



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Draft Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-552

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: December 15, 2025

Project Title: Lake Superior River Watch

Project Budget: \$404,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Courtney Kowalczak

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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: Revitalize the River Watch program in the Lake Superior watershed, by engaging students, secondary to undergraduate, in water quality monitoring and analysis to support Minnesota's stewardship efforts.

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

Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College (FDLTCC) hosted the St. Louis River – River Watch program for over ten years. This youth-based, hands-on water quality monitoring program involved over 800 students gathering biological, chemical, and physical data yearly from streams in the western Lake Superior basin. River Watch students acquired the knowledge, monitoring skills, and ability to apply critical thinking skills to local water quality issues. Since then, no River Watch programs have been active within MPCA Region 3 schools, with the only two programs in the state being in the Minnesota River valley and the Red River valley.

Our proposal will revitalize the River Watch program in the Lake Superior watershed and expand our proven program to include water quality data collection by FDLTCC college students following state protocols and including water quality analysis by a state-certified laboratory. Our River Watch program will include sampling sites in the St. Louis, Cloquet, Nemadji, and Southern Superior watersheds. This educational and monitoring program will produce engaged and informed citizens as well as quality data for Minnesota's stewardship efforts. Our program will provide a continuity of water quality data that fills the gaps between the 10 year watershed rapid assessment protocol monitoring.

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 goals of the Lake Superior River Watch program:

1. Create a Network of River Watch Schools: Establish a collaborative network among northern Minnesota urban and rural schools to share information and resources, fostering a community of educators dedicated to water quality monitoring.
2. Provide Educational Opportunities: Offer secondary and FDLTCC undergraduate students hands-on experience in water quality monitoring. This includes a tiered approach where secondary students collect chemical, physical, and biological data following citizen science protocols, while FDLTCC students collect WRAP water quality data following state protocols.
3. Develop a Knowledgeable Citizenry: Create a knowledgeable citizenry capable of understanding water quality issues and making informed water resource management decisions.

The LCCMR funding is essential for the expanded River Watch program. It enables FDLTCC to provide research, resources, and logistical support to schools. Schools can integrate the program into their science curriculum with equipment, training, transportation, and sampling coordination. This creates a network of educators who share resources to sustain the program. The funding also offers FDLTCC students experiential learning opportunities to collect water quality data, which is shared with schools, communities, and state agencies for resource management

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 project will revitalize and expand the River Watch program, engaging over 800 secondary and college students in annual water quality monitoring across the St. Louis, Cloquet, Nemadji, and Lake Superior-South watersheds. Through hands-on learning and technical training, students will collect scientific data following state protocols, generating actionable information for resource management. The initiative builds a collaborative network of schools and educators, promotes environmental stewardship, and provides measurable outcomes such as the number of participating schools and water quality data collected at a minimum 21 stream sites, enhancing community awareness and the health of Minnesota's natural resources.

Project Location

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

Region(s): NE

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

Region(s): NE

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Create a Network of River Watch Schools

Activity Budget: \$95,663

Activity Description:

The Lake Superior River Watch will create a strong network of northern Minnesota secondary schools dedicated to water quality monitoring and environmental stewardship. Key steps include engaging schools through targeted outreach, training teachers in River Watch sampling protocols and program management, supplying essential equipment, and coordinating classroom and streamside demonstrations to ensure consistent and accurate data collection. Program coordinators will facilitate hands-on training sessions, both in groups and individually, providing teachers with the resources and support necessary for successful implementation.

Progress will be tracked through meticulous documentation of outreach efforts, teacher training sessions, equipment distribution, and sampling events at each site. Classroom visits and field demonstrations will reinforce standardized procedures and foster student engagement, ensuring each school's activities contribute to a comprehensive dataset. This collaborative approach not only promotes reliable water quality monitoring but also strengthens community involvement and environmental awareness across participating schools. Regular reporting will capture details such as dates, locations, participant numbers, and specific monitoring activities, allowing for clear evaluation of outcomes and continuous improvement of the initiative.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
All Stream Sites Established	August 31, 2028
All Secondary Teachers Trained in Protocols	November 30, 2028
Establish River Watch Schools	December 31, 2028

Activity 2: Provide Education Opportunities

Activity Budget: \$214,137

Activity Description:

