



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2022 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2022-236

Proposal Title: YES! Students Take Action-Complete 80+Eco Projects

Project Manager Information

Name: Shelli-Kae Foster

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: YES! (Youth Eco Solutions) will empower 300 Minnesota youth to connect with natural resource experts, identify ecological challenges in over 50 communities, and TAKE ACTION to complete 80+ innovative projects.

Funds Requested: \$199,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30 2024

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Environmental Education (C)

Project Location

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

Statewide

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

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project

Narrative

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

Minnesota's environment is at risk. Flooding, drought, soil erosion, increasing numbers of invasive species on land and in our waters, and other environmental changes threaten the health of Minnesota's ecosystems. According to the 2020 State Water Plan more precipitation fell across the state during 2019 than any other year on record, and over 85% of Minnesota's warming occurred since 1970, indicating the state's climate is changing rapidly. Clearly the need for action is urgent and with your support, Minnesota's youth will be ready to take action.

Many times, our youth feel disconnected from what is happening in their community. YES! offers an opportunity to change that. One thing we have witnessed over the past 14 years is that connecting students with resources and expertise to implement youth-led environmental action projects empowers them to protect, restore, and enjoy nearby natural spaces. As one student said, "I learned the power of what just 5 people can do to make a difference in my community." Youth energy, inspire, and lead other citizens toward a sustainable future in which their community not only survives, but thrives.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and Milestones.

Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) is a student-driven, award-winning program that empowers students to solve ecological challenges through hands-on projects. Since 2007 YES! has supported over 3,500 students in working with over 6,500 businesses, organizations, and community members, cultivating connected and action-oriented future citizens. Our project goal is to mobilize Minnesota youth to partner with local natural resource experts in over 50 communities to generate the broad citizen participation so urgently needed to protect and restore Minnesota's natural resources. Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) is seeking \$199,000 to build on our past success by supporting youth-led ecological projects. Anticipated projects include: water quality/conservation (AIS monitoring, lakeshore restoration; installing water saving devices), community or school gardens, composting school lunch waste, greenhouses (raising produce for school lunch), planting native prairie (restoring soil; filtering run-off), pollinator gardens, bee homes, raised garden beds, raising trout for stream release, reducing plastic waste, energy conservation, renewable energy projects (building a solar car, boat, trailer, cellphone charger; solar installations), and energy-efficient upgrades.

In addition, YES! will provide workshops on environmentally focused careers. These "green job" workshops will open a new world of possibilities for students to explore internships and job shadowing

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?

Prairie Woods ELC, working in partnership with Ney Nature Center and Laurentian Environmental Center, seek to accomplish the following project-specific outcomes:

- Students complete 80 + new projects such as water quality/conservation, renewable energy, soil and prairie restoration, invasive species eradication, and citizen science
- Connect students with local experts to deliver 20 customized workshops and trainings on topics that inform, identify, and support community-based ecological projects
- Educate and mobilize over 300 youth and 50 communities to seek solutions for environmental issues and act to protect land restore local natural resources
- Highlight environmental- related careers through "green job" workshops and speaker series

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Recruit, Educate, and Connect YES! Students to Natural Resource Experts and Careers

Activity Budget: \$85,430

Activity Description:

Building on our past experience, YES! students will learn from local and state natural resource experts while completing up to 80 ecological projects over 2 years. YES! staff from 3 environmental centers in various locations in Minnesota will recruit new YES! teams and retain existing teams to gain statewide participation. We will partner with local natural resource experts to host a Fall Summit and up to 3 workshops per region (west central, southern, and northeast). Education will include hands-on training for topics students are interested in pursuing for their community projects as well as strategies for creating S.M.A.R.T. goals, managing projects, and engaging community members. YES! students will receive education in composting, surveying and reporting aquatic and terrestrial land invasive species, Adopt-A-Drain campaigns, citizen science, water and energy conservation, shoreline restoration, renewable energy, prairie restoration, school gardens, greenhouses, and more.

