



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Draft Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-260

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: November 10, 2025

Project Title: Cultivating Conservation Leaders through Education and Wilderness Experiences

Project Budget: \$1,252,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Alison Nyenhuis

Organization: Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

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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: Fostering the next generation of conservation leaders and increasing access to the Boundary Waters through environmental education and immersive wilderness experiences for 12,000 students throughout Minnesota.

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

While Minnesota is home to Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA), the most visited wilderness area in the country, many youth throughout Minnesota have never heard of or visited the BWCA. Youth face several barriers to accessing this wilderness, ranging from economic and skills-based to social and cultural, in both urban and rural populations, and especially among underserved and/or BIPOC communities.

These barriers include lack of proper gear, equipment, and skills needed to feel confident and safe while traveling in the remote forests and waters of the Boundary Waters. Cultural barriers include communication challenges with family about these activities and lack of representation in the outdoor recreation world. Other barriers include a sense of insecurity with travel away from home, and lack of supportive adults that know the unique needs of the community.

Wilderness experiences like the Boundary Waters hold many benefits for young people: short-term benefits include connection to nature and peers, confidence, and increased comfort with similar activities. Long-term benefits include resilience, lifelong outdoor activities, and career opportunities related to the outdoors and the environment.

Our program addresses these barriers to increase access and connection to the Boundary Waters for Minnesota students.

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.

Friends of the Boundary Waters aims to remove barriers described above so that all students can access and connect with the public lands and waters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA).

Our framework allows for diverse school/community partners throughout Minnesota to participate in our programs at their preferred level - virtual lessons, in-person experiential learning, and wilderness trips. As an extension of these programs, we offer a leadership cohort with expanded opportunities beyond those they do with their school groups. These components build upon one another to foster confidence and connection among students in a supportive and safe environment.

Programming includes:

- Hands-on lessons focused on the Boundary Waters ecosystem aligned with MN state standards.
- Wilderness trip scholarships, training, and gear to support school/community groups' needs, including culturally relevant approaches that remove barriers to accessing the BWCA.
- A leadership program with expanded outdoor recreation opportunities (ex. winter experiences) and career exploration related to the environment and natural resources.

The scaffolded experiences we will offer create opportunities for personal connections to the wilderness, making participants more likely to engage in future outdoor recreation activities.

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?

-Connecting at least 12,000 students throughout Minnesota to the BWCA through environmental education and hands-on skill building in their local communities. Goals include increased connection to the outdoors and awareness of unique Minnesota public lands and ecosystems.

- Providing at least 600 students opportunities to spend multiple days in Minnesota's most pristine wilderness area to foster connection and increase the likelihood of future engagement and conservation.
- Cultivating outdoor leadership in a year-long program for 60 students state-wide, leading to increased ability and interest in continuing to recreate, conserve, and explore careers relating to Minnesota's lands and waters.

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: Building awareness by engaging 12,000 students throughout Minnesota with hands-on environmental education on the Boundary Waters

Activity Budget: \$305,600

Activity Description:

We build awareness of the BWCA to thousands of students statewide by connecting with teachers to offer virtual and in-person lessons. These lessons provide hands-on education for students to learn more about the BWCA, its ecology, and recreation opportunities. Staff travel to Metro and Greater Minnesota schools to deliver programming in students' local outdoor spaces, building confidence and lifelong skills that students can use in outdoor recreation activities throughout the state. Programming is adapted to unique needs, feedback, or barriers of schools and organizations.