The Lake Superior River Watch is designed to immerse secondary and FDLTCC undergraduate students in practical water quality monitoring through direct field experiences and systematic data reporting. Each year, secondary students participate in seasonal water sampling trips at stream sites selected by their schools, guided by the River Watch Coordinator to ensure consistent application of Citizen Science protocols. FDLTCC students conduct more frequent sampling at both school-selected and state-priority sites during the ice-out period from May to October, covering about 21 streams annually and adhering to Minnesota state protocols. Sampling equipment is provided, and educators offer demonstrations both in the classroom and streamside, ensuring students master proper techniques. The Coordinator and teachers closely supervise all activities to maintain accuracy and consistency. By December, secondary schools submit their data to the River Watch Coordinator for analysis and integration into the River Watch database, while FDLTCC students enter their results into the MPCA EQuIS database, supporting statewide monitoring efforts. Through these hands-on experiences, students develop skills in scientific investigation, teamwork, and environmental stewardship, while generating reliable data that informs local and state water quality assessments, strengthens collaboration among educational institutions, and encourages broader participation in citizen science initiatives.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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River Watch Data Base Created	December 31, 2026
Sampling of Stream Sites	October 31, 2028

Activity 3: Developing a Knowledgeable Citizenry

Activity Budget: \$94,200

Activity Description:

The project will cultivate an informed community capable of understanding and making thoughtful decisions about water resource management. To achieve this, schools will guide students in creating posters and presentations that document their water quality monitoring efforts, which will be showcased annually at the River Watch Congress. This approach encourages active learning and peer education, while also serving as a method to evaluate students' grasp of water quality topics. The River Watch Congress, held each March at FDLTCC, unites students, community members, and natural resource professionals for a research-focused symposium where participants share findings and discuss regional challenges; surveys conducted during the event assess the program's effectiveness and impact. Complementing these efforts, annual newsletters will be distributed every September to highlight current water quality concerns, recap program activities, and provide additional resources for ongoing education. Furthermore, each April, the FDLTCC Research Symposium will feature student-led presentations and posters on water quality data, with college students encouraged to participate and extend their research to other conferences and community events. Our project will deepen participants' understanding of water issues, enhance their decision-making abilities, strengthen scientific communication skills, and ensure continuous program evaluation and improvement, while broadly sharing local research throughout the community.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Establish River Watch Congress	March 31, 2027
River Watch Student Survey Distributed	March 31, 2027
College Students Present at Research Conferences	April 30, 2027

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.

The Lake Superior River Watch Network, in partnership with Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC), is committed to fostering awareness, participation, and long-term stewardship of Minnesota's water resources. Our outreach plan ensures that research findings, data, and project outcomes are accessible, acknowledged, and useful to all stakeholders, supporting the goals of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF).

Dissemination and Presentation of Data

- **Newsletter Distribution:** An annual Lake Superior River Watch newsletter will be shared with partner schools, institutions, and attendees at college events, providing updates on project progress and key findings.
- **In-Person Events:** Water quality data and research outcomes will be presented at key events, including the River Watch Congress and regional conferences such as the St. Louis River Summit.
- **Research Posters:** FDLTCC college students will create research posters based on their summer monitoring projects, which will be shared at the River Watch Congress and with participating schools.
- **Social Media Outreach:** Regular updates, results, and highlights will be posted on the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College and Environmental Institute Facebook pages to reach a broader audience.

Data Sharing and Longevity

- **Standardized Data Submission:** Stream monitoring follows protocols aligned with state and federal agencies, ensuring all data can be submitted to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's EQuIS database, making it accessible to water resource professionals statewide.
- **Accessible Results:** Education and outreach materials will be produced in clear, jargon-free language to maximize accessibility for Minnesotans.

Engagement and Collaboration

- **Student Involvement:** Both college and K-12 students participate in water quality monitoring, analysis, and presentations, fostering mentorship and peer-to-peer learning.
- **Annual River Watch Congress:** This signature event brings together students from across the region to share findings, relate local data to broader watershed health, and build community connections.
- **Recognition of Support:** All outreach materials, presentations, and media will acknowledge the support of the ENRTF, following required guidelines for logos and attribution language.

