



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-593

Proposal Title: Towards a Better Future for Our Shared Mississippi

Project Manager Information

Name: Anne Conway

Organization: Recreation Alliance of Winona

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This three-year project embeds Indigenous ways of knowing into environmental education programming, cultivates the next generation of conservation leaders, and facilitates informed, stewardship-oriented public planning for the Upper Mississippi River.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$279,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

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.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and its floodplain forests are experiencing significant ecological degradation due to siltation, habitat loss, invasive species, and climate change. These challenges threaten biodiversity, water quality, and the long-term sustainability of this vital ecosystem. Despite its ecological importance, community engagement in conservation efforts remains limited, particularly among youth and underrepresented populations.

The Recreation Alliance of Winona (RAW), in partnership with local organizations, seeks to address this issue by fostering environmental education, youth development, and community stewardship by expanding and enhancing (through embedding Indigenous ways of knowing) existing successful programs, including the Prairie Island Adventure Club, Swamp Oak Wanderers, and Bluffs2Backwaters. This project leverages recent interest in collaboration among a variety of partners, continuing momentum generated by last year's 100-year anniversary celebration of the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge.

This project will expand equitable access to nature-based learning, embed Indigenous ways of knowing into programming, and ultimately, cultivate the next generation of conservation leaders. It also provides an opportunity to facilitate increased community input into Winona's Habitat Preservation Plan, and other government planning efforts. This work will empower our community and future leaders to protect and restore the Upper Mississippi River's fragile ecosystem.

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 solution is a multi-faceted approach that combines environmental education, hands-on conservation, and community engagement to address the ecological degradation of the Upper Mississippi River and its floodplain forests. RAW, working in tandem with key partner organizations, provides immersive experiences that foster ecological literacy and empower participants to take action.

Participants will engage in habitat restoration, invasive species removal, and water quality monitoring, among other stewardship initiatives. Through our partnership with the Honoring Dakota Project, we will integrate Indigenous ecological knowledge and conservation best practices to build a more inclusive and culturally-relevant approach to environmental stewardship.

LCCMR funding will support: structured, youth leadership development programs for underserved youth (Activity 1); enhanced and expanded educational programming, including Indigenous knowledge, for larger student and public audiences (Activity 2); and empowering our larger community to become better stewards of our shared environment through large public events that both educate and facilitate community input in local, state and federal planning efforts (Activity 3).

This initiative will not only restore critical habitat, but also cultivate the next generation of environmental leaders equipped with the skills and passion to protect the Upper Mississippi.

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 enhance the ecological health of the Upper Mississippi River by fostering environmental stewardship through:

Integrating Indigenous ecological knowledge across programming;

Serving 105 underserved youth (6-13) through the Prairie Island Adventure Club;

Training 75 underserved youth (14-21) to become conservation leaders through the new Youth GreenCrew program;

360 public school students participating in annual outdoor educational experiences;

75 total individuals participating in Citizen Science and naturalist programming;

900 total individuals attending and participating in annual celebrations that include stewardship education, updates on Citizen Science projects, and providing input into the City of Winona's Habitat Preservation Plan.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Empowering Tomorrow's Conservation Leaders in Winona County

Activity Budget: \$159,000

Activity Description:

The Recreation Alliance of Winona, through its partners Front Porch Management and The Joy Labs, currently runs the successful Prairie Island Adventure Club (PIAC), where 80% of participants (youth aged 6-13) are from under-resourced backgrounds. PIAC removes barriers to experiencing nature by providing transportation, food, and incorporating social emotional learning into environmental and outdoor adventure education.

To provide more formal training and education opportunities as PIAC graduates mature, project partner Izaak Walton League's (Ike's) local chapter will launch the Youth GreenCrew (YGC) for participants aged 14-21. YGC will facilitate a pathway for this group and others to learn an environmental ethic, how to conduct and lead conservation and data collection efforts, and engage their communities in environmental education and conservation efforts. This new effort will draw upon successful models like the Ikes Minnesota River Chapter's GreenCrew program. It will provide a training program over 3-years for 25 emerging conservation leaders each year, including conservation service projects, facilitating/leading PIAC experiences for younger students, and citizen science monitoring projects.

Honoring Dakota Project (HDP) will inform environmental education for both PIAC and YGC, including Indigenous ecological understandings through Dakota voices. This includes six workshops led by HDP for both youth leadership development

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Launch new YGC program; embed Honoring Dakota Project-led Indigenous workshops into curriculum.	September 30, 2026
Prairie Island Adventure Club provides 33-day camp sessions annually, occurring during the summer of 2026,	August 31, 2028
Youth GreenCrew 12-month program is complete at the end of June in 2027, 2028, and	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Enhancing Swamp Oak Wanderers Community Engagement and Environmental Stewardship Activities

Activity Budget: \$99,000

Activity Description:

Swamp Oak Wanderers is an environmental education programming series with distinct workshops and events designed for student and adult audiences. After seven years of measured growth, LCCMR funds are requested to expand this program, bringing on the Izaak Walton League and the Honoring Dakota Project as co-leaders. This series will be enhanced by embedding Indigenous ecological understandings and involving YGC participants as program leaders for programs targeting public school audiences. Programs will include: plant foraging; invasive species removal; native plant restoration to strengthen floodplain resilience and biodiversity; and monitoring water quality, insect and plant species to track ecosystem health. Swamp Oak Wanderers will foster an Indigenous-informed, well-versed understanding of the ecological threats facing the Mississippi, as well as a deep, sustained stewardship ethic.

