



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Final Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-520

Staff Lead: Noah Fribley

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: July 27, 2026

Project Title: Outdoor Learning Professional Development for Educators and Administrators

Project Budget: \$323,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Vanessa Riegler

Organization: Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center

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Project Reporting

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. 05ii

Appropriation Language: \$323,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center to train, mentor, and provide professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to enable them to implement innovative, locally focused outdoor learning at their 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: Wolf Ridge will provide professional development for educators and administrators throughout Minnesota, enabling them to implement innovative, locally focused outdoor learning at their school.

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

While classroom teachers understand the value of real-world learning, many have a hard time shifting from simply learning and playing outdoors to the use of the environment and outdoors as an integrated context for learning. Few teachers have enough expertise with facilitating outdoor learning to be able to naturally implement it into their existing curriculums. They often don't realize that all of their school subjects can be enhanced from being taught outdoors, not just their science lessons. With the introduction of the Minnesota Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act, schools in Minnesota are dedicating the majority of their professional development time and funding into literacy/reading training consequently lacking the opportunities or funding to grow foundational skills in outdoor learning. They often lack administrative support and culture within their schools or districts to be able to implement innovative best practices in outdoor learning. The March 2025 DNR Legislative Report states that barriers to youth outdoor opportunities include "lack of teacher training and professional development..." and "lack of buy-in from administration and administrative support." Culture changes in schools and districts along with capacity development of teachers and administrators is needed to create systems change for outdoor learning.

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.

Wolf Ridge will provide professional development for teachers and school leaders, and build a collaborative network of support that enhances outdoor learning and create systems changes in schools/ districts of Minnesota. By providing multi-day immersive learning experiences for teachers and school leaders, as well as on-site mentorship and site assessments, teachers and school leaders will increase their capacity to provide innovative, locally focused outdoor learning at their respective schools throughout the state that will exponentially impact Minnesota youth. Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center's teacher training team will host professional development experiences at Wolf Ridge's campus to provide a fully immersive experience for teachers and school leaders and create a statewide network of teachers and administrators to support outdoor learning. Wolf Ridge's team will also travel statewide to provide professional development trainings at schools or other district locations to enhance expertise in priority areas including water, education and outdoor recreation, wildlife, plants, and climate change resiliency. Finally, Wolf Ridge will support these education leaders with on-site mentorship for teachers and site assessments of outdoor learning physical spaces. Recommendations and critical resources will then be provided to schools to enable outcomes and the enhancement of outdoor learning.

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?

An estimated 15,000 Minnesota students statewide will be impacted by this project within the three year span. By raising the capacity of school leaders to provide systems change in their schools and by providing teachers professional development to enhance and strengthen the delivery of their outdoor learning, Minnesota students will continue to receive high quality instruction in educational priority areas including water, education and outdoor recreation, wildlife, plants and climate change resiliency. Teachers and school leaders will continue to deliver foundational knowledge and awareness of emerging threats to Minnesota's environment and natural resources for many years to come.

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: Statewide Collaborative and Coordinated Community of Teachers

Activity Budget: \$256,000

Activity Description:

According to the March 2025 Minnesota DNR Outdoor Opportunities for Minnesota Youth Legislative Report, a teacher barrier to youth outdoor opportunities is "the lack of teacher training and professional development...". Teacher professional development will be provided to the 7 different regions of Minnesota (as defined by Minnesota Science Teachers Association) through multi-day, total immersion programs using an outdoor school model. At Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, a minimum of 300 teachers will be provided a 3-5 day (20-44 instructional hours) professional development experience. The experience will enhance expertise in educational priorities including water, education and outdoor recreation, wildlife, plants, and climate change resiliency. Wolf Ridge will establish a collaborative and coordinated statewide network empowering teachers to share culturally relevant best practices with ongoing support. Through a network of newly, highly skilled teachers, a statewide exponential impact will occur for Minnesota youth. Teachers will document students impacted by receiving outdoor learning experiences. The network of teachers will provide outdoor learning for an estimated 2,500 new students each year, for a cumulative total of 15,000 students.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Serve 100 teachers in total immersion professional development workshops.	June 30, 2027
Consult with LCCMR about any changes to fee structure	July 31, 2027
Document statewide student contact numbers by trained teachers.	January 31, 2028
Serve an additional 100 teachers in total immersion professional development workshops.	June 30, 2028
Consult with LCCMR about any changes to fee structure	July 31, 2028
Serve an additional 100 teachers in total immersion professional development workshops.	June 30, 2029
Establish a network of skilled outdoor education teachers meeting regularly.	June 30, 2029
Document statewide student contact numbers by trained teachers.	June 30, 2029
Fiscal Management Plan requesting reimbursement at least monthly for expenses incurred per contingency.	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Schoolwide Expertise, Innovation, and Capacity Development