YES! will open up a new world of possibilities for youth to pursue environmentally focused careers by providing regional green career workshops delivered online or in-person. On a survey completed by students who attended a recent workshop, 93% said they “learned about green jobs they hadn’t thought about before the workshop.”

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Recruit over 150 students in over 25 communities to select ecological projects in year 1	November 30 2022
Educate 20 YES! teams through customized workshops on natural resources best practices in year 1	May 31 2023
Connect over 150 students to regional and state natural resource experts in year 1	June 30 2023
Provide 1 “green” career workshop per region (3 regions) in year 1	June 30 2023
Recruit over 150 students in over 25 communities to select ecological projects in year 2	November 30 2023
Educate over 150 students in over 25 communities to select ecological projects in year 2	May 31 2024
Connect over 150 students to natural resource experts in year 2	June 30 2024
Provide 1 “green” career workshop per region (3 regions) in year 2	June 30 2024

Activity 2: Take Action! Students Implement 80+ Hands-on Eco Action Projects; Public Events & Recognition Completed

Activity Budget: \$113,570

Activity Description:

The structure of how YES! operates is similar to the structure of a tree. Prairie Woods ELC, Ney Nature Center and Laurentian Environmental Center are the roots that support the program. Schools and communities are the trunk holding everything together, while students are branches reaching out to identify their community’s ecological needs and work to find solutions to meet those needs.

YES! will mobilize 40 YES! teams over 2 years to help students adopt sustainable lifestyles and participate in outdoor activities that protect and improve local environments. YES! coordinators work with local entities to support YES! teams and their projects, organize community events, and supply canoes, fat-tire bikes, or other equipment for outdoor educational activities.

Team projects will include composting, surveying and reporting aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, Adopt-A-Drain campaign, water and energy conservation, shoreline restoration, renewable energy, prairie restoration, school gardens,

greenhouses, and more. Education will include tours of waste, clean energy, and restoration sites.

We will recognize the achievements of our youth during our Spring Competition. ENRTF funds provide support for YES! staff time, project seed funds, and program-related school expenses like bus transportation to workshops, making it more cost-effective for schools to participate in YES!.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Engage over 20 YES! teams to select and develop natural resource projects in year 1	December 31 2022
Mobilize over 150 students to complete over 20 new ecological projects in year 1	May 31 2023
Recognize student achievements at our annual YES! Spring Awards at the MN Twins Game	June 30 2023
Engage over 20 YES! teams to select and develop natural resource projects in year 2	December 31 2023
Mobilize over 200 students to complete over 20 new ecological projects in year 2	May 31 2024
Recognize student achievements at our annual YES! Spring Awards at the MN Twins Game	June 30 2024

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Becky Pollack	Ney Nature Center, Henderson, MN	Becky Pollack serves as Executive Director of Ney Nature Center(NNC). NNC will be a program partner to facilitate YES! in the southern region by serving as a host site for YES! events, providing oversight to the southern YES! coordinator, processing billing, and ensuring project outcomes are met.	Yes
Karl Brown	Laurentian Environmental Center	Karl Brown serves as Executive Director of Laurentian Environmental Center (LEC). LEC will be a program partner to facilitate YES! in the northeast region by serving as a host site for YES! events, providing oversight to the northeast YES! coordinator, processing billing, and ensuring project outcomes are met.	Yes
Students and Teachers	School Districts in Minnesota	School Districts will be key project partners in supporting youth in participating in natural resource projects. Funds will help support project seed funds and enable students and teachers to attend events as indicated in the budget.	Yes
Volunteers	Lake Associations, Community Groups	Lake associations and other community groups are a big part of our resource base for volunteers who support our youth-led projects.	No
Eric Dahl	Environmental Quality Board (EQB)	Eric will serve as resource expert and presenter on Minnesota water quality and conservation best practices. Eric wrote the 2020 Minnesota Water Plan.	No
Jacob Selseth	Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)	Jacob will work with YES! students on energy efficiency projects as expert, presenter, and collaborator.	No
Jeff Lederman	DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife - Outreach	Support youth-led projects related to fish and wildlife and serve as expert, presenter, and collaborator.	No
Eric Wyatt	University of Minnesota - Forestry	Gary will support youth-led projects related to forestry and serve as expert, presenter, and collaborator.	No
Eriann Faris	Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council (SWMNPIC)	Eriann and her colleagues will help connect students with green job opportunities and real-world experiences in local communities.	No

