



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-260

**Proposal Title:** Cultivating Conservation Leaders through Education and Wilderness Experiences

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Alison Nyenhuis

**Organization:** Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

**Office Telephone:** (612) 263-0347

**Email:** alison@friends-bwca.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Fostering the next generation of conservation leaders and increasing access to the Boundary Waters through environmental education and immersive wilderness experiences for 12,000 students throughout Minnesota.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$1,375,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2029

**LCCMR Funding 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.**

While Minnesota is home to Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA), the most visited wilderness area in the country, many youth throughout Minnesota have never heard of or visited the BWCA. Youth face several barriers to accessing this wilderness, ranging from economic and skills-based to social and cultural, in both urban and rural populations, and especially among underserved and/or BIPOC communities.

These barriers include lack of proper gear, equipment, and skills needed to feel confident and safe while traveling in the remote forests and waters of the Boundary Waters. Cultural barriers include communication challenges with family about these activities and lack of representation in the outdoor recreation world. Other barriers include a sense of insecurity with travel away from home, and lack of supportive adults that know the unique needs of the community.

Wilderness experiences like the Boundary Waters hold many benefits for young people: short-term benefits include connection to nature and peers, confidence, and increased comfort with similar activities. Long-term benefits include resilience, lifelong outdoor activities, and career opportunities related to the outdoors and the environment.

Our program addresses these barriers to increase access and connection to the Boundary Waters for Minnesota students.

**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.**

Friends of the Boundary Waters aims to remove barriers described above so that all students can access and connect with the public lands and waters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA).

Our framework allows for diverse school/community partners throughout Minnesota to participate in our programs at their preferred level - virtual lessons, in-person experiential learning, and wilderness trips. As an extension of these programs, we offer a leadership cohort with expanded opportunities beyond those they do with their school groups. These components build upon one another to foster confidence and connection among students in a supportive and safe environment.

Programming includes:

- Hands-on lessons focused on the Boundary Waters ecosystem aligned with MN state standards.
- Wilderness trip scholarships, training, and gear to support school/community groups' needs, including culturally relevant approaches that remove barriers to accessing the BWCA.
- A leadership program with expanded outdoor recreation opportunities (ex. winter experiences) and career exploration related to the environment and natural resources.

The scaffolded experiences we will offer create opportunities for personal connections to the wilderness, making participants more likely to engage in future outdoor recreation activities.

**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?**

- Connecting at least 12,000 students throughout Minnesota to the BWCA through environmental education and hands-on skill building in their local communities. Goals include increased connection to the outdoors and awareness of unique Minnesota public lands and ecosystems.
- Providing at least 600 students opportunities to spend multiple days in Minnesota's most pristine wilderness area to foster connection and increase the likelihood of future engagement and conservation.

-Cultivating outdoor leadership in a year-long program for 60 students state-wide, leading to increased ability and interest in continuing to recreate, conserve, and explore careers relating to Minnesota's lands and waters.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Building awareness by engaging 12,000 students throughout Minnesota with hands-on environmental education on the Boundary Waters

**Activity Budget:** \$331,700

#### Activity Description:

We build awareness of the BWCA to thousands of students statewide by connecting with teachers to offer virtual and in-person lessons. These lessons provide hands-on education for students to learn more about the BWCA, its ecology, and recreation opportunities. Staff travel to Metro and Greater Minnesota schools to deliver programming in students' local outdoor spaces, building confidence and lifelong skills that students can use in outdoor recreation activities throughout the state. Programming is adapted to unique needs, feedback, or barriers of schools and organizations.

#### Strategies and Tactics:

- Engage Minnesota teachers to join the No Boundaries Educator Network and receive online lessons and resources, including resources highlighting Indigenous and other BIPOC experiences on this land.
- Use engagement strategies such as in-person meetings, emails, brochures, social media, and current relationships to identify school partners in Minnesota.
- Provide hands-on program experiences to Minnesota students. Activities focus on the Boundary Waters ecosystem and are aligned with MN State Standards in science, social studies, English, and P.E. for 6-12th grade. Courses include Boundary Waters Animal Adaptations, Map and Compass, Watershed Investigation, and more.
- Collect evaluations from participating teachers to assess effectiveness.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Enroll at least 800 teachers in the teacher network.	July 31, 2027
4,000 program experiences are provided in year one.	July 31, 2027
4,000 program experiences are provided in year two.	July 31, 2028
4,000 program experiences are provided in year three.	June 30, 2029

### Activity 2: Cultivating Positive Wilderness Experiences in the Boundary Waters

**Activity Budget:** \$691,800

#### Activity Description:

Yearly, the Friends provides scholarships for multi-day BWCA canoe trips, specifically serving underserved/BIPOC students throughout Minnesota. Beyond finances, barriers exist unique to each community, preventing students from exploring public lands, specifically the BWCA. To address these and cultivate positive wilderness experiences, we will build on Activity 1 engagement by regularly meeting with partners to customize programming, hold skill-building workshops, provide quality gear, and train chaperones in best practices for supporting students in the wilderness. These community-informed activities build skills and confidence, while informing expectations for wilderness trips.