Activity Budget: \$21,000

Activity Description:

According to the March 2025 Minnesota DNR Legislative Report, a teacher barrier to youth outdoor opportunities is "the lack of teacher training and professional development...". Teacher professional development will be provided statewide through the outdoor physical spaces at their school or another district chosen location. Fifteen schools (150 teachers) will be provided 4-8 hour professional development experiences. The experience will enhance expertise in educational priorities including water, education and outdoor recreation, wildlife, plants, and climate change resiliency. These innovative, locally focused teaching strategies will leverage resources and newly developed expertise to increase awareness of emerging threats to the environment and natural resources. The increased capacity of these teachers will provide more effective and engaging outdoor learning for an estimated 1,500 new students each year, for a cumulative total of 9,000 students.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Serve 3 schools and 70 teachers with in-service professional development	June 30, 2027
Serve an additional 3 schools and 70 teachers with in-service professional development	June 30, 2028
Serve an additional 3 schools and 70 teachers with in-service professional development	June 30, 2029
Survey and report on enhanced teacher effectiveness and leverage of local resources.	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Continuous Improvement Plans for Individual Teachers and Physical Space Effectiveness

Activity Budget: \$21,000

Activity Description:

According to the March 2025 Minnesota DNR Legislative Report, teacher barriers to outdoor learning include limitations on "how to use the outdoors as an active and important learning space." Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center professional teacher trainers will visit schools throughout Minnesota to provide on-site mentorship and site assessment. Direct observation of teachers facilitating outdoor learning with their students will lead to critical, direct feedback and guidance to help enhance and strengthen their practice in place. Site assessments include evaluating the grounds of the respective school with recommendations for site enhancement and development for outdoor learning. Critical resources will be provided for implementation of recommendations. This will raise the capacity of the school to effectively implement outdoor learning. Participating schools will be guided to join the Minnesota DNR School forest program to continue with statewide networking and professional support. Mentoring and coteaching will happen simultaneously thus impacting 3,000 students directly through outdoor learning.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Serve 3 schools (30 teachers, 600 students) and with on-site mentorship and site assessment	June 30, 2027
Serve additional 3 schools (30 teachers, 600 students) with on-site mentorship and site assessment	June 30, 2028
Serve additional 3 schools (30 teachers, 600 students) with on-site mentorship and site assessment	June 30, 2029

Activity 4: Systems Change in School Districts through Principal & Leadership Capacity Development

Activity Budget: \$25,000

Activity Description:

This innovative approach through system change in this activity will create a culture of outdoor learning at respective schools. According to the March 2025 Minnesota DNR Legislative Report, a barrier to youth outdoor opportunities is the "lack of buy-in from administration and administrative support." While empowered teachers may be able to make change at the classroom level, schoolwide system change requires administrative understanding and support. Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center professional teacher trainers and leadership will provide 36 principals and/or school leaders opportunities to participate in total immersion programming conducted by Wolf Ridge, on-site district workshops, and/or outdoor leadership coaching. This will build their capacity to support and lead their school systems towards a comprehensive outdoor learning team and site. Wolf Ridge will facilitate a statewide networking community, local project partners, and meaningful community engagement.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Serve 6 principals and/or school leaders in capacity development	June 30, 2027
Serve an additional 15 principals and/or school leaders in capacity development	June 30, 2028
Serve an additional 15 principals and/or school leaders in capacity development	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Emily Pavlisich	Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	Program Coordinator	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.

Dissemination of the opportunity will be shared with 125 Minnesota schools. Wolf Ridge will have social media posts throughout the project sharing achievements.

Wolf Ridge will share and acknowledge the stories of impact from this grant in several different ways. The Trust Fund logo will be used on our organizations website and promotional materials for programs, adhering to ENRTF guidelines. The Wolf Ridge Almanac (quarterly newsletter via our website and social media to wider public audience) will share stories of impact with a distribution to 26,000 people.

At the end of the grant period, the Wolf Ridge Almanac will provide a report on lessons learned from the opportunity as well as themes, trends, and highlighting the network that has been established.

Also at the end of the grant period, Wolf Ridge will share the empowerment that teachers and administrators are having through collaboration and stories of student impacts through presentations at a state teacher conference. Wolf Ridge will also share impacts and lessons learned about teacher and administrator trainings to the environmental education industry during at least one professional conference.