Programming will involve opportunities for Winona Area Public School students, families, and the public to experience nature in ways that strengthen environmental ethic, sense of stewardship and advocacy through opportunities for play, citizen science monitoring, experiential learning, and outdoor recreation.

Efforts will provide meaningful education opportunities for the Winona area community and visitors, while capturing valuable data on the current ecological health and vitality of the Mississippi River and its backwaters in our corner of the state.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Swamp Oak Wanderers is an environmental education programming series with distinct workshops and events designed for student	September 30, 2026
Facilitate 10 annual (20 total) adult community engagement experiences that include community discussion, interpretive hikes & paddles,	May 31, 2028
Facilitate three annual experiences for Winona Area Public School students (120 each year) at Prairie	May 31, 2029
Recruit and train community members, to be part of six total Citizen Science Monitoring programs over	May 31, 2029
Facilitate 40 annual (120 total) family-oriented naturalist experiences, 5 led by YGC	June 30, 2029
Citizen science results shared at annual celebrations and with city stakeholders during Years 2 and	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Bluffs 2 Backwaters Outdoor Recreation Festival

Activity Budget: \$21,000

Activity Description:

Since 2023 RAW has sponsored a multi-weekend outdoor recreation festival, now called the Bluffs 2 Backwaters Outdoor Recreation Festival. The annual event brings 300 individuals together for recreation and community, as well as celebrating “Our Shared River”. Our project leverages this opportunity to provide structured environmental education to festival participants, and facilitate increased engagement between decision makers with the City of Winona and local stewards of our Mississippi River.

This community event includes three summer weekends of shared outdoor experiences, totalling 900 participants over three years. Access to outdoor recreation is merged with education, stewardship of natural resources, fostering of the arts, and community engagement. LCCMR funds are requested to expand environmental education programming and outdoor recreation seminars at this major event, as well as facilitate community engagement sessions between the City of Winona and the public on the development (in Year 1) and implementation (in Years 2 and 3) of the Habitat Restoration Plan.

As a result of the strengthened programming described in Activities 1 and 2, we anticipate that community members will become more engaged and educated on Mississippi River ecological issues, and more interested in providing feedback in City management of our Shared River.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
At least 40 local residents provide input into development of the Habitat Restoration Plan for	September 30, 2027
Festival is held one-weekend in Jun, Jul, Aug at Prairie Island Park.	August 31, 2028
At least 80 residents provide feedback and insight into the implementation of the Habitat Restoration	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?

Launch Youth GreenCrew with curriculum adapted to Prairie Island Park.

Facilitate (33) Prairie Island Adventure Club sessions, serving (35) youth from under-resourced communities.

Develop and incorporate (3) environmental learning experiences incorporating Dakota cultural perspectives.

Seek Dakota input on the City of Winona's Habitat Improvement Plan.

Host 3rd, 5th, and 7th grade experiential learning events (6 per year).

Facilitate weekly (40) environmental education activities for Winona area families and visitors.

Facilitate training and support leaders and community members alike to participate in (5) Citizen Science Monitoring programs, providing over 75 monitoring opportunities.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Anne Conway

Job Title: Project Corrdinator

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

Anne Conway is a licensed Spanish teacher, a passionate environmental educator, a paddle sport guide, and part of the Front Porch Management team that operates Prairie Island Campground on behalf of the City of Winona. She is also the only paid staff for the Recreation Alliance of Winona, providing financial and operations management expertise to the non-profit. Anne brings ten years of teaching and equal years of landscaping with native plants to her most recent endeavor of inviting the community into learning about the environment and building deeper community connections at Prairie Island Park over the past 8 years. Anne has cultivated a unique spirit of collaboration among local organizations as she launched and led new environmental education programming at the 1,000-plus acre outdoor classroom that is Prairie Island Park. An experienced educator, organizational and community leader, she is an ideal person to lead this initiative to enhance and expand environmental education across Winona County.

Organization: Recreation Alliance of Winona

Organization Description:

Recreation Alliance of Winona's is a 501(c)(3) whose mission is to advocate, develop, and support outdoor recreation in the greater Winona area to improve quality of life, protect our public lands, and encourage sustainable economic growth, and to make the greater Winona area one of the premier outdoor recreation destinations in the Midwest.

