



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Draft Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-093

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: December 15, 2025

Project Title: Minnesota Community Schoolyards

Project Budget: \$1,343,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Anna Callahan

Organization: The Trust for Public Land

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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:

Appropriation Language:

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2029

Narrative

Project Summary: Minnesota Community Schoolyards will create at least 4 nature-focused habitat improvement projects at schoolyards across the state; engage students and the community in environmental stewardship; and encourage outdoor learning.

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

Minnesota's schools face many environmental, learning, and social challenges, including habitat and tree canopy loss; flooded and muddy fields; extreme heat and rain events; learning loss; classroom behavioral issues; amplified screen time; and disconnection from the outdoors.

Only a fraction of Minnesota's 2,500 schoolyards are designed to protect and preserve the environment. Conventional schoolyard design can unintentionally contribute to Minnesota's environmental challenges. In fact, many schoolyards are often hotter than the surrounding neighborhood due to the lack of shade trees and the presence of hard surfaces. A survey conducted by TPL found that only 4% of school administrators reported well-shaded playgrounds.

And our students are less connected to nature than even a generation ago. In recent years, time spent outdoors has plummeted while screen time, behavioral issues, isolation, and mental health issues have skyrocketed. The correlation to achievement gaps, teacher burnout, and parent exhaustion is not lost. The lack of adequate facilities like outdoor classrooms and learning habitats prevents teachers from bringing students outdoors to learn, explore, and burn off energy.

One of the best strategies to address these issues is beyond the classroom – and out in the schoolyard. Our schoolyards deserve overdue attention. They need an outdoor boost.

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 benefits of time outdoors are immense. When children spend more time outdoors, behavior issues drop, and learning improves. Outdoor experiences help students better understand their environment, develop skills, and improve long-term civic behaviors. More time learning outdoors makes better students and helps lay the foundation for future generations of nature stewards. The best connections happen without WiFi. It's not only nice to step away from our screens sometimes but necessary. TPL's Community Schoolyard program engages students in designing new outdoor spaces. Students explore and apply environmental topics to a place they care about – their schoolyard. This impactful project-based learning model highlights the power of civic involvement, collaboration, and environmental stewardship.

Moreover, it untaps the ecological potential of the land on which schools sit. Schools will be able to choose from a menu of environmental site improvements such as native landscaping and habitats, stormwater management/green infrastructure, trees, mini-forests, outdoor classrooms, gardens, nature exploration areas etc. With ENRTF support, TPL is on track to complete five schoolyards projects in Rochester, Red Lake, Brooklyn Center, Crystal, and St Paul. Schools from Lake City to Alexandria, South St. Paul to St. Cloud and Walnut Grove have expressed interest in participating.

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?

1. Transform 4 Minnesota schoolyards into vibrant, nature-rich Community Schoolyards. Projects will include community-designed improvements that enhance air, water, and habitat and the expanded enjoyment of the outdoors and natural resources.
2. Engage students, teachers, and community in the design and activation of new schoolyard spaces. This includes education about the importance, need, and impact of nature incorporation at school sites.

3. Build program awareness and a network of schools and organizations advancing nature-based schoolyard projects
4. Evaluate project impact and outcomes

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: Local nature-based schoolyard improvements selected through competitive RFP

Activity Budget: \$637,000

Activity Description:

A statewide survey of school administrators revealed that two out of three schools expressed interest in the Community Schoolyards initiative. Through a competitive RFP process, we'll select 3 school sites to participate in the program and receive funding for nature-based habitat projects.

Each project will receive approximately \$200,000 for nature-based improvements. They'll also receive TPL support with classroom curriculum and project-based learning, project management, design technical assistance, and stewardship and activation guidance.

Sites will be selected based upon:

1. Geographic diversity – at least half dedicated to Greater Minnesota school sites
2. Local needs based upon TPL's statewide assessment
3. Strength of partnerships, readiness, and local funding match

Schools will be expected to secure long-term maintenance commitments, regular use of outdoor classrooms, and provide community access outside of regular school hours.

