



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-436

Staff Lead: Tom Dietrich

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 27, 2026

Project Title: Outdoor Learning Center and Trails

Project Budget: \$250,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Chris Lindholm

Organization: Cook County Schools ISD 166

Office Telephone: (218) 387-2271

Email: clindholm@isd166.org

Web Address: <https://www.cookcountyschools.org/>

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. 05ff

Appropriation Language: \$250,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Cook County Public Schools to improve and expand access to the outdoor environment and provide spaces for exploration and education through accessible trails, outdoor classrooms, shelter, and seating for students in Cook County public schools. Before costs for this appropriation are incurred, a fiscal management plan must be approved in the work plan, unless otherwise determined by the commissioner.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2029

Narrative

Project Summary: The project will improve and expand access to the outdoor environment, provide spaces for exploration and education through accessible trails, features, shelter and seating for students in Cook County Schools

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

The mission of the Cook County School District is “Success for Each - Respect for All” (Niigaanosedaa – Manaaji’ididaa gekina awiya). The district is located along the north shore of Lake Superior and the people that choose to reside here truly embrace and respect the outdoors. This proposed outdoor learning centers and trail updates will further expand the community’s connection with the natural environment. The current school garden does not have any seating areas for a class of students to use and additional outdoor classroom areas are desired near the east bridge of the school forest and near the school's new main entrance. In addition, both bridges are over 25 years old and need to be replaced for both safety and improved accessibility. The new main entrance area is part of a larger facility project as a result of a successful bond referendum in 2024.

Having this space and designing it properly for accessibility will ensure that people of any age or physical ability will feel welcomed and have access to the amenities offered. The amenities will also provide opportunities to support our robust Ojibwe language, history and culture programs and our outdoor environmental education programs.

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 project will improve and expand access to the outdoor environment, provide spaces for exploration and education through accessible trails, features, shelter and seating for the Cook County Schools students and north shore community. Specifically, the plan is to install some seating in the current school garden, install an outdoor study area next to the new school main entrance, and install a learning area near the east bridge entering the school forest with a timber framed storage shed that is currently near the school. Both bridges will be replaced with new, more accessible bridges to better serve students and community members with mobility challenges. If funds allow, trails will also be improved with some strategic clearing of brush and dead timber and grading or wood chipping as needed.

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 goal of this project is to provide easy access for all students and community members to spaces that encourage appreciation and connection with the natural environment and cultivates a mindset that we are fortunate to have an abundance of these natural resources in Minnesota that should be preserved. Both bridges will be replaced to make them accessible for people with disabilities. Learning stations and learning areas will be designed to facilitate student learning about Ojibwe history, language, and culture and our connections to the land and forests here in Cook County, MN.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

City(s): Grand Marais

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

City(s): Grand Marais

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Development of an outdoor learning center/areas and trails in the school forest.

Activity Budget: \$250,000

Activity Description:

The project will improve and expand access to the outdoor environment, provide spaces for exploration and education through accessible trails, features, shelter and seating for students in Cook County Schools and the north shore community. Outdoor seating/classroom spaces will be added near the main/south entrance area, to the current school garden, and to the school forest eastern entrance. In addition, two trail bridges will be replaced with new ADA compliant bridges to improve accessibility. The east entrance trail and bridge to the school forest will be moved east approximately 30 yards to accommodate a new track & field facility. School forest trails will be leveled and woodchipped. Feasibility and design work will be completed using secured district funds and will comply with ENRTF requirements.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Feasibility / Engagement (2 Months) (non-ENRTF)	January 31, 2026
ESA Phase 1 (non-ENRTF)	February 28, 2026
Contact & Consult with SHPO (non-ENRTF)	February 28, 2026
Dept. of Admin. Pre-Design Review (non-ENRTF)	March 31, 2026
All Construction Funds Legally Secured	July 31, 2026
Pre-Construction & Bidding (1 Month) (non-ENRTF)	October 31, 2026
Construction starts (3 Months)	May 31, 2027
ENRTF Signage (Language/Logo) Installed	May 31, 2028
Certificate of Occupancy / Official Approval for Public Use	May 31, 2028
Notice of Funding Restriction Recorded	May 31, 2028
Open for Intended Use	June 30, 2028

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Lori Christensen	ICS	Project Collaborator	No
Kevin Wormuth	ICS	Project Collaborator	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.

Communications about the new Outdoor Learning Areas and Trails will be shared with the Cook County community through regular newsletters that include pictures and background information, through the district website, through community meetings regarding the district's construction project, and through coverage by our local radio station and newspaper. The fall 2027 district-wide newsletter will be mailed to all Cook County residents with pictures and information about the project. Finally, the district's Outdoor Environmental Education teacher will engage students in service learning projects to care for the trails and learning areas as part of the Environmental Education program.

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund will be acknowledged via signage or a plaque in the new outdoor learning areas along with in the fall newsletter, newspaper stories, and radio interviews.

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 implementation of this project will coincide with the other upgrades taking place to the facility and site due to successful bond referendums in 2024 and 2025. The School District is prepared to take on the responsibility of maintaining this space after initial improvements are completed. There will, however, be ongoing efforts to encourage donations and volunteerism to help maintain and enhance this outdoor area to limit the financial burden to the district.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
ICS	Service Contract	Design, Pre-Construction, Project Management				-		\$37,250
TBD	Service Contract	Construction Services				0		\$212,750
							Sub Total	\$250,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							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	\$250,000

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
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	ISD 166 Construction Fund and General Fund - Funds 06 and 01	Construction Budget from the 2024 District Bond Referendum for \$24 million	Secured	\$84,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$84,000
			Funds Total	\$84,000

Total Project Cost: \$334,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [078f42ab-497.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The arial view of the school ground shows the two areas (in green) planned for landscaping improvements to facilitate outdoor environmental education. Improvements to the bridges and trails in the official school forest are also part of the proposal to improve accessibility and safety....

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
ISD 166 LCCMR Resolution	1824d943-8dc.pdf
Capital Construction Questionnaire	8bde4ae4-3c6.pdf
LCCMR Budget	f35eb43e-d17.xlsx

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

No changes have been made to the plan between the proposal and the work plan. Design work will take place during the 2026-27 school year with construction implementation in the summer of 2027.

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?

N/A

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?

Yes

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:

Kevin Wormuth, ICS

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

Yes, I understand