



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-231

Proposal Title: YES Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability

Project Manager Information

Name: Kalley Pratt

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: YES will engage and connect diverse students across Minnesota in hands-on environmental education and natural resource-based outdoor recreation to promote youth-led sustainability projects and partnerships in local schools and communities.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$199,000

Proposed Project Completion: July 31, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (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 and In the Future

Narrative

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

Youth Eco Solutions (YES) is eager to offer an exciting opportunity to reconnect Minnesota's youth with the state's abundant natural resources. In a world dominated by technology, many young people have easy access to digital entertainment but face barriers to accessing outdoor spaces and environmental education.

The "YES Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability" initiative is designed to bridge these gaps by providing immersive outdoor education experiences. We aim to empower students to engage with Minnesota's unique landscapes and waters through hands-on activities that promote environmental literacy, foster leadership skills, and encourage peer connections from across the state. Students will also benefit from near-peer mentorship opportunities, inspired by YES's partnership with the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment through the National Science Foundation Grant 2147839.

This initiative is committed to providing equitable opportunities for all youth, including those from indigenous, local, BIPOC, and underserved communities. By collaborating with local communities, YES ensures that every student has the chance to access nature, deepening their connection to the environment and cultivating future environmental stewards. Ultimately, this program will inspire youth to take responsibility for their planet, build resilience, and foster community connections.

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

Youth Eco Solutions (YES) is an award-winning, student-driven program that empowers students to tackle ecological challenges through hands-on projects. Since its inception in 2007, YES has engaged over 5,085 students and collaborated with more than 7,330 local businesses, organizations, and experts, positively impacting an additional 366,333 students and community members.

The "YES Connects Students to Outdoors for Youth-Led Sustainability" initiative aims to provide middle and high school students across Minnesota with direct exposure to the state's diverse ecosystems. Through hands-on outdoor activities, students will explore key ecological sites such as wetlands, forests, and prairies, enhancing their understanding of environmental science. Field trips will be supplemented by workshops focused on sustainability practices, conservation, and ecological preservation. Students will engage in activities like tree planting, water quality monitoring, and wildlife tracking, all while being encouraged to lead their own eco-friendly projects in their local schools and communities.

Funding for the initiative will cover transportation, materials, expert facilitation, and program administration. Offering immersive outdoor education, we will cultivate environmental stewardship and responsibility for Minnesota's natural resources. This project will empower youth to become eco-conscious advocates, fostering a lasting impact on environmental awareness and action in their schools, neighborhoods, and future.

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?

This project will engage youth in protecting and conserving Minnesota's natural resources by encouraging active stewardship of local environments. Through outdoor experiences, students will gain a deeper understanding of ecological processes, species protection, and conservation. By promoting environmental literacy, the project will inspire sustainable behaviors and advocacy in the next generation. It will also connect like-minded students across the state, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for the environment. Long-term, this initiative will strengthen public connection to Minnesota's diverse ecosystems, ensuring the preservation of natural landscapes for future generations.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: YES Engaging Students with Minnesota Outdoors and Empowering Sustainability Initiatives

Activity Budget: \$125,000

Activity Description:

This activity aims to engage students with Minnesota's natural resources while empowering them to lead sustainability projects. The YES Season will begin with the YES Fall Summit, hosted at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center, where students will participate in hands-on workshops, connect with green career professionals, and deepen their environmental education. The Fall Summit will occur in both years, offering a space for students to connect with nature and each other. Additionally, YES will host ten outdoor environmental workshops focused on natural resources, conservation practices, and environmental issues over the two years.

To further enhance engagement, YES Weekend Retreats will be held during the winter season both years at a Minnesota Environmental Learning Center. These retreats will provide essential outdoor exposure for students who might not otherwise have access. In addition, YES will organize three large group recreational events annually, one in each region, to bring diverse students together and give them outdoor experiences.

Finally, with the support of YES Staff, 150+ students will be mobilized to implement 20 sustainability projects across both years. This hands-on experience will foster environmental stewardship, leadership, and community engagement. Overall, this activity will inspire students to become eco-conscious advocates and create meaningful change.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Kick-off YES Season with 100+ students at Fall Summit to address physical, social, financial barriers	November 30, 2026
Facilitate a YES Winter Retreat for 100+ students, fostering environmental awareness, leadership, and nature connections	March 31, 2027
Organize 10 hands-on nature-based workshops - offering students opportunities to learn about resources and sustainability	May 31, 2027
Host three large recreational events, one per region, to connect diverse students with outdoors	May 31, 2027
Support and mobilize 150 students to create and implement 20 sustainability projects	June 30, 2027
Kick-off YES Season with 100+ students at Fall Summit to address physical, social, financial barriers	November 30, 2027
Facilitate a YES Winter Retreat for 100+ students, fostering environmental awareness, leadership, and nature connections	March 31, 2028
Organize 10 hands-on nature-based workshops - offering students opportunities to learn about resources and sustainability	May 31, 2028
Host three large recreational events, one per region, to connect diverse students with outdoors	May 31, 2028
Support and mobilize 150 students to create and implement 20 sustainability projects	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Educating YES Students and Connecting Them to Green Career Pathways

Activity Budget: \$74,000

Activity Description:

The YES Seasons will kick off with the annual YES Fall Summit, hosted at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center in Spicer, Minnesota. This event will bring together 100+ students with green career professionals, providing valuable networking opportunities that can help shape their future career pathways in sustainability and environmental science.