Strategies and Tactics:

- Engage Minnesota teachers to join the No Boundaries Educator Network and receive online lessons and resources, including resources highlighting Indigenous and other BIPOC experiences on this land.
- Use engagement strategies such as in-person meetings, emails, brochures, social media, and current relationships to identify school partners in Minnesota.
- Provide hands-on program experiences to Minnesota students. Activities focus on the Boundary Waters ecosystem and are aligned with MN State Standards in science, social studies, English, and P.E. for 6-12th grade. Courses include Boundary Waters Animal Adaptations, Map and Compass, Watershed Investigation, and more.
- Collect evaluations from participating teachers to assess effectiveness.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Enroll at least 800 teachers in the teacher network.	July 31, 2027
4,000 program experiences are provided in year one.	July 31, 2027
4,000 program experiences are provided in year two.	July 31, 2028
4,000 program experiences are provided in year three.	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Cultivating Positive Wilderness Experiences in the Boundary Waters

Activity Budget: \$619,400

Activity Description:

Yearly, the Friends provides scholarships for multi-day BWCA canoe trips, specifically serving underserved/BIPOC students throughout Minnesota. Beyond finances, barriers exist unique to each community, preventing students from exploring public lands, specifically the BWCA. To address these and cultivate positive wilderness experiences, we will build on Activity 1 engagement by regularly meeting with partners to customize programming, hold skill-building workshops, provide quality gear, and train chaperones in best practices for supporting students in the wilderness. These community-informed activities build skills and confidence, while informing expectations for wilderness trips.

Strategies and tactics:

- Via Activity 1, identify candidates for overnight BWCA trips, targeting schools with high financial needs and under-represented demographics in the BWCA, such as BIPOC or Indigenous populations.
- Assess barriers, discuss strategies to address them.
- Liaise between participants and partner wilderness outfitters (ex: Camp Menogyn, Wilderness Inquiry) for logistics support.

- Award need-based scholarships
- Train chaperones to support students' social-emotional skills and teamwork for positive wilderness experiences.
- Hold hands-on pre-trip workshops to build student skills, teamwork, and confidence. Distribute gear and trip journals. Effective workshops require groups' transportation to a park with canoeing access.
- Hold alumni gatherings locally where students share their experiences and skills with family and friends.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year one.	August 31, 2027
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year two.	August 31, 2028
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year three.	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Fostering Leadership, Conservation, and Environmental Career Exploration for 60 students

Activity Budget: \$327,000

Activity Description:

In 2024, we started a year-long leadership program to provide opportunities for students to deepen their connections to the BWCA after participating in wilderness trips. In this Activity, we will grow our existing program and add an additional leadership cohort for students in Northeastern Minnesota.

In the school year following Activity 2, students accepted in the leadership program will participate in outdoor recreation opportunities, explore conservation topics and careers, and practice leadership skills. This program culminates in students serving as a "peer leader" on their schools' BWCA trip.

Strategies and tactics:

- Distribute information and applications to students from schools and organizations that completed Activity 2, targeting partner schools that work with underserved, BIPOC or Indigenous populations in 9-12th grade.
- Hold 5 sessions per year in each leadership cohort, including one winter BWCA experience with both cohorts, 3 local outdoor experiences, and one local overnight training for BWCA peer leader responsibilities.
- Plan and coordinate programming that enhances students' skills and knowledge related to conservation and outdoor recreation, including career pathways and leadership development.
- Conduct surveys to demonstrate growth in skill development, confidence, stewardship, and interest in further learning in topics related to environmental conservation or wilderness exploration.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year one: At least 20 students participate in leadership program, additional Northeastern Minnesota cohort created.	August 31, 2027
Year two: At least 20 students participate in leadership program.	August 31, 2028
Year three: At least 20 students participate in leadership program.	June 30, 2029

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 will share any data, and results with school and community partners as well as in LCCMR reports. Content may include but is not limited to progress made toward metrics, hiring of project staff, feedback from participants, trip chaperones, and/or school staff, and inclusion in local media or news outlets. In our own materials, such as our course catalogs, the education page of the website, brochures, and online units, the LCCMR logo and ENRTF attribution language will be present according to the ENRTF Acknowledgement guidelines. Additionally, we will share with partners and news/media outlets that our work is made possible through funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and also share with them the logo and attribution language mentioned above.

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?

