



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-304

**Proposal Title:** Expanding and Enhancing Environmental Education through Partnerships

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Katie Bloome

**Organization:** Belwin Conservancy

**Office Telephone:** (651) 435-0848

**Email:** katie.bloome@belwin.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Belwin will expand environmental education by partnering with east metro schools and Native-led organizations to provide students with hands-on, standards-aligned, science and cultural learning at our new education center.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$619,000

**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?**

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 and In the Future

## Narrative

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

Today's youth are spending less time outdoors than ever before. According to the National Recreation and Parks Association, children spend only 4 to 7 minutes per day in unstructured outdoor play, while averaging 7 1/2 hours on electronic media. This lack of outdoor activity negatively impacts attention, physical health, and emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the MN science standards, adopted in 2019, are phenomena based, encouraging students to explore, investigate, model, and explain natural occurrences. The outdoors is ideal for building scientific skills, understanding, and curiosity.

While many outdoor education programs exist, gaps in service remain. The recent closure of Warner Nature Center left schools, including all of Stillwater Area Public Schools (SAPS), without an environmental education partner. Additionally, Belwin has been asked to provide environmental education to students enrolled in Indian Education programs in two school districts. Because Indigenous culture and language are inextricably connected to their plant and animal relatives, outdoor experiences fill a specific need for Native communities.

Belwin is uniquely positioned to fill both of these gaps. Funding a new environmental education program at Belwin will provide the shared resources needed to establish a comprehensive partnership with SAPS and launch a new collaboration with Indian Education programs.

**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.**

Belwin has a 55-year history of providing immersive experiences that foster connection to the outdoors. In 2025, Belwin will complete construction of a new educational building, built because of demand for more outdoor learning. This new facility, paired with funding to grow staff and program supplies, will allow expanded access to environmental education.

Belwin and SAPS are building a comprehensive environmental learning program integrated throughout all elementary schools in the district. This new partnership will restore access to nature-based learning that supports academic and personal growth for students in the district.

Through Belwin and Dakhóta Lápi Okhódakičhiye (DIO)'s work together, we have identified a need for students participating in Indian Education programs to receive environmental education. This partnership will provide Indian Education students with outdoor experiences that connect science and culture.

These two partnerships, while seemingly separate, are linked in how they expand environmental education to fill gaps, and their dependence on each other to reach a scale of program delivery sustainable for Belwin. With a new building, Belwin has the indoor space to support expanded partnerships. The funding to grow staffing, purchase program supplies, and engage specialized contractors will allow both partnerships to thrive.

**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?**

We will establish and enhance environmental programming through two new partnerships:

- Establish a district-wide partnership between Belwin and SAPS where 9,000 K-5 and early childhood students will participate in environmental education at Belwin over the course of three years.
- Launch a partnership to provide environmental education integrated with Native teachings to students involved in Indian Education programs. The program will start with students enrolled in Indian Ed programs in two districts and expand as resources allow. Over the course of three years, we expect 1,000 visits to Belwin.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Establish Environmental Education Partnership with Stillwater Area Public Schools

**Activity Budget:** \$473,000

**Activity Description:**

Year one will follow an initial pilot year of working together with SAPS on a smaller scale. With the basic logistics of the program determined in the pilot year, staffing growth will allow this partnership to fully expand to all elementary grades in the district.

K-5 students will address science standards through classes focused on seasonal outdoor phenomena, including examining macroinvertebrates in a pond or stream, following animal signs and tracks in the winter, and observing adaptations of bird beaks and feet. All of these lessons will have hands-on immersive activities so students can experience nature up close. Naturalists, teachers, and curriculum specialists will work together to ensure classes at Belwin relate to classroom learning and address state standards.

Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE) classes will also be added in year one so the youngest learners and their families will be introduced to outdoor instruction and will experience the trails and habitats at Belwin. Classes will be jointly taught with ECFE and Belwin staff.

Years two and three will include the addition of a Naturalist collaborating with teachers and curriculum specialists to identify opportunities for the Naturalist to come into the classrooms to augment the outdoor learning experiences.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire naturalist staff	September 30, 2026
Purchase Program Supplies	December 31, 2026
Stillwater Early Childhood classes at Belwin are established	June 30, 2028
9,000 Stillwater Students attend programs at Belwin	June 30, 2029

### Activity 2: Launch Environmental and Cultural Education Program focused on Indian Ed

**Activity Budget:** \$146,000

**Activity Description:**

Through Belwin and DIO's work together, we have identified a need for students participating in Indian Education programs to receive outdoor education. New infrastructure and existing relationships with Native-led organizations make Belwin uniquely positioned to build this program.

In year one, this partnership will begin by working with two school districts' Indian Education students, bringing students to Belwin for two field trips during the course of the year. In following years, we will expand, working up to a total of 1,000 outdoor education visits over three years.

