**PROJECT TITLE:** Connecting >350 Students Minnesota to Boundary Waters

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Minnesota has the Boundary Waters. Arizona has the Grand Canyon. Wyoming has Yellowstone. The Boundary Waters is our national gem.

Although approximately 200,000 people visit the Boundary Waters each year, it is a place that many Minnesotans have not visited, even for people who live near the Boundary Waters. In our ongoing community conversation meetings in Northeastern Minnesota, we have become aware that many high school students and young adults from the region have not been in the Boundary Waters on multi-day wilderness experiences, even though the Boundary Waters is “in their backyard.” This project aims to address this situation by connecting over 350 high school students and young adults from Northeastern Minnesota (Koochiching, Itasca, St. Louis, Lake, and Cook counties) to the Boundary Waters through two activities:

* **Wilderness canoe experiences:** Multi-day wilderness canoe experiences in the Boundary Waters for at least 255 high school students from Northeastern Minnesota over a three-year period, focusing on outdoor skills, leadership development, and self-reliance.
* **Wilderness conservation stewardship volunteers:** Supporting at least 100 young adults (high school graduates/college students ages 18-24 years old) from Northeastern Minnesota over a three-year period to serve as wilderness conservation stewardship volunteers working in coordination with wilderness rangers from the Superior National Forest to perform trail maintenance, campsite, and habitat restoration. The participants will receive training on the proper use of saws and other equipment, in addition to developing outdoor skills.

To implement these activities, the Friends is hiring a Community Advocate staff person in Northeastern Minnesota, ensuring no LCCMR funds from this grant will be used to pay for any Friends staff. We will leverage our experience and relationships from two of our current successful programs in order to ensure the success of this project. For the last fifteen years, we have provided scholarships for approximately 50-70 students from the Twin Cities metro region to experience the Boundary Waters. For the last eight years, we have partnered with the Superior National Forest to provide daily stipends for volunteers who clear portages, clean campsites, and restore habitat.

Minnesota will benefit from this project as these students and young adults develop leadership skills, self-reliance, and an enhanced conservation ethic.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity 1: Provide 255 Students from Northeast Minnesota with Outdoor Wilderness Experiences in the Boundary Waters**  **Description:**  This activity will provide scholarships to 255 high-school students from Koochiching, Itasca, St. Louis, Lake, and Cook counties to experience a multi-day wilderness canoe trip in the Boundary Waters. These students will develop leadership skills and learn how to be self-reliant in the outdoors through hands-on activities, such as canoeing, portaging, building a fire, pitching a tent, and fishing.  The Friends is currently seeking out a NE Minnesotan to hire as a Community Advocate staff member in Northeastern Minnesota to partner with local high schools and civic organizations throughout Northeastern Minnesota to identify and recruit high school students to receive scholarships to experience a multi-day wilderness canoe trip in the Boundary Waters. The Friends will also partner with Northeastern Minnesota camps, and Ely and Grand Marais outfitters to provide these wilderness canoe trips. We will leverage our experience and relationships from our existing program that currently provides scholarships for students from the Twin Cities Metro region to experience wilderness canoe trips.  **ENRFT Budget for Activity 1: $153,000**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Outcome** | **Completion Date** | | *1. Provide 75 high school students from Northeastern Minnesotans with outdoor wilderness experiences in the Boundary Waters* | *9/1/2021* | | *2. Provide 85 high school students from Northeastern Minnesotans with outdoor wilderness experiences in the Boundary Waters* | *9/1/2022* | | *2. Provide 95 high school students from Northeastern Minnesotans with outdoor wilderness experiences in the Boundary Waters* | *9/1/2023* |   **Activity 2: Support Over 100 Wilderness Conservation Stewardship Volunteers from Northeastern Minnesota in the Boundary Waters**  **Description:**  The Friends is hiring a Community Advocate staff member in Northeastern Minnesota to identify and recruit young adults (high school graduates/college students ages 18-24 years old) from Koochiching, Itasca, St. Louis, Lake, and Cook counties to perform trail maintenance and campsite and habitat restoration in the Boundary Waters working in coordination with wilderness rangers from the Superior National Forest. This activity will help build the next generation of wilderness conservation stewards and aid career development in conservation.  This activity builds upon our existing Wilderness Conservation Stewardship program with the Superior National Forest in which we provide stipends to the participants for their work ($30/day, $210/week). The participants are provided housing by the Superior National Forest or wilderness camping for the week. We will reach 25 young people in the first year, 35 in the second year, and 45 in the third year. We will partner with community colleges, UMD, folk schools, and other educational institutions to recruit and select participants in this program.  **ENRFT Budget for Activity 2: $31,050**   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Outcome** | **Completion Date** | | *1. Support 25 conservation steward volunteers from Northeastern Minnesotans in the Boundary Waters wilderness* | *9/1/2021* | | *2. Support 35 conservation steward volunteers from Northeastern Minnesotans in the Boundary Waters wilderness* | *9/1/2022* | | *3. Support 45 conservation steward volunteers from Northeastern Minnesotans in the Boundary Waters wilderness* | *9/1/2023* | |  |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

Superior National Forest and its wilderness rangers.

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

The Friends currently receives private donations from individuals and private foundations to support our existing programs that provide scholarships to students for wilderness canoe trips and stipends for wilderness conservation stewards. We will leverage the LCCMR grant to attract additional private donations to enable continuation of this project that focuses on participants from Northeastern Minnesota.