To highlight the support of LCCMR, informational signs will be provided to each of the project sites. Groundbreakings and grand opening celebrations will bring project awareness while gathering community members, local leaders, and media.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Release Cohort 2 RFP/Call for Schools and selecte four (4) demonstration project sites	September 30, 2026
Finalize work plans, timelines, budgets, partnership agreements, and contracts (including project ordering)	December 31, 2026
Complete preliminary site assessment, survey, and ESA/EAW (if needed)	July 31, 2027
Work with schools to complete and finalize schoolyard designs, budgets, and secure approvals	January 31, 2028
Support schools with bidding, contractor selection, permitting, mobilization etc (pre-construction)	May 31, 2028
Collect pre-construction data for project evaluation	May 31, 2028
Secure all needed construction funds and break ground	June 30, 2028
Support school through construction and close-out milestones (ex: recorded funding restriction)	September 30, 2028
Install educational signage with ENRTF language/logo	September 30, 2028
Celebrate schoolyard completion with grand opening celebration	October 31, 2028
Collect and share lessons learned, post-construction evaluations, and success stories (ongoing reporting)	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: School support, technical assistance, and educational programming

Activity Budget: \$447,500

Activity Description:

Building a community schoolyard is impactful enough. But engaging students in the design of that schoolyard space is a lifelong learning opportunity. TPL's unique approach leverages the undertaking as a project-based learning opportunity.

With lessons taught by TPL, students learn about natural resources while exploring the design process and related trades/careers in construction, design, engineering and land management.

In addition to its expertise, TPL will engage contracted landscape architect(s) to offer design solutions and project support as needed. School teams will also be invited to participate in Hamline's LCCMR-funded Teacher Field School to develop confidence and coaching in outdoor nature-based teaching to support greater use of the outdoors.

TPL will also co-create site specific programs and stewardship guides to educate students and neighbors about their local environment through the hands-on care of the recently installed schoolyards. Students, staff, and neighbors will continue to engage in the process—learning about the importance of caring for green infrastructure, trees, and native plant areas through workshops with experts, such as Master Gardeners, hands-on planting days, and the formation of Schoolyard Stewards groups.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Finalize student leader class timeline, guest speakers, and community engagement plan	January 31, 2027
Release RFP/RFQ for Services and Select Design Consultant	February 28, 2027
Conduct classroom learning and community engagement (including open houses, surveys, public meetings etc)	October 31, 2027
Coach teachers on outdoor teaching skills, confidence, and curriculum	September 30, 2028
Develop student-led schoolyard stewards groups	October 31, 2028
Draft site-specific programming and stewardship guide	April 30, 2029
Host hands-on student-led planting days	May 31, 2029

Activity 3: Building statewide momentum through cross-sector partnership, outreach, and education

Activity Budget: \$258,500

Activity Description:

A statewide survey of school administrators revealed that two-thirds of schools are interested in the Community Schoolyards initiative. TPL will provide some technical assistance to non-funded schools/districts interested in pursuing schoolyard projects and policies. These efforts will support local leaders, expand the number of schools planning for eventual nature-based improvements, and integrate environmental stewardship into school curriculum.

TPL will continue to build statewide awareness of the benefits of nature-based habitat and outdoor learning spaces, including updating TPL's Minnesota Schoolyard assessment. Since 2020, TPL-Minnesota has been engaging multidisciplinary partners and champions to lead this movement—now in partnership with the Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBR) initiative. Members represent a cross-section of leaders in the environmental and educational fields, public health, nonprofits, and state agencies. With this group, TPL will continue to sustain and expand the program's impact, leading to long-term statewide implementation of connecting children to nearby nature spaces, like their schoolyards.