Programs will reach students in elementary, middle, and high school and will be adapted to be age appropriate. Students will participate in lessons that include seasonal changes in ecology, animal and plant identification, forest, prairie, and wetlands ecology, traditional medicines, and bison. Classes will be taught by a combination of Belwin Naturalists, DIO, and other contracted Indigenous teachers and elders. These lessons, using existing curriculum

developed through a cultural lens, will meet state science, history, and language arts standards, while bringing in cultural traditions and history, as well as Dakota and Ojibwe language.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Purchase program supplies	December 31, 2026
Initial two Indian Ed programs send students to environmental education classes at Belwin	June 30, 2027
Outreach to other Indian Ed programs to find additional partners/participants.	June 30, 2027
1,000 student visits to Belwin are complete	June 30, 2029

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Caitlyn Willis	Stillwater Area Public Schools	Executive Director of Elementary Education	No
Ethan Neerdaels	Dakhóta lápi Okhódakičhiye	School connections and delivery of cultural/environmental programming	Yes

## 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?**

Belwin is funded through donations, grants, earned income, and endowment. We are currently in a capital campaign, one goal of which is to build more revenue in all areas. This growth will increase our ability to support the required staffing for expanded programming. SAPS and Belwin are committed to this partnership and will use these initial years to begin building costs into our operating budgets.

We have identified several additional funding opportunities for these partnerships and will pursue them throughout this grant period. The ability to leverage ENRTF dollars with other funders will set us up for ongoing success.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage: Conservation Through Indigenous Culture	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 05f	\$420,000
Restoring Land, Reviving Heritage: Indigenous Conservation - Phase 2	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$688,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Katie Bloome

**Job Title:** Executive Director

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

Katie Bloome received her bachelor's degree in Biology at Grinnell College and a master's certificate in Environmental Education at Hamline University. Her education and passion for the outdoors has fueled 20 years of nonprofit work. Katie has taught outdoors and managed education programs with a focus on reaching new audiences. More recently, Katie worked on several major fundraising initiatives, including the launch of a mid-level giving program at Minnesota Public Radio and the successful management of capital campaigns.

In her current role as Executive Director of Belwin Conservancy, she is focused on expanding access to Belwin and growing community presence for the 1,600-acre nature center and preserve. This role has provided her with deep expertise in nonprofit management, partnership-based programming, conservation, and environmental education.

Katie's leadership and expertise in nonprofit management, education, and community partnerships position her to successfully lead a project that enhances environmental learning opportunities. She has a proven track record in fostering collaboration, developing strategic initiatives, and ensuring the growth and impact of educational programs.

**Organization:** Belwin Conservancy

**Organization Description:**

Belwin protects 1,600 acres of woodlands, wetlands, oak savanna, and prairie just 20 minutes east of downtown St. Paul. Amid a rapidly developing and diversifying area of the region, this land provides community access to healthy native ecosystems and acts as a buffer for regional wildlife.

Since its founding in 1970, Belwin has connected conservation with hands-on science education in partnership with the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS). Through that partnership, young science learners have access to three Minnesota biomes and four different aquatic systems. Access for students who have limited exposure to nature is a key component of our education vision, and Belwin is differentiated by its early and sustained commitment to providing outdoor learning experiences to all students, including those with physical and emotional disabilities.

In recent years, Belwin's programmatic activity has expanded, and now includes local youth athletic fields, public hiking, an array of arts and cultural events, and partnerships with other community organizations. Annually, we host nearly 200,000 visits through our athletic fields, education programs, public hiking trails, and events and programs, and that number is growing.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Lead Naturalist		Teach environmental education, coordinate school groups, manage trip logistics, supplies, and curriculum.			20%	3		\$271,400
Naturalist		Teach environmental education			18%	3		\$190,000
Program and Partnership Director		Oversee program and teaching staff			22%	0.3		\$34,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$495,400</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Dakhóta lápi Okhódakičhiye	Subaward	Staff time to support cultural and language teachings accompanying environmental education curriculum				0.6		\$60,000
TBD	Service Contract	Educational programming by Native elders, cultural experts, and Native ecology experts.				0.15		\$15,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$75,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Outdoor education program supplies	Commonly used program supplies for teaching ecology programs in all seasons. Includes water sampling supplies, nets, binoculars, natural history resources, culturally specific teaching tools, etc.					\$11,500
	Equipment	Snowshoes	Aiding environmental education lessons in the winter and introducing students to how to snowshoe.					\$4,100
	Equipment	Outdoor winter and rain gear	Equipping students with necessary gear (snow pants, boots, raincoats, etc) to learn outdoors.					\$3,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$18,600</b>

<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Other	Buses for students to attend programs (\$400/trip x 75 trips over 3 years)	Scholarships for field trip transportation to Belwin for environmental education. Most busing will be paid for by the schools, but this will subsidize busing costs when needed.					\$30,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$30,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$619,000</b>



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>				
In-Kind	Belwin Conservancy	Administrative costs associated with running this program and managing the grant reimbursements.	Secured	\$26,302
In-Kind	Belwin and Dakhóta lápi Okhódakičhiye	Curriculum used for environmental and cultural education programs	Secured	\$10,000
Cash	Brown's Creek Watershed District	Funding staffing and bussing for Stillwater Schools field trips	Potential	\$20,000
Cash	Other local watershed districts	Funding staffing and bussing for Stillwater Schools field trips	Potential	\$20,000
Cash	Stillwater Area Public Schools	General field trip support	Potential	\$60,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$136,302</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$136,302</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$755,302**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [4e28dd7d-a57.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Description and renderings of new education center....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Belwin 2023 Audit	<a href="#">16e1ae9b-6e1.pdf</a>
Belwin 2023 990	<a href="#">d16de4c8-861.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Belwin Conservancy Board Letter	<a href="#">ee544654-531.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support from Browns Creek Watershed District	<a href="#">6ec85775-d66.pdf</a>
Letter of support from Stillwater Schools	<a href="#">5373d6b4-e41.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:**

None

**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