equipment rentals such as kayaks, canoes, fat-tire bikes, cross-country skis, snowshoes, sleds, and related outdoor learning tools. Environmental Education workshop materials are estimated at \$20 per student for	Materials and supplies will support hands-on outdoor natural resource experiences for students across Minnesota by enabling access to equipment rentals such as kayaks, canoes, fat-tire bikes, cross-country skis, and sleds.					\$6,000

		150 students annually over two years, totaling \$6,000.							
								Sub Total	\$6,000
Capital Equipment									
								Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship									
								Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota									
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Coordinators & Project Manager travel: approximately 200 miles/month x 24 months x .655 = \$3,040	Travel required to support and meet with Statewide teams and coordinate activities in communities.						\$3,040
								Sub Total	\$3,040
Travel Outside Minnesota									
								Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication									
								Sub Total	-
Other Expenses									
		Project Seed Funds	Funds will support YES Teams, designated by their school districts, in purchasing materials and services needed to implement natural resource conservation, restoration, and related educational projects. Teams will be reimbursed up to \$200 annually upon submission of receipts. With 15 teams participating each year, this totals \$3,000 per year and \$6,000 over two years.						\$6,000
		Stipends for Liaisons (YES Workshop Presenters and Green Career Professionals)	Funds will provide stipends for YES Workshop Presenters and						\$3,500

			Green Career Professionals. Over two years, 20 workshops will be held (10 per year), with each presenter receiving a maximum amount of \$175 stipend. Workshop presenters will deliver educational sessions and provide mentorship, helping YES students build environmental knowledge, leadership skills, and connections with green career opportunities.					
		Outdoor Events	To facilitate increased student participation in outdoor programming, funds will be allocated toward venue fees. The total budget request is \$10,000 over two years, which equates to \$5,000 per year and supports three regional events annually (one per region).					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$19,500
							Grand Total	\$199,000

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	Each participating YES Team pays a fee of \$600. 15 Teams x 2 years = 30 teams x \$600 = \$18,000.	Participation fees cover costs not eligible for reimbursement from ENRTF such as food, t-shirts and other additional costs.	Pending	\$18,000
In-Kind	In-kind from Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC). Also includes student volunteer time, teacher/coach volunteer time, and professional/expert volunteer time.	In-Kind (phone, computer, maintenance, heating, electric, copies, professional service, etc.) PWELC \$36,000 for 2 years. Student volunteer time average is 200 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 6,000 x \$14.56/hr = \$87,360. Teacher/Coach volunteer time average is 80 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 2,400 x \$35/hr = \$84,000. Professional/expert volunteer time average is 10 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 300 x \$45/hr = \$13,500. Above in-kind is based on past history of previously quantified data.	Secured	\$184,860
Cash	Prairie Woods Environmental Center Income (Cash Reserves, Small Grants & Gifts)	Cash reserves are intended for staff, travel, office support and other items as required to maintain the program (Website Hosting, Constant Contact, Email, Technical Support, Printing, Marketing, etc.).	Secured	\$20,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$222,860
			Funds Total	\$222,860

Total Project Cost: \$421,860

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [db0a0ddb-fed.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A Statewide map of YES!, testimonials from participants, photos of environmental education, proposed projects....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2022 PWELC Form 990	51cdc346-856.pdf
PWELC - 2024 audit - FS (FINAL)	122dac63-1a9.pdf
Business Filing Details	cd102bc5-657.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
PWELC Board Letter	2f5c8ac3-dbe.pdf
PWELC Board Resolution	62fc595c-cd6.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
2023-24 YES Team Accomplishments	3cb22d84-d46.pdf
YES Letter of Support - CERTs	8e15af89-f3c.pdf
YES Letter of Support - New London Spicer High School	f97a5081-a2a.pdf
YES Letter of Support - New London Spicer Middle School	4012bd3f-73b.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Royalton Public Schools	22c36096-a5a.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	681b8768-473.pdf
Photos of Environmental Education	6a8c40ec-b93.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Harbor City International	aaf703b5-bfc.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Westbrook-Walnut Grove	b79761a8-3b4.pdf
YES Letter of Support - MACCRAY	4416ef31-a85.pdf
2024-25 YES Team Accomplishments	c9ef96e4-83f.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Project Completion Date Extended to June 20, 2029; PWELC Board Resolution, 2022 PWELC Form 990, PWELC - 2024 audit and 2024-25 YES Team Accomplishments Added to Attachments, Uploaded evidence of good standing from the Secretary of State, Specified that the office manager/administrator budget, Disaggregated the line item in "other" into several line items, Added years to the milestone descriptions

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

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:

Jennifer Swenson, Executive Director of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

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