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 be funded?

YES! is completing its 14th year of working with Minnesota's youth by leveraging over \$1.3 million in local support of projects in the form of in-kind contributions, matching funds, major grants, and volunteer hours. In addition, YES! will seek private and public partnerships, individual donors and sponsorships to continue the work. But it is the projects themselves that will have everlasting results.

One student commented, "Our YES! team is leaving a legacy." The results from this project will leave a lifetime legacy of improved waterways, preserved and restored natural environments, and informed citizens throughout Minnesota.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Youth-led Sustainability Initiatives in 40 Greater Minnesota Communities	M.L. 2014, Chp. 226, Sec. 2, Subd. 09b	\$350,000
Youth-Led Sustainability Projects in 50 Minnesota Communities – Phase III	M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 05c	\$400,000
YES! Students Take on Minnesota Water-Quality Challenge	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$213,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Shelli-Kae Foster

Job Title: YES! Program Director

Provide description of the project manager’s qualifications to manage the proposed project.

Shelli-Kae Foster serves as YES! Program Director. She holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Sustainable Business from Marylhurst University, Oregon and a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Communications from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN. Shelli-Kae has been employed by Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center since 2011 to manage and direct the YES! program to successfully complete over 1,300 youth-led projects that protect and restore Minnesota’s natural resources. Duties include providing guidance and oversight, budget analysis and projections, supporting YES! staff, developing and implementing communication strategies, grant reporting and various daily duties to ensure the program operates efficiently and achieves its mission to empower youth to create solutions to today’s ecological challenges through hands-on community projects.

Shelli-Kae was honored with the Minnesota Women in Energy award by Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) in 2018. She helped YES! earn the Environmental Initiative Award for Environmental Education in 2013. Previous to working with the YES! program, she worked as Sustainability Manager for School District 206/Alexandria, managed the Green Team at Tastefully Simple, Inc, produced environmental programming for Twin Cities Public Television and produced over 100 programs for other major corporations. She has managed 4 LCCMR projects over the past 10 years and 2 LCMR projects for Twin Cities Public Television. Published work includes "Uncle Sam Worked Here" for Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education.

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

Organization Description:

Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) is a regional center for environmental education and outdoor recreation located in west central Minnesota. Founded in 1992, PWELC now serves over 30,000 people annually from over 70 school districts and dozens of youth and conservation organizations. With over 500 acres of natural space, an education building with 5 classrooms, a trailhead, a pavilion, an educational shooting sports range, an observatory building, and a 40-foot indoor climbing wall, PWELC offers numerous opportunities for learning and fun. Unique from many other environmental learning centers are our outreach programs, offering educational experiences in communities. Offerings such as YES!(Youth Eco Solutions), our mobile climbing wall, kayaks, and 34-foot voyager canoe are unique opportunities for meeting the needs of busy community members and students who are unable to travel to our facilities. In addition, these programs provide extended opportunities to partner with other environmental centers across the state.