Our scaffolded approach offers opportunities for students to progressively deepen engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood that students will continue to conserve and recreate in Minnesota's public lands, specifically the Boundary Waters.

Results from this project, including engagement and feedback from school/community partners, chaperones, and students, will inform and support the broader implementation and modifications of our programming for years to come.

We will fund complementary and ongoing work beyond this project through sources such as, but not limited to, individual donors, corporate and foundation grants.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Connecting Students to the Boundary Waters	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$450,000
Fostering Conservation by Connecting Students to the BWCA	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05a	\$1,080,000
The Boundary Waters is Our Backyard	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05n	\$500,000

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Education Director (.5FTE) 50,000 X 25% Benefits X 3 years = \$187,500		Project Manager, supervises programs staff			25%	1.5		\$187,500
Education Coordinator: Twin Cities and Central/Southern MN (1 FTE) 55,000 + 25% Benefits x 3 years = \$206,250		Coordinates and carries out project activities in/around Twin Cities Metro & portions of Greater Minnesota			25%	3		\$206,250
Education Manager: Twin Cities and Central/Southern MN (1 FTE) 65,000 + 25% benefits x 3 years = \$243,750		Manages Twin Cities Leadership cohort, supervises interns, coordinates and carries out project activities in/around Twin Cities Metro & portions of Greater Minnesota			25%	3		\$243,750
Education Manager: Northern Minnesota (.6 FTE) 42,000 + 25% Benefits x 3 years = \$157,500		Manages Northeastern Leadership Cohort, supervises interns, coordinates and carries out project activities in Northern Minnesota			25%	1.8		\$157,500
Seasonal Education Interns (3 per year at .15 FTE): \$18/hour, 20 hours per week for 16 weeks. 2 interns in the		Deliver programming in project area with the supervision of other education staff.			0%	1.35		\$51,600

Twin Cities location and 1 intern in the Ely location x 3 years = \$51,600								
							Sub Total	\$846,600
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Programming and Curriculum Supplies	Supplies for program delivery, including replacement supplies and consumable supplies (for example, students use cotton balls and tins for our fire building course that is restocked several times a year, or replacement materials such as white board markers, firestarters, and compasses). Roughly \$1000 per year					\$3,000
	Tools and Supplies	Gear for students on wilderness trips	Gear for students to borrow or keep to better prepare them for a positive wilderness experience. Examples of gear to keep include wicking shirt, water bottle. Gear to borrow includes rain gear, headlamp, etc (we have a supply but occasionally need to replace or repair). On average \$14/student x 600 students					\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$11,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-

Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage, food and lodging for staff visits to schools. \$175 average food and lodging per overnight visit, 8 times per year for four program staff for three years (175x8x4 staff x 3 years = 16,800). Mileage: 20 visits per year per program staff at an average of 78 miles per visit. 240 visits X 78 miles X .7 per mile = 13,104 . \$13,104 + \$16,800 = \$30,000	Mileage, food and lodging for program staff to visit schools throughout the state.					\$30,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Transportation for leadership program: Rental passenger van for overnight leadership program sessions (\$250/ day, 4 days a year x 3 years)	Staff will carry out leadership program activities/outings & will rent a passenger van to transport students.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$33,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Trip journals for students on Boundary Waters wilderness trips (\$4/student on trips, 600 X 4 = \$2400)	Trip journals for students to use on their BWCA trips. Journals include chaperone-led curriculum material including self-reflection and goal-setting prompts, plant and animal identification, Anishinaabe language and constellation information, and more.					\$2,400
							Sub Total	\$2,400
Other Expenses								
		Wilderness trip scholarships	Scholarships for wilderness trips Notes: Average cost of \$860 per trip. Average cost student pays is \$100 (range of 0-400 based on level of financial need at the school, among other factors). \$760 X 600 = \$456,000. Minus scholarship match (174,000) = \$282,000					\$282,000
		Leadership Cohort Program Fees	Program fees, outfitting, and lodging for leadership program - paid to					\$27,000

