



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-270

**Proposal Title:** Empowering Future Leaders Through Outdoor Access

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Sara Lemke

**Organization:** Camp Fire Minnesota

**Office Telephone:** (612) 540-3043

**Email:** giving@campfiremn.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** This initiative will engage 5121 young people through year-round family events, leadership development planning, and expanded scholarships, ensuring equitable access to outdoor experiences and fostering future environmental stewards.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$875,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2028

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Education and Outdoor Recreation (C)

#### Project Location

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

Region(s): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

**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.**

Camp Fire Minnesota has provided young people with access to nature for 100 years through camps, environmental education field-trips, and afterschool programs. In 2024, we welcomed 10,780 youth to programs tied to Minnesota state education standards. With our 103-acre property in Excelsior and community-based programming, we empower youth to discover their spark and build brighter futures.

Yet, nature access remains inequitable. The Center for American Progress reports that 76% of low-income and nonwhite communities experience nature deprivation. Additionally, the U.S. National Science Foundation found that in 2021, Hispanic, Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native people made up 31% of the U.S. population but only 24% of the STEM workforce.

Our project will address these disparities by expanding free family events, fostering diverse participation in outdoor experiences through continued scholarship support, and creating leadership pathways for youth. Through hands-on, evidence-based environmental curriculum, we will connect young people—particularly BIPOC and under-resourced youth—to nature and career pathways in environmental fields. Partnering with Indigenous, local, and BIPOC-serving organizations, we will create progression-based leadership programs, ensuring more young people see themselves in nature and environmental careers.

By breaking down barriers, we will cultivate a more diverse generation of environmental stewards.

**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.**

Our programs take place in classrooms, community parks, and on our 103-acre property in Excelsior. Developed alongside educators and youth, our curriculum includes 17 STEM courses aligned with Minnesota state education standards and 10 Outdoor Education courses covering topics like animal adaptations and renewable energy. In 2024, 90% of youth shared that because of Camp Fire, they value nature and plan to steward the environment.

Camp Fire Minnesota will address nature access disparities by expanding partnerships with schools where 60% or more of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and collaborating with BIPOC-serving organizations. Together, we will develop culturally relevant, inclusive outdoor learning and recreation programs that remove barriers to nature. Through surveys and partner input, we will tailor programs, provide scholarships, and create leadership opportunities for youth historically underrepresented in environmental fields.

By prioritizing accessibility, we ensure young people and partner organizations drive program design. Funding will allow us to expand free family programming, strengthen partnerships, and establish leadership pathways that support a more diverse environmental workforce. Currently supported by individual donors and foundations, we seek LCCMR funding to sustain and grow these efforts, ensuring more youth—especially BIPOC and under-resourced students—can experience nature, build skills, and

**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 do the following:

Engage 5121 young people through year-round family events, leadership development planning, and expanded scholarships, ensuring equitable access to outdoor experiences and fostering future environmental stewards.

90% see a bright future for themselves

80% of youth welcomed will report understanding the importance of caring for the natural world around them.

95% of educators will report that the activities address the learning objectives they hoped to address.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Expanding Diversity in Outdoor Experiences through Family Programs (Family Programs)

**Activity Budget:** \$161,200

**Activity Description:**

To create lasting engagement with nature, we will ensure our programs are meaningful, accessible, and inclusive for youth and their families. Research shows that outdoor engagement is more sustainable when the whole family participates. We aim to remove barriers by offering free, culturally relevant outdoor experiences that connect children, parents, grandparents, and extended family members to nature.

To achieve this, we will collaborate with our network of 665 schools, educators, and partners, including Minneapolis Community Education and organizations serving under-resourced youth. We will host no-cost family programs at Camp Fire's 103-acre property, covering transportation expenses, and expand programming within community spaces.

By prioritizing equitable access, we will provide transformative, hands-on outdoor experiences that foster joy, confidence, and connection. Through evidence-based environmental education, youth will explore nature alongside supportive peers and mentors, reinforcing a lifelong relationship with the outdoors. This initiative will engage 500 students and family members, deepening community ties and creating pathways for continued participation.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Identify opportunities for family engagement events: Connect with current partners to co-create events in the community and	August 31, 2026
Schedule & host 6 new family engagement events & enhance access to 4 existing events	June 30, 2027
Update program offerings based on feedback and identified needs from partners and families.	July 31, 2027
Share events and coordinate transportation and signups in collaboration with partners and new audiences.	June 30, 2028
Schedule & host 8 new family engagement events & enhance access to 4 existing events	June 30, 2028
Share events and coordinate transportation and signups in collaboration with partners and new audiences.	June 30, 2028

### Activity 2: Empowering Future Leaders through Leadership Progression Programming (Leadership)

**Activity Budget:** \$109,700

**Activity Description:**

To build a more diverse and representative environmental workforce, we will establish a leadership progression program that equips underrepresented youth with the skills, experience, and mentorship needed to become environmental leaders. This program will provide structured opportunities for youth to develop leadership abilities through outdoor education, hands-on learning, and career exploration.

