

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2016 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 115-C

Developing Connections and Conservation Ethics through Nature Play

Category: C. Environmental Education

Total Project Budget: \$ 710,140

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 2 years, July 2016 to June 2018

Summary:

Nature play areas address a growing need to provide children opportunities to engage with the natural world through unstructured, independent play which creates long-lasting conservation values for the next generation.

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Location

Region: SE

County Name: Winona

City / Township: Altura

Alternate Text for Visual:

An overview map showing the location of the proposed nature play area at Whitewater State Park will be located where the existing Gooseberry Glen Campground is. It is adjacent to the Cedar Hill Campground and connected by a pedestrian bridge. An image that shows the existing Whitewater River bank has gentle slopes which would allow for an accessible route to the river. Images of play components from around Minnesota and the world, such as water, sand, stone, logs, sticks, and topography would be used to demonstrate these ideas through independent play.

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL	_____ %



PROJECT TITLE: Developing Connections and Conservation Ethics through Nature Play

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Nature play areas address a growing need across Minnesota by providing families with children opportunities to engage with elements of the natural world. Among parents, educators, health professionals, and others there is concern that many children have lost a connection to nature. A connection to the outdoors and unstructured play at an early age is shown to create long-lasting stewardship and conservation values in children. A nature play area is a designated outdoor play area where the focus is on child-directed, independent play with natural elements, which give opportunities to children to express their inherent ability and values to create their own play. Nature play areas have the ability to address obstacles and challenges to getting children outdoors, including lack of access to nature, peoples’ comfort level in nature, and competition with technology for free time.

A nature play area allows children to create their own play experiences in the nature world, including with water, vegetation, landforms, natural processes, and more. These experiences can be reproducible for children in their own environments, which has a long-lasting effect on inherent environmental and conservation values. Nature play areas also can provide these experiences to children of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds with a space that is accessible and as safe as it needs to be.

Nature play areas provide opportunities to experience nature in a way that is more structured, familiar, and accessible. Numerous studies link outdoor play with mental development, health, and wellness for children. Studies also show an increase in environmental concern among children who experienced nature first-hand, early in life. Nature play areas differ from traditional playgrounds which have single-use elements, by providing open-ended play opportunities for a different experience every time. These play elements are created with natural elements common to Minnesota state parks and trails. Whitewater State Park has a long history within the Whitewater River Valley, including flooding and impacts of changing land uses. Nature play at Whitewater State Park could provide experiences that relate to those themes. A nature play area can create a positive introductory experiences that encourages visitors to interact with the environments. Providing a positive experience in nature, can make the transition to interacting with unfamiliar aspects of nature easier. For visitors, the benefits of nature play correspond directly to the Parks and Trails Division’s aim to create unforgettable park, trail, and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

Activity 1: Design of accessible nature play area at Whitewater State Park

Budget: \$125,070

Parks and Trails will work with a core group including naturalists, resource specialists, landscape architects, designers, and park managers to determine themes and elements for the nature play area. Final planning and design of the nature play area will incorporating educational themes within water play and land use elements. The design of infrastructure for site to make site fully accessible. Designers will complete all the technical work, including any necessary soil borings, survey, and plans and specification. Once all this is completed, the designers will seek out multiple bidders with the State project bidding process. Once the bidding process is completed, a contractor will be selected and the bid awarded.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Collect necessary site technical information, such as survey and soil borings	11/30/2016
2. Design of nature play area, incorporating educational and interpretive themes in the design	2/6/2017
3. Prepare bid package, review plans, and select contractor	5/1/2017



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2016 Main Proposal

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Activity 2: Construction of nature play area

Budget: \$585,070

Once a contractor is selected for constructing the nature play area construction on the play components, site work, and infrastructure can begin. The site will be ADA accessible and will allow access to Whitewater River’s edge.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Complete construction of nature play area, including managing contracts, construction administrations, and construction of the nature play elements	11/15/2017

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Project team will include staff from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, with all funds received by the DNR. Staff includes Stacy Smith, project manager, Aaron Wunrow, district supervisor; Brent Anderson, Whitewater State Park (WWSP) manager; Colin Wright, WWSP assistant manager; Sara Holger WWSP interpretive naturalist; and Jeremy Darst, WWSP interpretive naturalist. There are currently no partners for this project who would receive funding, but if it is feasible we will be seeking information from educators or other recreation providers.

B. Project Impact and Long-Term Strategy

The inclusion of nature play areas in Minnesota state parks and trails is an innovative way to address barriers keeping families from engaging in the outdoors and meeting goals of creating a place for visitors and communities to develop meaningful conservation ethics. Focus group participants from 2007 told the DNR that they would be more likely to visit a Minnesota state park if they knew they could have fun while enjoying nature; enjoy natural scenery; spend time with family; get away from life’s usual demands; and enjoy the smells and sounds of nature. Nature play areas will provide a new and compelling incentive for families to visit Minnesota state parks by responding directly to known barriers and motivations. Above all, nature play areas will provide a way for children to have fun while enjoying nature.

Minnesota state parks and trail are situated across the state and with this first proposed nature play area, the division will begin to establish opportunities to develop outdoor experience with lasting impacts. Elements of this and subsequent nature play areas will align directly with the best practices for Minnesota state park and trail interpretation and education, by being designed strategically to include components that would provoke responses and inspire further exploration and discovery of our natural environments. With the ability to build this first nature play area, Minnesota parks and trails will be able to establish best practices and design principles for future nature play areas with other funding sources.