#### Strategies and tactics:

- Via Activity 1, identify candidates for overnight BWCA trips, targeting schools with high financial needs and under-represented demographics in the BWCA, such as BIPOC or Indigenous populations.
- Assess barriers, discuss strategies to address them.
- Liaise between participants and partner wilderness outfitters (ex: Camp Menogyn, Wilderness Inquiry) for logistics support.

- Award need-based scholarships
- Train chaperones to support students' social-emotional skills and teamwork for positive wilderness experiences.
- Hold hands-on pre-trip workshops to build student skills, teamwork, and confidence. Distribute gear and trip journals. Effective workshops require groups' transportation to a park with canoeing access.
- Hold alumni gatherings locally where students share their experiences and skills with family and friends.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year one.	August 31, 2027
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year two.	August 31, 2028
200 participants on Boundary Waters overnight experiences with pre and post programming in year three.	June 30, 2029

### Activity 3: Fostering Leadership, Conservation, and Environmental Career Exploration for 60 students

**Activity Budget:** \$351,500

#### Activity Description:

In 2024, we started a year-long leadership program to provide opportunities for students to deepen their connections to the BWCA after participating in wilderness trips. In this Activity, we will grow our existing program and add an additional leadership cohort for students in Northeastern Minnesota.

In the school year following Activity 2, students accepted in the leadership program will participate in outdoor recreation opportunities, explore conservation topics and careers, and practice leadership skills. This program culminates in students serving as a "peer leader" on their schools' BWCA trip.

#### Strategies and tactics:

- Distribute information and applications to students from schools and organizations that completed Activity 2, targeting partner schools that work with underserved, BIPOC or Indigenous populations in 9-12th grade.
- Hold 5 sessions per year in each leadership cohort, including one winter BWCA experience with both cohorts, 3 local outdoor experiences, and one local overnight training for BWCA peer leader responsibilities.
- Plan and coordinate programming that enhances students' skills and knowledge related to conservation and outdoor recreation, including career pathways and leadership development.
- Conduct surveys to demonstrate growth in skill development, confidence, stewardship, and interest in further learning in topics related to environmental conservation or wilderness exploration.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year one: At least 20 students participate in leadership program, additional Northeastern Minnesota cohort created.	August 31, 2027
Year two: At least 20 students participate in leadership program.	August 31, 2028
Year three: At least 20 students participate in leadership program.	June 30, 2029

## 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?**

Our scaffolded approach offers opportunities for students to progressively deepen engagement, thereby increasing the likelihood that students will continue to conserve and recreate in Minnesota's public lands, specifically the Boundary Waters.

Results from this project, including engagement and feedback from school/community partners, chaperones, and students, will inform and support the broader implementation and modifications of our programming for years to come.

We will fund complementary and ongoing work beyond this project through sources such as, but not limited to, individual donors, corporate and foundation grants.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Connecting Students to the Boundary Waters	M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$450,000
Fostering Conservation by Connecting Students to the BWCA	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05a	\$1,080,000
The Boundary Waters is Our Backyard	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05n	\$500,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Alison Nyenhuis

**Job Title:** Education Director

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

Alison Nyenhuis, Education Director, has been with the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness since 2019. She oversees the No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters program, which has been partially funded by past LCCMR appropriations. Under her direction, our programming has met or exceeded the goals laid out in previous applications.

As a former classroom teacher, youth wilderness guide, and environmental educator, she has a wealth of experience in outdoor education, project management, and inspiring young learners of all backgrounds. She is skilled in curriculum development, and organizing and administering large-scale projects.

**Organization:** Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

**Organization Description:**

Since 1976, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness has been the leading voice for the ongoing protection, preservation, and restoration of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA). Our organization was instrumental in the passage of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978, which made the Boundary Waters what it is today.

The mission of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness is to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Quetico-Superior ecosystem. We believe that in order to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness, increased access is necessary. Our future generations of land stewards are

the youth of today.