In year one, we will collaborate with partner organizations, educators, and youth to design a culturally relevant leadership track that aligns with community needs. We will integrate mentorship, environmental career exposure, and skill-building workshops into our existing programming. Scholarships will ensure that cost is never a barrier.

In year two, we will implement the leadership track, engaging youth in progression-based outdoor education, community stewardship projects, and leadership roles within Camp Fire programs. We will also create connections with environmental professionals to provide networking and career pathway opportunities.

By the project's end, 116 youth—particularly BIPOC and under-resourced students—will have gained leadership experience, career exposure, and a sense of belonging in outdoor spaces. This initiative will create a lasting impact by preparing youth for environmental careers and strengthening a pipeline of diverse, passionate leaders in the field.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire & train Youth Leadership Program Coordinator	August 31, 2026
Program Planning	December 31, 2026
Recruitment	June 30, 2027
Pilot Program	June 30, 2027
Update program offerings based on feedback and identified needs from partners and young people.	July 31, 2027
Run second year of program	June 30, 2028

### Activity 3: Creating Inclusive and Free Outdoor Experiences for All (Scholarship)

**Activity Budget:** \$604,100

#### Activity Description:

Our objective is to ensure that our program offerings reach low-income and BIPOC young people. To be successful, we will communicate to school representatives, partner organizations, and individuals via email, website, and phone to announce the ENRTF-funded scholarship opportunities. We maintain a database of 665 schools and educators interested in Environmental Education experiences but lack the funding. Camp Fire Minnesota will provide scholarships to young people based on need, as determined by Free and Reduced Lunch Rates, identified through an application process. The provision of scholarships will encourage an entire group of young people to attend one or multiple programs, not just those of financial means.

We will document scholarship support provided throughout our 3 core programs: Environmental Education, Summer and School Break Camp, and After School Explorers. All programs are currently offered at no cost or on a sliding scale. Camp Fire Minnesota's nature-based initiatives serve as a transformative space for youth to rediscover the joy of fun in nature amidst the camaraderie of supportive peers and mentors. The outcome of this work will ensure the financial accessibility of all our programs to 4505 youth.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Create list of current and waitlist partners to create unique engagement plan curated by teachers and youth	September 30, 2026
Send scholarship information and applications to schools, partners, and individuals we serve and new & current audiences.	December 31, 2026
Work with current and new partners to identify current needs and extra learning support in Environmental Education.	April 30, 2027
Update program offerings based on feedback and identified needs from partners and young people.	September 30, 2027
Share updated program offerings and applications to current schools and partners and new audiences.	December 31, 2027
A minimum of 4505 young people will experience Environmental Education with Camp Fire through financial assistance	June 30, 2028

## 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?**

This project will expand equitable outdoor access through our 17 STEM and 10 Outdoor Education courses while establishing a leadership track in year one and implementing it in year two. ENRTF funds will support free family programming, scholarships, and relationship-building with partners serving under-resourced youth, strengthening our network of diverse school districts. Camp Fire Minnesota is committed to sustaining these efforts beyond the project's duration through long-term public and private funding, including support from foundations, corporations, and individual donors. This investment will ensure continued environmental education and hands-on learning experiences for 5121 Minnesota youth.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Sara Lemke

**Job Title:** Vice President of Development & Communications

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

Sara Lemke is a dedicated nonprofit leader with nearly a decade of experience managing complex projects, strategic initiatives, and community engagement efforts. Sara excels in cross-departmental collaboration, ensuring that fundraising, community programming, and strategic goals align seamlessly. She has led organization-wide funding efforts, supervising grants, budgets, and donor databases. Her strong project management, data analysis, and marketing background enables her to design and implement impactful programs that engage diverse stakeholders. Sara's educational background in Child, Adult, and Family Services from Iowa State University, coupled with her board leadership roles at Camp Fire Heart of Iowa and the Alzheimer's Association, reflects her deep commitment to youth development and equitable outdoor access. Her skills in grant writing, budget management, corporate giving, and strategic storytelling position her as an ideal leader for this project. With a track record of growing nonprofit initiatives, fostering inclusive programming, and executing strategic funding plans, Sara is well-equipped to manage and expand the proposed project's reach and impact.