Please note, PWELC's renewable energy production is typically close to net-zero. The facility serves as a model for

retrofitting buildings to renewable energy systems. PWELC also serves as a model for natural resource conservation best practices and for sharing these practices with all who live in west-central Minnesota.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		To manage project budget, reporting and staff to achieve desired project outcomes.			25%	1.3		\$84,224
Regional Coordinator		To coordinate and support student-driven teams to complete natural resource initiatives in west central Minnesota.			25%	0.7		\$30,000
Office Manager		To provide bookkeeping, process payroll, project seed fund distributions and other office duties.			25%	0.24		\$10,400
							Sub Total	\$124,624
Contracts and Services								
Ney Nature Center	Sub award	To coordinate and support up to 10 teams each year. Facilitate student-driven teams to complete natural resource initiatives in southern Minnesota.				26,500		\$26,500
Laurentian Environmental Center	Sub award	To coordinate and support up to 10 teams in the region each year. Facilitate student-driven teams to complete natural resource initiatives in northeast Minnesota.				26,500		\$26,500
School District/Community Expense allowance	Sub award	To facilitate student participation, funds will be available for reimbursement to allow YES! coaches to attend YES! events during the school day and cover some expenses to transport students to YES! events.				7,000		\$7,000
							Sub Total	\$60,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies for events and workshops such as kayak, canoe, bike rentals; technology for virtual events,	The kayak, canoe and/or bike rentals will enable outdoor natural resource experiences for students across Minnesota. In the event schools are in distance learning, we will conduct our workshops via Zoom.					\$1,000

							Sub Total	\$1,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Coordinators & Project Manager travel: 400 miles/month x 24 months = 9,600 miles x .56 = \$5,376	Travel required to support and meet with teams and coordinate activities in over 50 MN communities.					\$5,376
							Sub Total	\$5,376
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Project Seed Funds; approx. \$200 per team x 20 teams = \$4,000 x 2 years = \$8,000	Allows for teams to purchase materials and services necessary to initiate projects for natural resource conservation and restoration related projects & educational events.					\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$8,000
							Grand Total	\$199,000

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				
Cash	Each participating YES! team pays a fee of \$600. We estimate 20 schools will participate in the school years of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. YES! anticipates 20+ teams each year. 20 x 2 years = 40 teams total x \$600 = \$24,000.	Participation fees cover costs not eligible for reimbursement from ENRTF such as food, t-shirts, and other additional costs.	Pending	\$24,000
In-Kind	In-kind from Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) and our partners Ney Nature Center (NNC)and Laurentian Environmental Center(LEC). Also includes student volunteer time, teacher/coach volunteer time, and professional/expert volunteer time	PWELC \$24,000 + LEC \$5,000 + NNC \$ 10,000 for 2 years = 39,000 Student volunteer time average is 200 hrs per team x 20 teams x 2 yrs = 8,000 x \$13/hr = \$104,000 Teacher/Coach volunteer time average is 100 hrs per team x 20 teams x 2 yrs = 4,000 x \$35/hr = \$140,000 Professional/expert volunteer time average is 10 hrs per team x 20 teams x 2 yrs = 400 hrs x \$45/hr = \$18,000. Above in-kind is based on past history of previously quantified data.	Pending	\$301,000
Cash	Prairie Woods Environmental Center income - cash reserves.	Cash reserves are intended for staff, travel, office support and other items as required to maintain the program.	Secured	\$20,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$345,000
			Funds Total	\$345,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [98ad7cf8-590.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The visual describes the project starting with the title which is "YES! Students Take Action to Complete 80+ Eco Action Projects." There are 3 photos showing students actively engaged in doing a project including YES! students monitoring Lake Ringo for Aquatic Invasive Species, YES! students planting native species for a pollinator garden in Sleepy Eye, and a photo of a solar boat built by students in Wrenshall. They raced the boat in the Solar Boat Regatta and won as overall champion!