RAW accomplishes this through:

- Facilitating communication and advocacy among outdoor recreation user groups including, but not limited to those who: hike, road cycle, rock climb, ski, fish, mountain bike, birdwatch and paddle
- Projecting a positive message around outdoor recreation activities and initiatives
- Facilitating productive partnerships between the public and local officials
- Supporting development of and increase access to recreational facilities
- Promoting the conservation of natural resources

RAW has developed strong partnerships with other nonprofits, the local school district, the Honoring Dakota Project, and the City of Winona in recent years. They have earned a reputation as a convener and leader to drive more engagement among the wider community in protecting and stewarding our Shared River.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Anne Conway, Project Coordinator		Coordinate Prairie Island Adventure Club (PIAC) and Youth GreenCrew (YGC) programs. Recruit program participants and build relationships with their families. Coordinate and Co-facilitate Swamp Oak Wanderers (SOW) community engagement programming around environmental education, citizen science monitoring, and conservation service projects. Train and mentor AmeriCorp members as YGC Leaders, and the YGC mentees in their conservation service projects and community engagement. Post updates through social media.			8%	0.9		\$54,000
							Sub Total	\$54,000
Contracts and Services								
Front Porch Management	Service Contract	Facilitate social emotional learning and group development (mental health), and river paddlesport experiences for the PIAC and YGC. Provide transportation and paddlesport rental services to PIAC and YGC programs				0.9		\$89,400
Izaak Walton League Will Dilg Chapter	Service Contract	Co-facilitate PIAC and YGC environmental leadership, conservation, and service program, and SOW community engagement programming around environmental education, citizen science monitoring, and conservation service projects. Train and mentor AmeriCorp members as YGC Leaders, and the YGC mentees in their conservation service and community engagement projects.				1.5		\$60,500
Honoring Dakota Project (HDP)	Service Contract	Develop environmental learning experiences within the City of Winona's Prairie Island Park, grounded in Dakota perspective, voice and cultural understandings. Provide input on the City of Winona's Habitat Improvement Plan. Facilitate experiential learning opportunities for 3rd, 5th & 7th grade learners within Winona Area Public Schools, PIAC and YGC participants, and				0.45		\$12,000

Engage Winona (EW)	Service Contract	Facilitating community engagement and discussions as part of the SOW programming, and public input on the comprehensive land use plan.				0.05		\$5,000
The Joy Labs	Service Contract	Provide mental health program mentorship and curriculum development for the PIAC and the YGC				0.3		\$25,500
							Sub Total	\$192,400
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	water quality monitoring testing supplies	Save Our Streams Citizen Science Monitoring program					\$3,000
	Tools and Supplies	Education supplies such as laminated identification cards and maps, art supplies,	PIAC, YGC, and SOW educational programming					\$4,850
	Equipment	Rental of indoor classroom meeting space (100 events at \$150 per event)	YGC and SOW winter programming and PIAC programming during adverse weather					\$15,000
	Tools and Supplies	Cache of hand tools and chemicals	To complete YGC and SOW conservation service activities at Prairie Island Park					\$3,800
	Equipment	Electronic tablets	To support instruction and training in PIAC, YGC, and SOW programs, citizen science data collection and upload to Clean Water Hub, iNaturalist, Nature's Notebook, eBird, etc., and the creation of videos by youth that features their engagement in nature.					\$2,150
	Tools and Supplies	Marketing of programs	Community engagement through technology subscriptions, website updates					\$3,800
							Sub Total	\$32,600
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	\$279,000

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				
Cash	National Izaak Walton League Endowment Grant	Development environmental leadership, conservation service, and community engagement curriculum for YGC program	Potential	\$15,000
Cash	Slaggie Foundation	PIAC mental health programming	Potential	\$5,000
Cash	Gunderson Community Grant	PIAC mental health programming	Potential	\$5,000
Cash	Winona Community Foundation	PIAC mental health programming	Potential	\$5,000
In-Kind	Adult program volunteers	SOW program support (40-family x 3hrs, 20 adult x 2hrs) 20 for 3-years over 180 events (\$33.49/hr x 160hrs)	Potential	\$5,358
In-Kind	Outdoor Classroom rental	Host youth and community programming (86 events at \$100/event)	Secured	\$8,600
In-Kind	Cruiser bike fleet	PIAC programming (\$150/day x 9 days)	Secured	\$1,350
			Non State Sub Total	\$45,308
			Funds Total	\$45,308

Total Project Cost: \$324,308

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [05064b72-89c.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A Google Earth image of Prairie Island Park and a description of the proposed Habitat Improvement Plan....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Front page of 990	a9f5bcfe-bdc.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Rec Alliance of Winona - LCCMR Resolution	0ffdb1d2-baa.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Project Go! support	9bd8838a-35c.pdf
Honoring Dakota Project support	474a70ff-2ac.pdf
The Joy Labs	be687474-ca0.pdf
Winona Area Public Schools	74570003-058.pdf
MN Trout Unlimited Support	055da10c-159.pdf
Engage Winona	980bf791-474.pdf
IWLA Support	45187eae-f60.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:

Anne Conway and Brittany Hennessey of Recreation Alliance of Winona

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