YES Students in grades 6 through 12 will engage with local and state environmental experts from organizations like Clean Energy Resource Team (CERTs), Climate Generation, Emily Ford, Friends of the Boundary Waters, National Loon Center,

and others. These experts will lead hands-on training sessions focused on sustainability topics relevant to students' community projects and future careers. Students will explore a variety of key sustainability practices, including energy conservation, renewable energy, water conservation, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, pollution prevention, biodiversity protection, green building practices, sustainable transportation, climate change mitigation, eco-friendly product design, sustainable fisheries, forest management, and social sustainability, all of which are vital to environmental stewardship. To further support the students' growth, YES will host 10 annual environmental career workshops across the state, offering industry insights, inspiration and green career pathway connections.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Launch the YES Season with the Fall Summit, connecting 100+ students to green career professionals	November 30, 2026
Host 10 environmental career workshops with experts, inspiring students about sustainability and green career pathways	May 31, 2027
Launch the YES Season with the Fall Summit, connecting 100+ students to green career professionals	November 30, 2027
Host 10 environmental career workshops with experts, inspiring students about sustainability and green career pathways	May 31, 2028

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
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
Emily Pavlisich	Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	Host a weekend retreat in which a diverse group of students participating in Youth Eco Solutions will be engaged in hands-on environmental education and natural resource-based outdoor recreation.	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 work be funded?

YES is completing its 18th year of working with Minnesota's youth by leveraging over \$1.4 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 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
Yes! Students Take On Water Quality Challenge II	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000
YES! Students Take Action to Complete Eco Projects	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000
YES! Students Step Up To Reduce Carbon Footprint	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05m	\$199,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Kalley Pratt

Job Title: YES Director

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

Kalley Pratt, the Director of Youth Eco Solutions since May 2023, has extensive experience managing environmental projects. Prior to her current role, she served as the Communications and Grants Manager for the organization. Pratt has successfully managed three LCCMR Grants: "Yes! Students Take On Water Quality Challenge II," "YES! Students Take Action to Complete Eco Projects," and "YES! Students Step Up To Reduce Carbon Footprint." In 2024, she successfully concluded the "Yes! Students Take On Water Quality Challenge II" project and continues to oversee the remaining

initiatives. Pratt's expertise is bolstered by the support she has received from LCCMR, DNR, and Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center.

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 560 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.

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, and provide strategic and collaborative leadership in carrying out the mission of the statewide Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) program.			25%	1.2		\$86,560
Team Manager		To coordinate and support student-driven teams to complete sustainability projects.			25%	1		\$53,100
Office Manager/Administrator		To provide bookkeeping, process payroll, project seed fund distributions and other office duties.			25%	0.14		\$12,800
							Sub Total	\$152,460
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies for YES educational events and workshops: Fall Summit, Workshops, Awards Ceremony. Environmental Education workshop supplies approximately \$10 per students X \$150 students per year X 2 years = \$3,000.	Materials and supplies will enable outdoor natural resource experiences for students across Minnesota.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Coordinators & Project Manager travel: approximately 200 miles/month x 24 months x .655 = \$3,040	Travel required to support and meet with Statewide teams and coordinate activities in communities.					\$3,040

							Sub Total	\$3,040
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Youth Engagement, Accessibility & Project Support	Includes transportation, outdoor events, stipends for participation, and project funds for their subsequent local projects.					\$40,500
							Sub Total	\$40,500
							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. 15 Teams x 2 years = 30 teams x \$600 = \$18,000.	Participation fees cover costs not eligible for reimbursement from ENRTF such as food, t-shirts and other additional costs.	Pending	\$18,000
In-Kind	In-kind from Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC). Also includes student volunteer time, teacher/coach volunteer time, and professional/expert volunteer time.	In-Kind (phone, computer, maintenance, heating, electric, copies, professional service, etc.) PWELC \$36,000 for 2 years. Student volunteer time average is 200 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 6,000 x \$14.56/hr = \$87,360. Teacher/Coach volunteer time average is 80 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 2,400 x \$35/hr = \$84,000. Professional/expert volunteer time average is 10 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 300 x \$45/hr = \$13,500. Above in-kind is based on past history of previously quantified data.	Secured	\$184,860
Cash	Prairie Woods Environmental Center Income (Cash Reserves, Small Grants & Gifts)	Cash reserves are intended for staff, travel, office support and other items as required to maintain the program (Website Hosting, Constant Contact, Email, Technical Support, Printing, Marketing, etc.).	Secured	\$20,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$222,860
			Funds Total	\$222,860

Total Project Cost: \$421,860

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [db0a0ddb-fed.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A Statewide map of YES!, testimonials from participants, photos of environmental education, proposed projects....

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
PWELC Board Resolution	67d17d24-d26.pdf
PWELC Board Letter	2f5c8ac3-dbe.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
YES Letter of Support - MACCRAY	4416ef31-a85.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Westbrook-Walnut Grove	b79761a8-3b4.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Harbor City International	aaf703b5-bfc.pdf
Photos of Environmental Education	6a8c40ec-b93.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center	681b8768-473.pdf
YES Letter of Support - Royalton Public Schools	22c36096-a5a.pdf
YES Letter of Support - New London Spicer Middle School	4012bd3f-73b.pdf
YES Letter of Support - New London Spicer High School	f97a5081-a2a.pdf
YES Letter of Support - CERTs	8e15af89-f3c.pdf
2023-24 YES Team Accomplishments	3cb22d84-d46.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

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

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

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

Yes

Do you certify that background checks are performed for background check crimes, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 299C.61, Subd. 2, on all employees, contractors, and volunteers who have or may have access to a child to whom children's services are provided by your organization?

Yes

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Jennifer Swenson, Executive Director of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

N/A