Impact and Legacy

Our outreach plan is designed to ensure that research not only advances science but also empowers decision-makers, educators, and the public to protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota's natural resources for generations to come.

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?

FDLTCC will seek support to provide equipment and transportation to Lake Superior River Watch secondary schools. FDLTCC will serve as an informational resource and provide water quality monitoring trainings to River Watch schools to ensure continued monitoring of stream sites. FDLTCC students will continue stream sampling as part of their Environmental Science research projects. The program will maintain consistent protocols will produce quality data that can be submitted to MPCA's EQuIS database leading to the collection of essential water quality data on Region 3 watersheds.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Bene fits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Personnel: Program Coordinator - The Coordinator will be paid at the rate of \$57,090 with yearly 5% increases. Coordinator will be 75 FTE . Fringe is calculated at 35% covering FICA/Medicare, Retirement and Insurance costs		Coordination of River Watch programming			35%	2.25		\$191,325
							Sub Total	\$191,325
Contracts and Services								
Pace Analytical Labs	Service Contract	Water quality analysis of water samples taken by FDLTCC students				0.3		\$32,300
							Sub Total	\$32,300
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Equipment/Tools/Supplies: It is estimated that it will cost approximately \$1315 to equip each of the 15 schools with appropriate water quality testing materials (\$). Monitoring equipment includes: water quality test kits for nutrients, dissolved oxygen, & pH (\$547/school), 5 pair of waders per school at \$80	Monitoring Equipment needed for chemical, physical and biological stream sampling.					\$59,175

		ea.(\$400/school), glass vials (\$100/school), macroinvertebrate sampling supplies (\$158/school), AIS ID materials (\$50/school), water clarity secchi tube(\$60/school)					
						Sub Total	\$59,175
Capital Expenditures							
						Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship							
						Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota							
	Other	Bus transportation for River Watch students to stream sampling sites twice a year for 3 years. Estimated cost of bus transportation per school 150 miles per year for 15 schools 2250 miles at \$300/trip (\$9000).	Travel for River Watch Schools and Coordinator to Stream Sites and for training visits to participating schools.				\$27,000
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Bus transportation for schools to attend one River Watch Congress per year for three years, 15 schools at an estimated \$600 ea (\$9000).	Bus transportation for secondary school students to attend the River Watch Congress				\$27,000
						Sub Total	\$54,000
Travel Outside Minnesota							
						Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication							
	Printing	Publication and Printing Costs (\$1000): publish posters, River Watch newsletters for distribution to schools, communities, and local agencies (\$600). River Watch Congress programs (\$400). River Watch Congress supplies for participants and presenters. Includes such items such as tape, paper, poster board and other miscellaneous supplies (\$500)	All supplies needed for creation and printing of research materials and outreach				\$6,000

		Materials for paper and online program evaluation. (\$1500)					
						Sub Total	\$6,000
Other Expenses							
		College Student Summer Water Quality Monitoring (12 Weeks @20 hrs/week at \$17/hr) 5 Students. Students paid through college workstudy appointments that are paid bi-weekly.	Support of college students to collect water quality data from stream sites within the Lake Superior watershed				\$61,200
						Sub Total	\$61,200
						Grand Total	\$404,000

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$404,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [a5f0912d-bc6.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Lake Superior River Watch Watersheds with landuse information. The St. Louis River, Cloquet River, Nemadji, and Lake Superior South watersheds are included in graphic. Information on how many high priority streams are in these watersheds (38) with the information about the percentage (30%) of these streams will be monitored....

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Minnesota State System Wide Financial Statements	5367b51c-9e7.pdf
Minnesota Supplemental Financial Statements FY 24	0c48a1af-524.pdf
FDLTCC Letter of Support for LCCMR Lake Superior River Watch Proposal	2907f07a-c1c.pdf
FDLTCC Letter of Support for LCCMR Lake Superior River Watch Proposal	8d7bfa44-89a.pdf
FDLTCC Lake Superior Watch Activities Table	49adab1b-bcc.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Due to reduced funding, the Lake Superior River Watch project will sample 21 streams, lowering lab analysis expenses. Coordinator travel costs have been eliminated and will be covered by other funds. Printing costs are minimized by using the college's in-house poster printing for participating schools.

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?

Yes, Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College

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:

Bret Busakowski Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College EFO

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