We envision a future where all people feel welcome in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and help to maintain the natural recreational resources of the space. A future where threats to that wilderness no longer exist, and where communities surrounding the BWCA are prosperous and thriving. These drive our day-to-day work and we foresee the greatest impact to come through our No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters program.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Education Director (.5FTE) 50,000 X 25% Benefits X 3 years = \$187,500		Project Manager, supervises programs staff			25%	1.5		\$187,500
Education Coordinator: Twin Cities and Central/Southern MN (1 FTE) 55,000 + 25% Benefits x 3 years = \$206,250		Coordinates and carries out project activities in/around Twin Cities Metro & portions of Greater Minnesota			25%	3		\$206,250
Education Manager: Twin Cities and Central/Southern MN (1 FTE) 65,000 + 25% benefits x 3 years = \$243,750		Manages Twin Cities Leadership cohort, supervises interns, coordinates and carries out project activities in/around Twin Cities Metro & portions of Greater Minnesota			25%	3		\$243,750
Education Manager: Northern Minnesota (.8 FTE) 46,500 + 25% Benefits x 3 years = \$195,000		Manages Northeastern Leadership Cohort, supervises interns, coordinates and carries out project activities in Northern Minnesota			25%	2.4		\$195,000
Seasonal Education Interns (4 per year at .15 FTE): \$18/hour, 20 hours per week for 16 weeks. 2 interns in the		Deliver programming in project area with the supervision of other education staff.			0%	1.8		\$69,000



Twin Cities location and 2 interns in the Ely location x 3 years = \$69,120								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$901,500</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Programming and Curriculum Supplies	Supplies for program delivery, including replacement supplies and consumable supplies (for example, students use cotton balls and tins for our fire building course that is restocked several times a year, or replacement materials such as white board markers, fire starters, and compasses). \$1500 per year					\$4,500
	Tools and Supplies	Gear for students on wilderness trips	Gear for students to keep after their wilderness trip to encourage further use and exploration in the outdoors. Wicking shirt, water bottle, etc. \$20/student x 600 students					\$12,000
	Tools and Supplies	Replacement gear for borrowed gear library	Replacing lost or damaged gear available for students to borrow on wilderness trips, such as rain gear, headlamps, etc. \$500 a year.					\$1,500
	Tools and Supplies	Food & Beverages for student programs (Generally Ineligible)	Food and beverages to serve student events such as alumni celebrations, chaperone training, trip information sessions, and workshops. Food and refreshments will be reasonable and proportionate to the type of event being held. We have found water and snacks are essential for outdoor programming to ensure safety in hot weather, and offering food for trip	X				\$6,000

			information sessions increases attendance and helps to build relationship with communities. Some examples of refreshments for past programs have included family-friendly items like smores, pizza, water and juice, trail mix, hot dogs, sandwiches, tacos, or other reasonable food items for youth outdoor events. \$2000 per year X 3					
	Tools and Supplies	Food & Beverages for Leadership Program Sessions	Food and beverages to serve at leadership cohort sessions. These are day-long sessions, often involving outdoor activities, and so we have found that it increases attendance and parent support of the program if we are able to provide a meal. Some examples of refreshments for past programs have included family-friendly items like smores, pizza, water and juice, hot dogs, sandwiches, tacos, or other reasonable food items for youth outdoor events. \$50 / student x 60 = 3,000	X				\$3,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$27,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage, food and lodging for staff visits to schools. \$175 average food and lodging per overnight visit, 8 times per year for four program staff for three years (175x8x4 staff x 3 years = 16,800). Mileage: 20 visits per year per program staff at an average of 78 miles per visit. 240 visits	Mileage, food and lodging for program staff to visit schools throughout the state.					\$30,000

		X 78 miles X .7 per mile = 13,104 . \$13,104 + \$16,800 = \$30,000						
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Transportation for leadership program: Rental passenger van for overnight leadership program sessions (\$250/ day, 4 days a year x 3 years)	Staff will carry out leadership program activities/outings & will rent a passenger van to transport students.					\$3,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Transportation for students: Bus/passenger van rental or service to occasionally transport groups from their schools to local workshops and programming at nearby parks - average \$210, 3 times per year year (\$210x3x3 = approx \$2000). Additionally, transportation to and from the BWCA for 2 trip groups (\$1500 x 2 = 3,000).	Many of our schools face transportation funding barriers. We would be able to provide more programming experiences with paddling or larger outdoor spaces with additional funding for schools to get students to these areas. Additionally, a few of our schools need assistance with transportation costs to and from the Boundary Waters.					\$5,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$38,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Trip journals for students on Boundary Waters wilderness trips (\$5/student on trips, 600 X 5 = \$3,000)	Trip journals for students to use on their BWCA trips. Journals include chaperone-led curriculum material including self-reflection and goal-setting prompts, plant and animal identification, Anishinaabe language and constellation information, and more.					\$3,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Partner fees for high-volume programming	Space, equipment, and activity instructors from organizations such as Minneapolis Park Board, Three Rivers, and Wilderness Inquiry to host specific activities alongside Friends of the BWCA programming (such as fishing, paddling, wheelchair-adaptive programming) during large community					\$1,500