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 capacity development of teachers and school leaders, districts that were provided professional development during this project will have the skills and network needed to continue to deliver high quality outdoor learning to Minnesota students. Wolf Ridge will create and facilitate an online community of trained educators who can use each other as professional resources for the continuation of mutual support for outdoor learning facilitation. Wolf Ridge will seek additional funding to continue to reach more schools to grow the statewide network of teachers and school leaders.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Increasing Outdoor Learning For Young Minnesotans	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 05a	\$383,000

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Teacher Trainer Instructor 1		Wolf Ridge education faculty who conduct trainings or mentoring at a school, or site assessments at respective schools.			18%	0.36		\$15,000
Teacher Trainer Instructor 2		Wolf Ridge education faculty who conduct trainings or mentoring at a school, or site assessments at respective schools.			18%	0.36		\$15,000
Teacher Trainer Instructor Trainer 1		Wolf Ridge education faculty, instructor trainer.			18%	1.08		\$49,000
Teacher Trainer Instructor Trainer 2		Wolf Ridge education faculty, instructor trainer			18%	1.08		\$45,000
							Sub Total	\$124,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	(Activity 2, 3 and 4) Equipment for Wolf Ridge instructors	Field learning tools and supplies for conduction of training workshops,.to include but not limited to: wagons for hauling tools, camera, microscope, digital display, audio recording devices. Exact needs are based upon customization of trainings to schools that enroll and Wolf Ridge ability to meet needs and goals that support integration of outdoor learning back at the respective school.					\$2,000
	Tools and Supplies	(Activity 2 and 3) Resources for outdoor learning provided to teachers for the 18 schools, \$277 value	Assets provided to schools to enable execution of outdoor learning					\$5,000

		per school. Exact tools or equipment vary by school and are dependent upon what resources are already held, examples include but not limited to: digital weather station, tablet for plant ID, plankton nets, sweep nets, field guides.						
							Sub Total	\$7,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	(Activity 2 and 3), 18 trips, estimated 6500 miles @ 0.73/mile = \$4745.00. Lodging for 2 Wolf Ridge employees for 18 trips = \$5,760.00. 4 meals per person per trip for 18 trips, at average of 20/meal = \$1,495.00, 4745+5760+1495 = \$12,000	Statewide travel to schools in the different regions of Minnesota.					\$12,000
							Sub Total	\$12,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		(Activity 1) Teacher Training Workshop Fee	This fee covers expenses for 300 participants for either 3- or 5-day courses including such things as lodging, meals, and facility & classroom use consistent with our guidelines for					\$154,000

			establishing fees. This does not include personnel time.					
		(Activity 4) Administrator Training Workshop Fee	This fee covers expenses for 36 participants for either 3- or 5-day courses including such things as lodging, meals, and facility & classroom use consistent with our guidelines for establishing fees. This does not include personnel time.					\$26,000
							Sub Total	\$180,000
							Grand Total	\$323,000

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				
In-Kind	Travel/Mileage from participating teachers, administrative staff.	Participating schools will contribute coverage of travel/mileage expenses to/from Wolf Ridge ELC.	Pending	\$53,000
Cash	Wolf Ridge Unrestricted Operating Revenue	These funds will be used to cover the difference between the funds awarded and the true costs of operating the program.	Secured	\$50,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$103,000
			Funds Total	\$103,000

Total Project Cost: \$426,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [3e6181f9-a6b.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A map of Minnesota with 9 different regions outlined by county. Regions include Northwest, Northeast, West Central, East Central, Central, South West, South Central, South East, and Metro....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
WRELC 2024 990 tax return	1b23c60b-11c.pdf
WRELC 2023-24 Financial Audit	71ba7afc-214.pdf
MN Secretary of State, nonprofit business filling, active, 3-2025	094466f8-e54.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
WRELC Board Support Letter	ab225883-08c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support from Dr. Cathy Kindem, Oak Ridge Elementary Principal	158ccce7-085.pdf
2025 MN DNR Legislative Report on Outdoor Opportunities for MN Youth	71cf4640-84b.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

We changed the board support letter, added information about the dissemination plan, and edited the budget to fit the recommendation of \$60,000 less than was in the original proposal. Budget changes were made with respect to numbers of schools, students, teachers, and administrators impacted., as well as what dollar value of resources for equipment and teacher tools/supplies that will be provided to districts.

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")?

No

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

Peter Smerud, Emily Pavlisich, Wolf Ridge 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