



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-449

Proposal Title: Outdoor Learning through the Art of Conservation

Project Manager Information

Name: Veronica Mangio

Organization: Wildlife Forever

Office Telephone: (763) 253-0222

Email: vmangio@wildlifeforever.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This project develops conservation curriculum and connects high school students to Minnesota's fish and songbird habitats through hands-on field trips and artistic reflection, expanding access to conservation education and stewardship.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$68,000

Proposed Project Completion: May 31, 2029

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?

Region(s): Central, Metro,

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

Region(s): Central, 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.

Minnesota's lakes, rivers, and green spaces offer invaluable opportunities for environmental education and outdoor recreation. However, these experiences are not equitably accessible, particularly for BIPOC and underserved students. Many youth face barriers such as limited access to green spaces, lack of transportation, and minimal relevant programming. These challenges are especially pronounced for high school students, as environmental education opportunities significantly decline in grades 9-12. Without place-based learning during this critical stage, students are less likely to develop lifelong environmental stewardship.

Additionally, traditional environmental education programs often lack creative and culturally relevant approaches that resonate with diverse learners. Integrating art-based activities such as nature journaling, painting, and storytelling provides an engaging, accessible way to explore conservation topics while fostering personal connections with the environment.

This project seeks to address these gaps by providing immersive field experiences that combine hands-on conservation activities with creative reflection. By doing so, students will gain a deeper understanding of Minnesota's natural resources, particularly fish and songbird habitats, while developing a personal investment in conservation. Expanding equitable access to environmental education ensures that all students—regardless of background—can connect with and contribute to the stewardship of their local ecosystems.

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.

Wildlife Forever is a national nonprofit dedicated to engaging communities in protecting America's wildlife and outdoor heritage. Through the Art of Conservation (AOC) program, Wildlife Forever integrates environmental education with artistic expression to inspire the next generation of conservationists. With a 28-year legacy, the AOC has reached over 80,000 youth worldwide through the Fish Art and Songbird Art contests.

This project will expand equitable access to environmental education by launching a quarterly field trip program for high school students, prioritizing BIPOC and underserved communities. Wildlife Forever will partner with schools, community organizations, and park agencies to reach students who have limited opportunities for environmental learning.

Seasonal field trips will immerse students in conservation topics such as habitat restoration, invasive species, and water quality, with a focus on fish and songbird ecosystems. Each experience will combine hands-on environmental science activities with guided artistic reflections to reinforce learning. Additionally, pre- and post-field trip classroom activities will extend the educational impact beyond the trip itself.

By combining science and art, this initiative will foster a deeper, more personal connection to Minnesota's natural resources while ensuring students from all backgrounds have access to meaningful, place-based conservation education.

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:

- Increase high school engagement in conservation education: At least 400 students will participate in hands-on, field-based learning annually.
- Expand equitable access to environmental education: At least 60% of participants will come from BIPOC and underserved communities.
- Strengthen conservation knowledge and hands-on experience: Students will explore real-world conservation challenges such as habitat loss, invasive species, and water quality.

- Ensure long-term impact through creative reflection and resource development: Wildlife Forever will develop a replicable field trip model integrating science and art, allowing educators across Minnesota to implement similar conservation experiences.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Develop Field Trip Programming and Curriculum to Support Hands-On Outdoor Experiences and Art Reflections

Activity Budget: \$8,533

Activity Description:

Create an engaging, hands-on field trip program designed to connect students with local ecosystems through environmental science and artistic reflection. The program will cover key conservation topics and include seasonal activities that align with Minnesota's ecosystems, with a focus on Fish Habitats and Songbird Habitats. Students will actively participate in scientific exploration (e.g., water quality tests, fish species observation, habitat restoration) while also reflecting through art-based activities like field journaling and nature sketching. These activities will help deepen their connection to nature and develop a comprehensive understanding of local environmental issues related to both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Collaborating with subject matter experts, educators, and artists will ensure the curriculum is accurate, culturally relevant, and aligned with state education standards.