			camp/outfitting partners in the BWCA or local outdoor partners for use of space, equipment, food (included in the rate), rentals, and any instruction fees. \$450 per student for local leadership overnight, BWCA winter retreat, and local programming. 60 students x \$450 = \$27,000					
		Student Peer Leader Stipend	Stipend for students attending their schools BWCA trip as a peer leader through Leadership program. This stipend is a large draw for applying to and completing the program. \$300/student x 50 = \$15,000	X				\$15,000
		Teacher Chaperone Stipends	Teacher stipend for chaperoning trip to compensate them to the extra time to assist with coordinating trip logistics, attending a training, and chaperoning overnight experiences outside of school hours (500/teacher/trip). 600 / 8 (group size in BWCA) = 75. 70 chaperones x \$500 = \$37,500	X				\$35,000
							Sub Total	\$359,000
							Grand Total	\$1,252,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Student Peer Leader Stipend	We wish to compensate students for their time and energy for their leadership role on the Boundary Waters trips. This stipend also helps to incentivize student commitment since the summer trip dates are not solidified when they are applying. This is a 5 day trip, and so breaks down to \$60 a day.
Other Expenses		Teacher Chaperone Stipends	We wish to compensate teachers for their time and energy in acting as chaperones for these trips as the trips occur outside of their contract hours with their schools. We hold required chaperone training for teachers, and we determined the \$500 stipend based on teacher feedback. This breaks down to roughly \$100 / day.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Individual donations and foundation grants to support the multi-day Boundary Waters canoe wilderness trips.	Scholarships for Boundary Waters wilderness trips	Secured	\$174,000
In-Kind	Individual donations and foundation grants which support general operations	Staff support from the Education Director (.25 FTE per year), Operations Director (.1 FTE per year), and Grants Manager (.05 FTE per year). Total 1.2 FTE = \$100,000	Secured	\$100,000
Cash	Individual donations and foundation grants which support general operations	Food and beverages to serve at student events such as SPARKS sessions, alumni celebrations, chaperone training, trip information sessions, and workshops.	Secured	\$5,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$279,000
			Funds Total	\$279,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,531,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [e3098935-27c.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

1-page document with short project description and photos. The description includes information on how our program connects youth to the Boundary Waters through education experiences, BWCA wilderness trips, and leadership opportunities. Photos feature students outdoors in the Boundary Waters and their schoolyards, engaging with each other and outdoor skills....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Friends of BWCA Audit	9d7dd00d-d78.pdf
Friends of BWCA 990	e8aeed59-a17.pdf
Friends of BWCA Certificate of Good Standing	ae09ce6c-108.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Friends of BWCA Board Resolution	836550c6-23a.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Support Letter: Cloquet Schools American Indian Education Program	8898ed81-2ef.pdf
Support Letter: Prairie Seeds Academy	3f3fccaa-ff4.pdf
Support Letter: Anoka High School	25c04642-81b.pdf
Support Letter: Laura Jeffrey Academy	8beecf75-9da.pdf
Support Letter: Harding High School	2a0cb812-08d.pdf
Support Letter: Willow River High School	9f4798a3-8d7.pdf
Support Letter: Barnum Public Schools	e90d9e7e-e35.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

We did not change any milestones, but made some budget changes.

The budget changes are as follows:

- We removed an intern position, and changed the Northern Education Manager to .6 FTE
- Gear for students on wilderness trips was reduced. We hope to partner with outfitters or companies to bring down the cost of these items.
- Program supplies was reduced to \$3000
- Food for events and food for SPARKS was removed and placed in matching funds.
- Transportation for students and partner fees for high-volume programming were removed. These are smaller amounts that we plan to fund as-needed.
- Wilderness trip scholarships were decreased to \$282,000 and matching funds were increased.
- Leadership cohort program fees were decreased to \$27,000 for a lower price per student on activities.

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:

Karen Johnson, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Bree Sikorski, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

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