We'll also co-host a Community Schoolyard convening—complete with a tour of LCCMR-funded schoolyard projects—to build momentum and local capacity. The convening will gather school leaders, technical experts, and outdoor champions to build awareness; expand statewide networks; and share best practices and lessons learned.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Hold Quarterly Schoolyard Partner Meetings (year 1)	June 30, 2027
Update statewide schoolyard assessment and survey	June 30, 2028
Hold Quarterly Schoolyard Partner Meetings (year 2)	June 30, 2028
Host Community Schoolyards Convening	October 31, 2028
Maintain Minnesota Community Schoolyards website	June 30, 2029
Hold Quarterly Schoolyard Partner Meetings (year 3)	June 30, 2029
Provide technical assistance to nascent Community Schoolyard programs	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jonee Brigham Kulhman	University of Minnesota - GreenStep Schools	Activity 3 collaborator representing GreenStep Schools which is a free and voluntary statewide best practices framework and recognition program for public and private K-12 schools and districts to reduce environmental impact and costs, and provide effective environmental and sustainability education. GreenStep Schools is housed at the University of Minnesota.	No
Laura Duffey	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - School Forests	Activity 3 Collaborator representing Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - School Forests Program. The Minnesota School Forest Program is a partnership between the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota schools. The program provides a variety of benefits to increase outdoor education activities.	No
Arielle Courtney	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights	Activity 3 Collaborator representing Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBR). The COBR address the disconnection between children and nature and outlines a vision where all children are engage with and deepen their appreciation for the natural environment.	No
Cathy Jordan	Teacher Field School	Activity 2 Collaborator representing the Teacher Field School—an immersive, research-backed program, open to K-12 teachers and specialists across Minnesota, is a series of retreats focused on helping teachers develop fluency and confidence in nature-based teaching.	No
Patty Born	Teacher Field School / Hamline University	Activity 2 Collaborator representing the Teacher Field School—an immersive, research-backed program, open to K-12 teachers and specialists across Minnesota, is a series of retreats focused on helping teachers develop fluency and confidence in nature-based teaching.	No
Rachel Kimpton	University of MN Extension - Hennepin County Master Gardeners	Activity 2 Collaborator representing the Youth Education & Community Program for Hennepin County Master Gardeners at the University of MN Extension. The volunteer Master Gardeners will be a technical assistance partner in community and student workshops, hands-on planting days and more.	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.
 We plan to share findings, case studies, and more at the Community Schoolyard convening—complete with a tour of LCCMR-funded schoolyard projects—to build momentum, awareness, and local capacity. The convening will gather school leaders, technical experts, and outdoor champions to build awareness; expand statewide networks; and share best practices and lessons learned. The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund will be acknowledged through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications per the ENRTF Acknowledgment Guidelines.

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?

We envision a future where all Minnesota youth have access to vibrant, nearby nature spaces at their schools—serving as hubs for improved education and health, nature-based resiliency, civic involvement, and environmental stewardship.

These projects we propose will demonstrate opportunities, grow awareness, and create resources, helping to make Community Schoolyards the standard practice for outdoor school spaces across Minnesota school districts.

We are exploring federal, state, and local funding that could further this work and supportive policies like shared-use agreements and design guidelines. As a nonprofit, we are also pursuing private funding opportunities and matches to support program expansion.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Minnesota Green Schoolyards	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$250,000
Minnesota Community Schoolyards	M.L. 2023, Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08i	\$1,433,000

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Program Staff		Project management and support, technical assistance provider, program partner coordination, data analysis support			30%	1.44		\$205,000
Research & Innovation Evaluator		Evaluation of schoolyard site projects and statewide assessment			30%	0.05		\$8,000
Project Assistant		Classroom learning delivery, Project and community engagement support, technical assistance and evaluation support			30%	2.01		\$256,000
Legal Staff		Legal documents and agreements			30%	0.12		\$12,000
Finance Staff		Finance support, invoicing			30%	0.21		\$21,000
Engagement Assistant		Project, community engagement, and classroom delivery support			30%	0.39		\$32,000
							Sub Total	\$534,000
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Landscape architecture and engineering consultant(s) to support site-specific schoolyard design				0		\$195,000
TBD - School Sites (3)	Subaward	Three schools will be selected to receive nature-based improvement project support at \$195,000 each for site improvements (Service Contract), and \$5,000 stipend for personnel to assist with project management, coordination, and stewardship activities. Documented and reported through tracking sheet and project photography. Entities will be updated once selected.				0.12		\$600,000
							Sub Total	\$795,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Classroom teaching aids	Supplies for student learning, projects, and classroom exercises.					\$2,000

							Sub Total	\$2,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Estimation - Number of miles dependent on project locations. Assumes 10-15 on-site meetings throughout project	Check-in, classroom delivery, and engagement meetings/events.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing of project materials, engagement boards, resources	Student workbooks, teacher resources, display boards, hand outs, maps, and other engagement					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Other Expenses								
		School Signs (3)	Display LCCMR-support and education signage, highlight project as Community Schoolyard					\$4,000
							Sub Total	\$4,000
							Grand Total	\$1,343,000