Key Topics Covered:

Fish Habitat

- Aquatic Ecosystems & Fish Species Identification
- Water Health & Stewardship
- Fishing for Conservation

Songbird Habitat

- Birdwatching & Species ID Skills
- Field Journaling & Ecosystem Study
- Habitat Restoration

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design Hands-On Scientific Activities and Artistic Reflections Aligned with Local Ecosystems & Identified Topics	December 31, 2026
Collaborate with Subject Matter Experts, Artists, and Educators to Refine the Curriculum	February 28, 2027
Finalize the Field Trip Programming and Curriculum for Implementation	May 31, 2027

Activity 2: Develop Pre- and Post-Field Trip Activities to Reinforce Conservation Concepts

Activity Budget: \$8,550

Activity Description:

Design pre- and post-field trip classroom activities that engage students with the core conservation themes covered in the field trips. Pre-activities will introduce key topics such as fish & songbird habitats, water quality, birdwatching, and invasive species through interactive, inquiry-based methods. Post-activities will guide students in reflecting on their field trip experiences through art, discussion, and critical thinking exercises. These activities will help students internalize what they've learned, build personal connections to the material, and deepen their understanding of the environmental issues covered. Digital resources will be provided for teachers to integrate these activities into their classrooms, ensuring that conservation education continues beyond the field trip.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop Pre-Field Trip Activities Introducing Conservation Themes	December 31, 2026
Design Post-Field Trip Activities for Reflection Through Art and Discussion	February 28, 2027
Create Digital Resources for Teachers to Implement Pre- and Post-Activities	March 31, 2027

Activity 3: Implement Seasonal Field Trips for High School Students, Focusing on Fish and Songbird Habitats

Activity Budget: \$48,517

Activity Description:

Offer high school students, especially from BIPOC and underserved communities, the opportunity to participate in immersive environmental education through seasonal field trips. These trips will focus on fish and songbird habitats, providing hands-on activities that allow students to engage with local Minnesota ecosystems. Students will participate in field-based activities such as water quality testing, fishing for conservation, birdwatching, field journaling, and invasive species removal, all while reflecting on their experiences through artistic activities. The goal is to foster a deep connection to both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, encouraging students to become informed environmental stewards. Surveys will be administered after each field trip to assess student engagement, learning, and the effectiveness of the activities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Establish Partnerships with Schools and Community Organizations.	January 31, 2027
Coordinate Transportation and Field Trip Logistics for First Round of Trips	May 31, 2027
Implement First Round of Seasonal Field Trips, Including Hands-On Activities and Art Reflections	May 31, 2028
Collect and Analyze Exit Surveys to Measure Student Engagement and Learning	May 31, 2028
Implement Second Round of Seasonal Field Trips, Incorporating Feedback from First Round	May 31, 2029
Collect and Analyze Exit Surveys for the Second Round of Trips	May 31, 2029

Activity 4: Create a Scalable Field Trip Model & Share Curriculum Resources for Broader Adoption

Activity Budget: \$2,400

Activity Description:

Create a structured, replicable model for field trip programming that focuses on conservation topics of fish and songbirds along with their ecosystems, which can be adopted by other educators and organizations. This model will include detailed documentation of the field trip structure, lesson plans, and best practices for hands-on activities like water quality testing, fishing for conservation, birdwatching, habitat restoration, and artistic reflection. The curriculum will be made easily accessible to educators through a digital platform, enabling them to replicate the field trips and adapt the activities to their local ecosystems. A user-friendly guide will be developed to help other educators implement similar programs, with recommendations for establishing partnerships, securing funding, and using materials effectively. These resources will be shared nationally through Wildlife Forever's networks to expand access to immersive environmental education, making it easier for educators to offer field trip experiences and education that connect students to the ecosystems of fish and songbirds.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Document Field Trip Structure, Lesson Plans, and Best Practices	May 31, 2028
Develop a User-Friendly Guide for Educators, Including Partnership and Funding Recommendations	August 31, 2028
Make the Curriculum and Resources Accessible to Educators	August 31, 2028
Share Resources Nationally Through Wildlife Forever's Networks	September 30, 2028
Edit and Refine Resources for Educators Based on Feedback	May 31, 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?