**Organization:** Camp Fire Minnesota

**Organization Description:**

Camp Fire Minnesota is an inclusive, nature-based youth development organization that connects Twin Cities youth with outdoor experiences. While Camp Fire was a national organization created in 1910, Camp Fire Minnesota was established in 1924, and in 2024, we celebrated 100 years of welcoming all Minnesotans to new experiences in nature! Our mission is "With nature as our catalyst, we energize youth to discover their spark so their futures glow brighter." We deliver our mission through three core programs: K-12 Environmental Education field trips and in-class programs, nature-based summer and school-break camps, and after-school nature programs in the community. In 2024, we led nature experiences for 10,780 youth, with 60% receiving financial assistance through our Environmental Education and Afterschool Explorers program.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Out-of-School-Time Program Manager		Y1: Family Programs (0.25 FTE); Leadership (0.25 FTE)			10%	0.5		\$37,733
Out-of-School-Time Program Manager		Y2: Scholarship (0.5 FTE); Family Programs (0.25 FTE); Leadership (0.25 FTE)			10%	1		\$75,467
Youth Leadership Program Coordinator		Y1: Leadership (0.5 FTE)			10%	0.5		\$29,800
Environmental Education Program Manager		Y2: Scholarship (0.5 FTE)			10%	0.5		\$33,700
Environmental Education program staff		Y1: Family Programs (0.5 FTE)			10%	0.5		\$23,857
Environmental Education program staff		Y2: Scholarship (2.5 FTE); Family Programs (0.5 FTE)			10%	3		\$143,143
Summer Camp Coordinator		Y1: Scholarship (0.25 FTE)			10%	0.25		\$12,200
Summer Camp Coordinator		Y2: Scholarship (1 FTE)			10%	1		\$48,800
Break Camp Program staff		Y2: Scholarship (0.25 FTE)			10%	0.25		\$8,750
Partner Overnight program staff		Y2: Scholarship (1.0 FTE)			10%	1		\$42,000
Admin Staff Support		Y1: Scholarship (0.75 FTE); Family Programs (0.25 FTE)			10%	1		\$45,000

Admin Staff Support		Y2: Scholarship (0.75 FTE); Family Programs (0.25 FTE)			10%	1		\$45,000
Intern Wages		Y2: Leadership (0.4 FTE)			10%	0.4		\$14,000
Out of School Time Program Staff		Y1: Family Programs (0.25 FTE)			10%	0.25		\$22,100
Out-of-School-Time program staff		Y2: Scholarship (4.0 FTE); Family Programs (0.25 FTE)			10%	4.25		\$198,900
Youth Leadership Program Coordinator		Y2: Leadership (0.5 FTE)			10%	0.5		\$29,800
Summer Camp Program Staff		Y2: Scholarship (0.25 FTE)			10%	0.25		\$8,750
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$819,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Software	Service Contract	Purchase of database system for youth registration and tracking.				0		\$8,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$8,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Program Supplies	Program supplies, including but not limited to, nature craft supplies, outdoor cooking and camping supplies, winter gear like gloves, hats and boots, life jackets, craft supplies, among other related items.					\$19,000
	Tools and Supplies	Medical Supplies	Medical supplies, including but not limited to, bandages, icepacks, ointment, eye wash, gloves, and other related items.					\$1,200
	Tools and Supplies	Program Food Supplies	Essential food and beverage for summer campers on scholarship and partner overnights: 675 participants X average of 8 meals X \$5 per meal = \$19,375. Meals for family engagement					\$25,000



			programs at Camp Fire Minnesota: 800 participants X 1 meal X \$5 per meal = \$4,000. Snacks for leadership program participants: 520 meetings X \$2 per snack = \$1,040. When on property at Camp Fire MN, no other nearby food and beverage is accessible to our program participants. As such, funding for onsite meals is critical for the health and safety of our program participants.					
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$45,200</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	200 events x avg. 20 miles roundtrip x \$0.70 = \$2,800	Transportation for Out-of-School-Time staff to deliver programming across the Twin Cities Metro via van.					\$2,800
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,800</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>

							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$875,000</b>
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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
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Opus Foundation	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies	Secured	\$100,000
Cash	Registration Fees	Fees for summer camp and school break programs	Pending	\$3,800,000
Cash	Individual Donors	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies	Potential	\$500,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$4,400,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$4,400,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$5,275,000**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [2f760bc1-76d.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

2023 Annual Report...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
2023 990	<a href="#">f6b8e9a8-ff7.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
2026_Camp Fire Resolution Letter Signed	<a href="#">ecdf3348-22d.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Camp Fire Stories & Resources	<a href="#">b65a6261-6d3.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")?**

No

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

Sara Lemke, Camp Fire Minnesota

**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**

Yes, I understand