

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
2017 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

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**Project Title:**

**ENRTF ID: 177-G**

Experiential Nature Play at Whitewater State Park

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**Category:** G. Land Acquisition, Habitat and Recreation

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**Total Project Budget:** \$ 710,265

**Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested:** 1.5 years, July 2017 - September 2018

**Summary:**

Nature play areas provide children opportunities to engage the natural world through independent play, a component of outdoor recreation, which creates long-lasting conservation values into the next generation.

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**Sponsoring Organization:** MN DNR

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**Location**

**Region:** Southeast

**County Name:** Winona

**City / Township:** Elba

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**Alternate Text for Visual:**

A map of Whitewater State Park showing the proposed nature play area, where the Gooseberry Glen campground currently is located. Two photos show the existing Whitewater River and pedestrian bridge from Gooseberry Glenn to Cedar Hill Campground. Six photos of examples of nature play components, including a tree stump walk; a large boulder river crossing with wooden railings; children playing along a river edge; a naturalist play area with water elements that would be ADA accessible; a stone water table that may be ADA accessible; and a nature play area with wooden log sand sticks.

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



**PROJECT TITLE: Experiential Nature Play at Whitewater State Park**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Nature play areas are an innovative concept that address a growing trend of children not spending time outdoors, engage and recreate in the natural world. This results in children losing a connection to nature through outdoor play, which is crucial to creating long-lasting stewardship and conservation values in children. A nature play area is a designated outdoor area where the focus is on child-directed, experiential play with natural elements. These play opportunities allows children to express their inherent ability to create their own play. Nature play areas differ from traditional playgrounds which have single-use elements, by providing open-ended play opportunities which can provide a different experience every time. Research shows that outdoor play is a part of outdoor recreation for children and can improve a person’s overall health and wellness. Nature play areas also have the ability to address obstacles and challenges to getting children outdoors and recreating, including lack of access to nature, a person’s level of comfort in nature, and competition with technology for free time.

One of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails’ goals is to expand the diversity its users, increase accessibility of facilities, and provide innovative opportunities for outdoor recreation. The proposed nature play area at Whitewater State Park (WWSP) would help to achieve these goals. The nature play area would introduce nature in a way that is more structured, familiar, and accessible to existing and new users. WWSP was selected because it is less than two hours from the Twin Cities and about thirty minutes from Rochester. The Rochester metro area has a population of over 200,000 people and is an international destination for medical treatment. WWSP is a favorite destination for visitors from the metro area and statewide; is popular park for people in the community; and people visiting or staying at one of the nearby medical centers.

WWSP has a long history within the Whitewater River Valley, including increase impacts from changing land uses, flooding, and effects of conservation efforts in the valley. Nature play components at WWSP would include interactive water elements coupled with land features (soil, sand, rocks, etc.) and would take advantage of the existing topography, to demonstrate how the water, land, and the environment are connected. The proposed 2.5 acres site will be within a day use area and is adjacent to a campground and the Whitewater River. The nature play area will be accessible to all levels of mobility, which will require infrastructure such as paths, parking, site amenities, and play components to be built with the project.

**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 the park staff 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 the site will be to make accessible to all users. Designers will complete all the technical work, including soil borings, survey, plans, and specification. When the design is completed, the DNR will seek bids for the project. Once the bidding process is completed, a contractor will be selected and the bid awarded.

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>
1. Collect necessary site technical information, such as survey and soil borings	11/30/2017
2. Design of nature play area, incorporating educational and interpretive themes in the design	2/6/2018
3. Prepare bid package (plans and specifications), review plans, and select contractor	5/1/2018



**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)**  
**2017 Main Proposal**  
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**Activity 2:** Construction of nature play area

**Budget: \$585,070**

Once a contractor is selected, construction on the nature play area, including play components (water elements, land use displays, and using topography), site work, infrastructure (paths, parking, benches, kiosks, and site amenities) can begin. The site will be ADA accessible and will allow access to Whitewater River shoreline.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Secure all necessary permits for the project. Once that is complete, construction activities will begin.	7/1/2018
2. Complete construction of nature play area, including managing contracts, construction administrations, and construction of the nature play elements	9/1/2019

**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, Brent Anderson, district supervisor; Colin Wright, Whitewater State Park (WWSP) 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 that can keep families from engaging in the outdoors and meeting goals of creating a place for visitors and communities to develop a connection to nature and outdoor recreation. 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 be strategically designed 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.

In 2007, focus group participants 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; natural scenery; spend time with family; get away from life’s usual demands; and enjoy the smells and sounds of nature. Nature play areas 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 and meet the goal of the goal of the Parks and Trails Division 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.

**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 the fall of 2017, with construction starting the following spring or summer of 2018. The nature play area construction should be completed during the summer 2019.