Wildlife Forever will implement the program by hosting quarterly field trips in partnership with schools and park agencies, providing ongoing conservation education for high school students throughout the year. The field trip model and lesson plans will be documented and shared nationally, allowing educators to replicate the program in their own communities.

To sustain and expand the initiative, Wildlife Forever will adopt a pay-what-you-can model, allowing schools to contribute based on financial capacity while ensuring free participation for underserved schools. Long-term funding will also come from partnerships with park agencies, schools, and community organizations committed to expanding equitable environmental education.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Veronica Mangio

Job Title: Education Manager

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

Veronica Mangio, Education Manager at Wildlife Forever, will oversee this project. She brings expertise in environmental education, program development, and community engagement, making her well-suited to lead this initiative.

Veronica holds a Master of Arts in Sustainable Design from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and a Bachelor of Science in User Experience from the Milwaukee School of Engineering. Her background in sustainability, user-centered design, and community-driven initiatives informs her approach to developing conservation education programs that are both engaging and accessible.

At Wildlife Forever, Veronica manages the Art of Conservation program, which includes the nationally recognized Fish Art and Songbird Art Contests. These programs have engaged over 80,000 youth worldwide, fostering a love for conservation through art. She collaborates with educators, conservationists, and community partners to develop educational resources that integrate science and creativity. Her experience in curriculum development, outreach, and logistics ensures she can effectively implement and expand programming for high school students.

Veronica has extensive experience in partnership development and event coordination, working with local and national organizations to promote environmental stewardship. She has led efforts to create engaging conservation initiatives, organized community events, and facilitated collaborations with park agencies, schools, and nonprofits. Her ability to coordinate stakeholders, secure resources, and manage logistics will ensure the successful execution of this project.

Her passion for conservation and commitment to equitable environmental education make her uniquely qualified to manage this initiative. By integrating hands-on field experiences and art-based reflection, she will ensure high school students build meaningful connections to Minnesota's natural resources, gain conservation knowledge, and develop a lasting sense of environmental stewardship.

Organization: Wildlife Forever

Organization Description:

Wildlife Forever is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit conservation charity. Founded in 1987, Wildlife Forever has funded

thousands of research and habitat restoration projects across North America. Signature programs focus on educating sportsmen and women about invasive species prevention, connecting youth to the outdoors through the Art of Conservation, Getting Families Fishing & Boating, and habitat restoration through Prairie City USA.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Curriculum Developer		Develop 4 topics of conservation curriculum: Songbird Habitat: Identifying Songbirds with Artistic Reflection Songbird Habitat: Ecosystem Study & Field Journaling with Artistic Reflection Fish Habitat: Aquatic Life & Water Health with Artistic Reflection Fish Habitat: Fishing & Conservation with Artistic Reflection			0%	0.2		\$12,400
Field Trip Manager		Organize and facilitate the field trips			0%	0.2		\$12,400
Invasive Species Program Manager		Provide input and content on the Aquatic Species portion of the curriculum			0%	0.01		\$3,100
Accounting		Manage grant expenses and develop expense reports			0%	0.03		\$6,000
							Sub Total	\$33,900
Contracts and Services								
Fishing Facilitator	Service Contract	Teach and guide students how to fish during field trips				0		\$600
Bird Watching Facilitator	Service Contract	Facilitate and teach students how to birdwatch during field trips				-		\$600
Aquatic Species & Water Health Facilitator	Service Contract	Teach students about aquatic species and water health during field trips				-		\$600
Invasive (Plant) Species Facilitator	Service Contract	Guide and teach students about local invasive species and how to remove them during field trips				0		\$600
							Sub Total	\$2,400
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								

