**PROJECT TITLE:** YES! Students Take on Water Quality Challenge - Phase II

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) is a student-driven, award-winning program that challenges and empowers students to solve ecological challenges through hands-on projects. Since 2007 YES! has supported over 3,500 students in working with 6,500 businesses, organizations and community members, to impact an additional 110,000 students. Our goal with the proposed project is to mobilize Minnesota youth to partner with local watershed experts in over 20 communities to help fill the urgent need for broad citizen participation to protect and clean-up Minnesota waters.

PWELC is seeking $199,700 to build on our past experience with water related projects to implement the 3- Step Water Awareness method developed during Phase I. This method includes the following: 1) student and coach orientation to aquatic invasive species (AIS) and training in water quality surveying techniques, 2) student-driven surveying and monitoring of local water bodies, and 3) student organized public education events. This project is a triple win for Minnesota – youth acquire water quality knowledge, skills and career exposure; communities become more engaged and aware; and the state gains valuable monitoring/testing data from its waterways.

During the first part of Phase I, the number of water quality related projects completed by students more than doubled from 12 to 32! Projects include: water quality testing and evaluation, public events on water quality and peer education, design and planting of rain gardens, local lakeshore and river restoration and clean-up, storm water awareness, collection and reuse, building aquaponics systems, AIS monitoring and reporting, tracking of water usage, and water pollution reduction demonstrations through solar boat design and build. Project Guides created by teachers will serve as models for projects in Phase II. YES! works in partnership with Ney Nature Center and Laurentian Environmental Learning Center to bring this successful program to Minnesota’s youth.

**Specific Goals for YES! Students Take on Water Quality Challenge Phase - II:**

* Complete 30 or more new student-driven water quality and citizen science projects and public events.
* Mobilize over 200 youth and 20 communities in local water quality issues and partnering with an additional 2,000 community or more community members.
* Improve over 20 valuable Minnesota water bodies by monitoring, testing, and reporting data. Data will contribute to the DNR EDDMapS.
* Partner with local experts to provide 10 customized water quality workshops and trainings.
* Recognize accomplishments through statewide Water Quality Stewardship award competition

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1 Title: Recruit, Educate, and Train YES! Students in the 3-step Water Awareness model**  **Description:** Building on our past experience, YES! students will learn from local and state water quality experts to complete up to 20 water quality and conservation projects. To raise community awareness of water quality best practices in the local community, students will participate in the 3-step Water Awareness method to complete water related improvements identified in their community. Students will take a pre- and post-evaluation to determine program effectiveness.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $ 81,365** |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 1. **Recruit** over 200 YES! students in over 20 communities to identify, evaluate, prioritize, and select local water quality projects | Nov. 2020, 2021 |
| 2. **Educate** and prepare over 200 youth on the 3-step Water Awareness method of: 1) student and coach orientation and training, 2) student surveys of local water bodies, and 3) public awareness through events and presentations | May 2021, 2022 |
| 3**. Train** over 20 YES! teams through customized workshops on AIS testing, Secchi disk reading, buffer restoration, Adopt-a-Drain, and other water stewardship best practices | Oct. 2020, 2021 |

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| **Activity 2 Title: Taking Action – Over 30 New Student Driven, Hands-on Water Quality and Conservation Projects and Public Events Completed in Minnesota**  **Description:** Building on the successful YES! model of connecting local experts and community resources with student identified water quality challenges in their community, YES! will connect students with local water quality experts to complete projects that will improve water bodies in their region.Over 20 YES! teams will partner with local watershed experts to implement community awareness and mitigation projects and participate in on-water and shore land activities to protect and improve local water quality.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $ 118,051** |  |

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| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| 1. **Engage** over 20 YES! teams to identify, prioritize, and select local water quality projects in their watershed | Nov. 2020, 2021 |
| 2. **Mobilize** over 200 students to develop action plans and complete over 30 new water quality related action projects in partnership with their communities, including events | June, 2021, 2022 |
| 3. **Partner** with local watershed experts to implement the 3-Step Water Awareness method and deliver to up to 10 communities through local events of on-water and shore land activities to protect and improve local water quality | Sept. 2020, 2021 |
| 4. **Recognize** student achievements through the Water Quality Stewardship award given to the team demonstrating exemplary work to mitigate water quality challenges each year | May 2021, 2022 |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

The project partners include Prairie Woods ELC, Laurentian Environmental Center, and Ney Nature Center. Partners will collaborate with their local watershed districts, county AIS Task Forces, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, lake associations, and U of M/Extension and AIS Department. Prairie Woods ELC will serve as the fiscal host with Laurentian Environmental Center and Ney Nature Center fulfilling contract services.

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

With major assistance from ENRTF, YES! has developed a solid network of partners, including students, educators, experts and community stakeholders. YES! will use its award-winning program to directly impact water quality in watersheds throughout Minnesota. YES! student teams bring what they have learned from workshops, tours and events back to their school and community through blog posts, school newsletters and their own educational events, developing informed and engaged citizens for a lifetime. YES! alumni testify that environmental engagement stays with them for a lifetime. Many alumni are now employed in watershed districts, utilities, government, and school districts. Other past supporters of YES! include McKnight Foundation, Bush Foundation, Initiative Foundations, Waste Management, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, local businesses, corporate sponsorships, and individuals.