



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-467

Proposal Title: Outdoor Learning Center and Trails

Project Manager Information

Name: Daniel Stifter

Organization: Aitkin Public Schools

Office Telephone: (218) 927-7100

Email: dstifter@isd1.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The project will provide access to the outdoor environment, with spaces for exploration and education through accessible trails, features, shelter and seating for the ISD1 students and Aitkin County residents.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$340,000

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): Central

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

Region(s): Central

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

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

The mission of the Aitkin Public Schools District is: “Our mission is to inspire and prepare our students with the tools and skills to succeed in an everchanging world”. The ever-increasing world population places additional and increasing demands on all of our outdoor spaces. A firm grounding on the interconnection of humans and nature is an important part of education. An outdoor learning space that allows students and teachers to interact directly with nature is an important tool for education and training. Having this space and designing it properly for accessibility will ensure that no matter the age or physical ability limits, all will feel welcomed and have access to the amenities offered.

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.

The project will improve and expand access to the outdoor environment, provide spaces for exploration, education and training through accessible trails, features, shelter and seating for the Aitkin Public Schools students and greater Aitkin community.

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?

Providing an educational space that encourages interaction with the natural environment and promotes greater education and training opportunities for both teaching staff and students. With greater understanding of impacts and causation on the environment our natural resources can be more responsively used and utilized and protected.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: The project is contingent on a voter approved referendum in November of 2025 for a new educational facility (PreK- grade

Activity Budget: \$340,000

Activity Description:

Feasibility / Engagement (7 Months)

Finalize project scope and costs.

Engagement and education of voters.

Design (4-5 Months)

SD – Schematic Design: Review schematic design and high-level budget review.

DD – Design Development: Review updated designs, discuss modifications and verify budgets are still tracking.

CD – Construction Documents: Drawings, Specifications and Budget reviewed in preparation for bidding.

Construction (17 Months – coincide with site work for new building)

Construction Management: Construction oversight, manage any change orders and administration.

Final ENRTF Requirements: Signage, etc.

Project Completion: Ribbon cutting and open for use.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
The project is contingent on a voter approved referendum in November of 2025 for a	November 30, 2025

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
City of Aitkin	City of Aitkin	City will provide extension of utilities to the property and potentially to additional housing areas.	No

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

As mentioned, this project would be developed concurrently with a new Elementary school. The school project is subject to voter approval in November of 2025. The school district is actively working with partners and potential donors to obtain additional funding which may enhance the project with additional buildings, trails or educationally relevant support tools.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Daniel Stifter

Job Title: Superintendent

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

The school district is planning a \$70+M referendum in November of 2025. The referendum will ask for authority to sell bonds to build a new Prek-6 Elementary and additional support buildings on a vacant piece of property bordered by the Ripple River on the west and north sides. This project is currently being designed and an outdoor learning space, with an ADA compliant trail to access, will be included along the biologically diverse river and funded by this grant. The district would negotiate with the same professional services companies currently working with the district (Architects, Engineers and Construction Managers) to design, bid and oversee the implementation of the project. The overall process, final scope/design would be monitored by the Superintendent with final approval by the School Board.

Organization: Aitkin Public Schools

Organization Description:

The Aitkin Public Schools District is located in north central Minnesota, primarily in Aitkin County with an Elementary and High School located in the City of Aitkin, a community of approximately 2,150 residents. The school district educates approximately 1000 students and is one of the largest geographic districts in the state. The districts mission is: "Our mission is to inspire and prepare our students with the tools and skills to succeed in an everchanging world".

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
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								

		Aitkin Public Schools - Outdoor Learning Center and Trails	To create an out door learning area/classroom as part of a new building project for Aitkin Public Schools. Items include: Outdoor Pavilion, trails, design expenses, project management and a contingency fund.					\$340,000
							Sub Total	\$340,000
							Grand Total	\$340,000

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: \$340,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [97d5c041-dec.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of area, county map and city map....

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Aitkin Public Schools - Board Resolution	5a202e8e-cba.pdf
Aitkin - Audit Report	3799e72d-379.pdf
LCCMR Budget Estimate	77205ae9-0f3.pdf
Outdoor Learning Center and Trails	bc681a5d-f84.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?

Yes, Aitkin Public Schools

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?

Yes

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:

ICS - Kent Koerbitz

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