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				
In-Kind	Dept of Natural Resources Parks and Trails and School Forest Program Staff Time	Staff time and technical assistance support over 3 years to build statewide movement and awareness of the benefits of nearby nature spaces for students and Minnesota's youth.	Secured	\$12,000
Cash	Local Watershed Districts	TPL will seek local watershed district funding to expand the scope of green infrastructure projects on Community Schoolyard sites.	Potential	\$30,000
Cash	Local Units of Government (County, Municipality, etc)	TPL will seek funding from relevant local units of government (such as County or Municipality) to expand the scope of demonstration projects (tree canopy, habitats, etc)	Potential	\$70,000
			State Sub Total	\$112,000
Non-State				
Cash	Local School Match	Schools selected for funding will be expected to secure a local match of \$25,000 or more.	Potential	\$75,000
Cash	Private Philanthropy	TPL will work to fundraise capital funding to expand scope of habitat projects and maintenance	Potential	\$400,000
Cash	Private Philanthropy	TPL will seek private funding to support additional legal, finance, and other operational staffing expenses	Potential	\$21,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$496,000
			Funds Total	\$608,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,951,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Parcel TBD - to be identified through open call for schools process		Parcel TBD - to be identified through open call for schools process		-	-	-			
Totals				0	0	-			

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

As a part of Activity 1: Local nature-based schoolyard improvements selected through competitive RPF, each selected project will receive funding for nature-based improvements. These nature-based improvements may include limited small-scale restoration activities. This is yet to be determined. If applicable, all any restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on lands permanently protected by a conservation easement or in public ownership.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

NA. As a part of Activity 1, the school sites selected will receive classroom curriculum and project-based learning, project management, design technical assistance, and stewardship and activation guidance. Any plans developed as a part of this process will be implemented as a part of this grant and TPL will adhere to the data retention policy as a part of the Pass-Through Grants Reimbursement Manual pursuant to our grant agreement.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

If applicable, the limited small-scale restoration activities will follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement. Additionally, TPL and its' partners will follow the requirements pursuant to our grant agreement governing these best practices.

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

As a part of Activity 1, the schools selected are expected to secure long-term maintenance commitments. The schoolyards developed as a part of this funding will be managed and maintained by the permanent steward according to the guidelines developed as a part of this process.

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

If applicable, we will give consideration to and make timely written contact with Conservation Corps Minnesota for possible use of the corps' services to contract for restoration and enhancement services.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

NA. However, as a part of Activity 1, post-construction evaluations will occur and be shared through on-going reporting.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [93a7c613-814.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Images showing potential schoolyard improvements and outcomes next to map showing locations of high-need potential community schoolyard sites and districts across Minnesota. Includes two inset tables listing the top 8 high-need school districts and communities with the greatest number of high-need schoolyards. Program website: <https://www.tpl.org/our-work/community-schoolyard-renovation-application...>

Financial Capacity

Title	File
TPL Financial Capacity_Evidence of good standing with the Secretary of State	3cb27b69-8e9.pdf
TPL Financial Capacity_990	a3f3b023-3d8.pdf
TPL Financial Capacity_2024 Audit	ce3370fc-865.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
TPL Letter Authorizing 2026-093 Proposal	84f715b3-c7e.pdf
202504 Updated TPL Letter Authorizing 2026-093 Proposal Received LATE 04-08-2025	ffdbfd63-a06.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_Brooklyn Center Community Schools LOS	d9647b10-9e9.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_EndazhiRedLake School LOS	2203dc23-20e.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_FAIR Middle School Crystal LOS	eda6e5fc-e05.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_Franklin Elementary LOS	89070423-6b8.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_Maxfield Elementary LOS	11fe4981-69e.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_Hamline Teacher Field School LOS	cc77abb3-867.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_UMN Extension Master Gardener Program LOS	cc6c45ab-75d.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_National Park Service RTCA LOS	0a3d7507-050.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_Maxfield-SPPS LOS	523a6fc6-d8a.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Community Schoolyards Program_NESC	29a47229-50b.pdf
TPL_Minnesota Community Schoolyards_2026-093_capital_construction_project_questionnaire	4b1294e4-e0c.pdf
LCCMR 2026_TPL Minnesota Community Schoolyards_Map_HighNeed_SchoolDistricts_And_Schoolyards	cfc47e03-ef1.pdf
TPL_Minnesota Community Schoolyards_2026-093_capital_construction_budget_addendum	ac949c97-ec4.xlsx

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Based on the approved funding, we will complete 3 instead of 4 schoolyard projects. It is possible, depending on additional funding raised, that we may be able to complete a 4th modest project.

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?

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:

Kenton Quist and Sophie Vorhoff, Trust for Public Land

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