C. Timeline Requirements

It is anticipated that the nature play area would be completed within 24 months of receiving funding. Planning and design for the nature play area would begin in July of 2016, with construction starting the following spring or summer of 2017. The nature play area construction should be completed by the spring of 2018.

2016 Detailed Project Budget

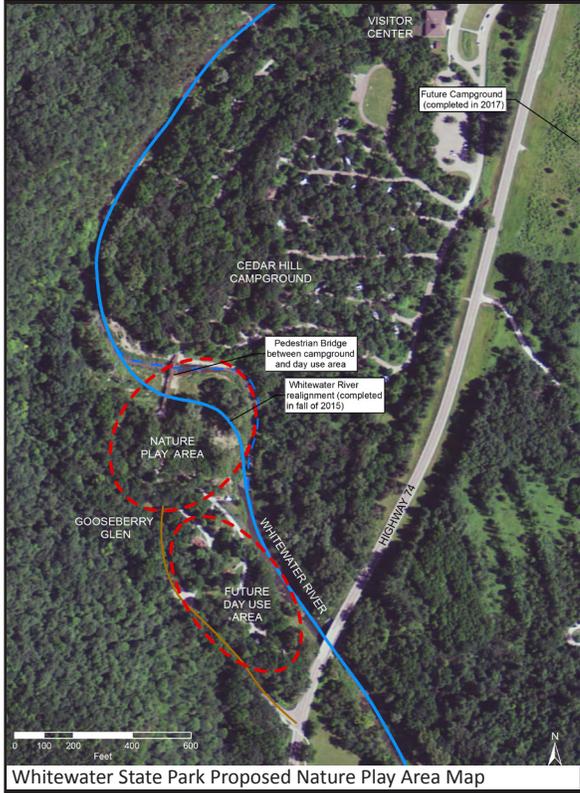
Project Title: Developing Connections and Conservation Ethics through Nature Play

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 2 years

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
Personnel:	\$ -
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts:	
Design and Construction Administration Sole Source: Site design & construction coordination	\$ 140,000
Site construction company TBD: Construct play area and infrastructure, RFP needed	\$ 545,000
Geotechnical Company TBD: Technical data collection, RFP needed	\$ 15,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies:	\$ -
Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements):	\$ -
Travel:	\$ -
Additional Budget Items:	
Direct and Necessary expenses: Financial Support (\$7,840.00), Communications Support (\$1,236.00), Planning Support (\$829.00), and Procurement Support (\$235.00) necessary to accomplish funded programs / projects.	\$ 10,140
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 710,140

V. OTHER FUND

<u>SOURCE OF FUNDS</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>Status</u>
Other Non-State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period:	N/A	
Other State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period:	N/A	
In-kind Services To Be Applied To Project During Project Period:	N/A	
Funding History:	N/A	
Remaining \$ From Current ENRTF Appropriation:	N/A	



Existing Site Photos



Whitewater State Park, Whitewater River: looking east from proposed site at riverbank access



Whitewater State Park, Whitewater River: pedestrian bridge looking west from Cedar Hill Campground

Whitewater State Park’s existing site lends itself to several opportunities for nature play, with themes around water, land use, and how together they impact water quality. A nature play area is a designated outdoor space where the focus is on child-directed, independent play with natural elements, which give opportunities to children to express their inherent ability and values to create their own play. Connecting children to nature with unstructured play early in life can create long-lasting stewardship and conservation values. Nature play areas give children an opportunity to engage with nature and learn to love it.

Nature Play Area Photos

Nature play areas can have a few elements or many. They can be combined in many ways with appropriate themes for the setting.



Westmoreland Park, Portland, Oregon: create creek through sand pit where kids create dams and divert water



Whitetail Woods, Dakota County Parks & Recreation: ADA accessible hand pump water feature and sand where kids can play



Rio Tinto Naturescape, King’s Park and Botanical Garden, Perth, Australia: detail of natural stone water play component



Whitetail Woods, Dakota County Parks & Recreation: fort building with loose parts



Rio Tinto Naturescape, King’s Park and Botanical Garden, Perth, Australia: large log bridge crossing water



Itasca State Park, Mississippi River headwater crossing: stones crossing the river allow for walking and play



Project Manager Qualifications

Stacy Smith’s background is in biology, environmental science, and landscape architecture. She has worked in the design field and parks and recreation for 11 years, as a landscape designer, park planner, and now as an acquisition and development coordinator for the Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Trails. As coordinator, her responsibilities include represents the division’s interests for development projects and while managing leases for parks and trails. Part of representing the interests for the division is to consider all areas and programs of Parks and Trails for each project.

Organization Description

The Department of Natural Resources-Division of Parks and Trails operates State of Minnesota owned lands for the purpose of providing recreational experiences to the public. The division manages 67 state parks; 8 state recreation areas; 575 miles of surfaced state trail; 1,610 water access sites; 30 water trails; and 9 state waysides throughout Minnesota. The division connects people to the state’s natural resources by providing access to outdoor recreation, conservation education, and natural resource restoration and management.

The vision of the Parks and Trails Division is to create unforgettable park, trail and water recreation experiences that inspire people to pass along the love for the outdoors to current and future generations.

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