## 2017 Detailed Project Budget

**Project Title:** Nature Play and Outdoor Recreation at Whitewater State Park

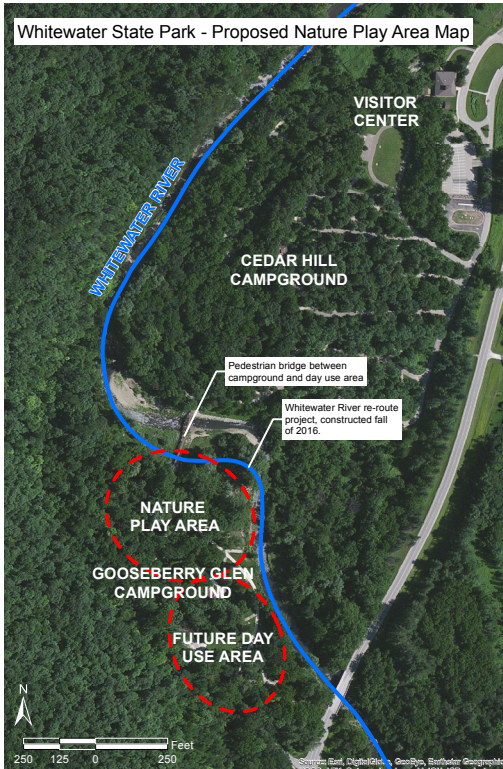
### IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 2 years

<u>BUDGET ITEM</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>
<b>Personnel:</b>	N/A
<b>Professional/Technical/Service Contracts:</b>	\$700,000
A. Site Design & Construction Administration, single-source	\$ 140,000
B. Geotechnical Company TBD: Technical data collection, RFP needed	\$ 15,000
C. Site construction company TBD: Construct play area and infrastructure, RFP needed	\$ 545,000
<b>Equipment/Tools/Supplies:</b>	N/A
<b>Acquisition (Fee Title or Permanent Easements):</b>	N/A
<b>Travel:</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Budget Items:</b>	\$ 10,265
Direct and Necessary expenses: Financial Support (\$7,840), Communication Support (\$1,316), Planning Support (\$912), and Procurement Support (\$197) necessary to accomplishing funded programs/projects.	
<b>TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =</b>	<b>\$710,265</b>

### V. OTHER FUNDS

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

Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund  
 2017 Visual / Map  
 Project Title: Experiential Nature Play at Whitewater State Park



Pedestrian bridge near campground, Whitewater State Park



Whitewater River bank, Whitewater State Park

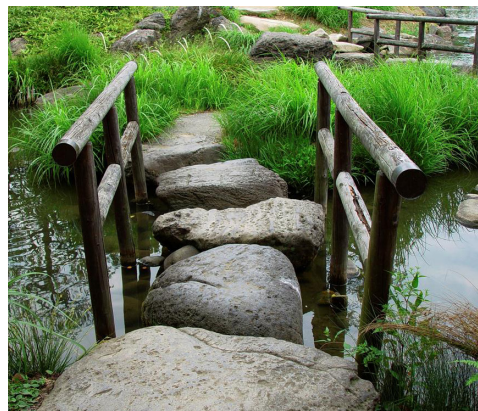


Log walk, Prospect Park, New York, NY



Water play, Natuurspeeltuin de Speeldernis, Rotterdam, Netherlands

Whitewater State Park provides several opportunities for nature play elements with themes related to water quality, land use, and natural process like floods and river ecology. Nature play areas also have the ability to address obstacles and challenges to getting children outdoors and recreating, including lack of access to nature, a person's level of comfort in nature, and competition with technology for free time. The site at Whitewater State Park will provide outdoor recreation opportunities, which are accessible for all users.



Stepping stone bridge, Renewed Hope Services, Topfield, MA



Accessible water play, Nature Discovery Ridge, Cleveland Zoo, Cleveland, OH



Water table, Buffalo Bayou Park, Houston, TX



Wooden loose parts, Hyland Lake Park Reserve, Bloomington, MN

## **Environment Trust Fund 2017 Project Proposal**

### **Project Title: Experiential Nature Play at Whitewater State Park**

#### Project Manager Qualifications

As an acquisition and development coordinator for the Division of Parks and Trails, Stacy Smith coordinates development and construction projects at state parks, state recreation areas, state trails, and public water access throughout the state. These projects contribute to and help renew Minnesota's outdoor recreation opportunities.

Stacy has a master's in landscape architecture and has worked in the parks, recreation, and the design field for over 12 years. Her experience included design, construction, and project management for project ranging from small sites to park master planning. Many project included multiple disciplines and involve working with multiple user groups.

#### Organization Description

The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Trails operates 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.