	Tools and Supplies	Songbird Habitat Field-Trip Materials: Birds of Minnesota Field Guide – Qty: 60 – \$14.95 – Total: \$897.00 Bird Finder - Study Guide – Qty: 60 – \$7.95 – Total: \$477.00 Bird Nest Finder - Study Guide – Qty: 60 – \$7.95 – Total: \$477.00 Binoculars – Qty: 60 – \$14.95 – Total: \$897.00 Birding Journal – Qty: 120 – \$12.95 – Total: \$1,554.00	Used for Songbird Habitat field trips, allowing students to observe, identify, and document birds in their natural environment. Some items may be borrowed, while others can be kept for continued learning.					\$4,302
	Tools and Supplies	Fish Habitat Field Trip Materials: Fish of Minnesota Field Guide – Qty: 60 – \$14.95 – Total: \$897.00 Fishing Journal – Qty: 120 – \$9.95 – Total: \$1,194.00 Rod/Reels Combo – Qty: 60 – \$10.00 – Total: \$600.00 Water Testing Kits – Qty: 24 – \$50.00 – Total: \$1,200.00 Sampling Nets – Qty: 60 – \$3.00 – Total: \$180.00 Aquatic Invasive Species Models – Qty: 10 – \$100.00 – Total: \$1,000.00	Supports Fish Habitat field trips, providing hands-on tools for students to explore aquatic ecosystems, assess water quality, and understand fish species and invasive threats. Some items may be borrowed, while others can be kept for ongoing learning.					\$5,071
	Tools and Supplies	Dual Habitat Materials / Art Supplies: Clipboards (2 Pack) – Qty: 30 – \$19.99 – Total: \$599.70 Hand Lenses – Qty: 60 – \$1.50 – Total: \$90.00 Watercolor Sets – Qty: 240 – \$9.64 – Total: \$2,313.60 Watercolor Paper (625 Sheets) – Qty: 1 – \$164.99 – Total: \$164.99 Water Cups – Qty: 60 – \$0.34 – Total: \$20.40 Colored Pencil Kits – Qty: 240 – \$12.80 – Total: \$3,072.00 Drawing Paper (700 Sheets) – Qty: 1 – \$105.89 – Total: \$105.89 Sharpeners – Qty: 240 – \$0.89 – Total: \$213.60 Erasers (Pkg of 4) – Qty: 120 – \$4.95 – Total: \$594.00 Pencils (Pack of 144) – Qty: 4 – \$13.68 – Total: \$54.72 Worksheets – Qty: 480 – \$2.50 – Total: \$1,200.00 Nature Explorer (Book) – Qty: 240 – \$15.95 – Total: \$3,828.00 Nature Explorer Sketchbook – Qty: 240 – \$9.95 – Total: \$2,388.00	Used for both Songbird and Fish Habitat field trips, these materials enhance students' ability to document their observations creatively. These items help reinforce connections between science, observation, and artistic expression.					\$14,644
	Tools and Supplies	Shipping: Adventure Keen Book / Journal Products – Qty: 1 – \$50.00 – Total: \$50.00 Blick Art Supply Products – Qty: 1 – \$50.00 – Total: \$50.00 Other Products – Qty: 4 – \$10.00 – Total: \$40.00	Covers the cost of delivering essential materials for the field-trip experiences.					\$123
	Tools and Supplies	Miscellaneous Costs to Support Accessible Field-Trips: Bus Rental – Qty: 40 – \$125.00 – Total: \$5,000.00 Gas – Qty: 30 – \$4.00 – Total: \$960.00 Field Trip Snacks & Drinks – Qty: 8 – \$200.00 – Total: \$1,600.00	Supports transportation, fuel, and snacks for students during field trips, ensuring accessibility and comfort. Providing transportation helps students reach outdoor learning environments, while snacks keep them energized and engaged throughout the experience.					\$7,560

							Sub Total	\$31,700
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$68,000

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$68,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [6d4b886a-0ad.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The visual offers an overview of the project, highlighting the hands-on outdoor activities included in the field trips and the corresponding curriculum topics....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Audit Report	e7f034f9-ce2.pdf
IRS Form 990	5e8b761a-eee.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Project Resolution	4927eeaf-9f6.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Detailed Budget	82a33cef-637.xlsx
Identified Project Partners	f0d98488-7c6.pdf
2024 Impact Report for the Art of Conservation Fish Art Contest	8105a333-9fc.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?

N/A

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:

Wildlife Forever

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