			events (such as the alumni paddle day, or large school programs where Friends staff needs additional capacity). \$500 per year, \$1500					
		Wilderness trip scholarships	Scholarships for wilderness trips Notes: Average cost of \$860 per trip. Average cost student pays is \$100 (range of 0-400 based on level of financial need at the school, among other factors). $\$760 \times 600 = \$456,000$ . Minus scholarship match (132,000) = \$324,000					\$324,000
		Leadership Cohort Program Fees	Program fees, outfitting, and lodging for leadership program - paid to camp/outfitting partners in the BWCA or local outdoor partners for use of space, equipment, food (included in the rate), rentals, and any instruction fees. \$600 per student for local leadership overnight, BWCA winter retreat, and local programming. $60 \text{ students} \times \$500 = \$30,000$					\$30,000
		Student Peer Leader Stipend	Stipend for students attending their schools BWCA trip as a peer leader through Leadership program. This stipend is a large draw for applying to and completing the program. $\$300/\text{student} \times 50 = \$15,000$					\$15,000
		Teacher Chaperone Stipends	Teacher stipend for chaperoning trip to compensate them to the extra time to assist with coordinating trip logistics, attending a training, and chaperoning overnight experiences outside of school hours (500/teacher/trip). $600 / 8 \text{ (group size in BWCA)} = 75$ . $70 \text{ chaperones} \times \$500 = \$37,500$					\$35,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$405,500</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,375,000</b>

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>		Food & Beverages for student programs (Generally Ineligible)	Food and refreshments will be reasonable and proportionate to the type of event being held. We have found water and snacks are essential for outdoor programming to ensure safety in hot weather, and offering food for trip information sessions increases attendance and helps to build relationship with communities. Some examples of refreshments for past programs have included family-friendly items like smores, pizza, water and juice, trail mix, hot dogs, sandwiches, tacos, or other reasonable food items for youth outdoor events.
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>		Food & Beverages for Leadership Program Sessions	Food and refreshments will be reasonable and proportionate to the type of event being held. These are day-long sessions, often involving outdoor activities, and so we have found that it increases attendance and parent support of the program if we are able to provide a meal. Some examples of refreshments for past programs have included family-friendly items like smores, pizza, water and juice, hot dogs, sandwiches, tacos, or other reasonable food items for youth outdoor events.

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Individual donations and foundation grants to support the multi-day Boundary Waters canoe wilderness trips.	Scholarships for Boundary Waters wilderness trips	Secured	\$132,000
In-Kind	Individual donations and foundation grants which support general operations	Staff support from the Education Director (.25 FTE per year), Operations Director (.1 FTE per year), and Grants Manager (.05 FTE per year). Total 1.2 FTE = \$100,000	Secured	\$100,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$232,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$232,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$1,607,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [e3098935-27c.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

1-page document with short project description and photos. The description includes information on how our program connects youth to the Boundary Waters through education experiences, BWCA wilderness trips, and leadership opportunities. Photos feature students outdoors in the Boundary Waters and their schoolyards, engaging with each other and outdoor skills....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Friends of BWCA Certificate of Good Standing	<a href="#">ae09ce6c-108.pdf</a>
Friends of BWCA 990	<a href="#">e8aeed59-a17.pdf</a>
Friends of BWCA Audit	<a href="#">9d7dd00d-d78.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Friends of BWCA Board Resolution	<a href="#">836550c6-23a.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Support Letter: Barnum Public Schools	<a href="#">e90d9e7e-e35.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Willow River High School	<a href="#">9f4798a3-8d7.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Harding High School	<a href="#">2a0cb812-08d.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Laura Jeffrey Academy	<a href="#">8beecf75-9da.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Anoka High School	<a href="#">25c04642-81b.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Prairie Seeds Academy	<a href="#">3f3fccaa-ff4.pdf</a>
Support Letter: Cloquet Schools American Indian Education Program	<a href="#">8898ed81-2ef.pdf</a>

## 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:**

Karen Johnson, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Bree Sikorski, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

**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