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Financial Capacity

File: [a7748cb7-717.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
PWELC Board Resolution Letter	fc29825a-838.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
Accessible Reader for YES! Visual Component	ecf32a68-1a8.docx
Letter of Commitment - Laurentian Environmental Center	b1ee3441-8ea.pdf
Letter of Commitment - Ney Nature Center	210304a7-672.pdf
Lac qui Parle Valley Letter of Support	f88f1904-c13.pdf
Westbrook-Walnut Grove Letter of Support	0672781d-a37.pdf
Discovery Woods/Brainerd Letter of Support	aeea8127-767.pdf
Northern Lights Community School/Warba Letter of Support	7a0277ce-94f.pdf
Sleepy Eye Letter of Support	967bb949-c00.pdf
Mankato West Letter of Support	f13adb25-5b9.pdf
New London-Spicer Letter of Support	82e2b2cf-fd8.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

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?

No



YES! Students Take Action to Complete 80+ Eco Projects

Building on the successful YES! model, this two-year project will empower over **300** Minnesota youth to connect with natural resource experts, identify ecological challenges in over **50** communities, and complete **80** or more projects to protect and preserve Minnesota's natural resources. YES! will work with local experts to provide **20** customized workshops for students and educators.

www.yesmn.org



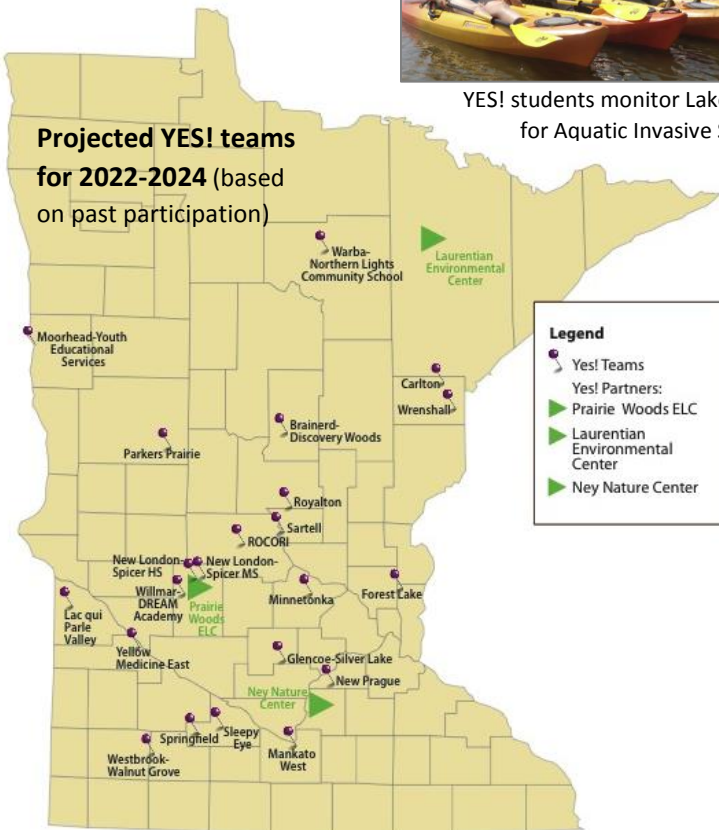
YES! students monitor Lake Ringo for Aquatic Invasive Species



YES! students planting native species for a pollinator garden in Sleepy Eye

Proposed YES! Projects for 2022-24

- Invasive species eradication
- Water quality and conservation
- Lakeshore and river restoration
- Building homes for bees and birds
- Planting trees
- Greenhouse building, planting and harvesting for school lunch
- Composting school lunch waste
- Rain garden design and planting
- Lakeshore and river clean-ups
- Aquaponics systems
- Stenciling storm drains
- B3 tracking for energy and water
- Pollinator gardens
- Energy conservation
- Clean energy projects such as building solar boats, cars, etc.
- Native prairie plantings to restore soil health



I remember when I was little and the YES! team came into my classroom and told us about the projects they do and I wanted to be on the YES! team when I got bigger because I loved the hands-on learning about something I cared about, our environment.

- New London-Spicer student



Wrenshall YES! team wins Solar Boat Regatta with student-built boat

