



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-145

Proposal Title: Rooting Resilience Through Community Forest Stewardship

Project Manager Information

Name: Jaime Souza

Organization: Marine Village School

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Email: jaimes@marinevillageschool.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Restore a school forest into a resilient community arboretum through forest restoration, outdoor education and recreation, expanding public access while engaging students and residents as stewards of Minnesota's natural resources.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$298,000

Proposed Project Completion: July 31, 2030

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): 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.

The Marine Community and School Forest is a publicly owned, DNR-certified School Forest intended to support education and community use, yet it currently lacks the resources needed to function as a resilient, well-managed natural asset. Invasive species pressure, 2025 summer storm damage, and limited staffing capacity have stagnated forest restoration and learning opportunities for students and the community. While the project is community-driven, its scope exceeds local volunteer capacity and funding. Financial support is critical to advance site preparation and restoration, implement professional maintenance, and build educational infrastructure that would otherwise remain unattainable.

Research shows that both rural and urban students face inequitable access to meaningful outdoor education. Marine Village School serves a small rural population with limited funding for sustained, standards-aligned outdoor learning. Its partner school, Paul and Sheila Wellstone Elementary, a Title I school in St. Paul, serves students who face even greater barriers to nature access and environmental education.

By pairing forest restoration with hands-on education, community stewardship, and outdoor recreation, the project advances conservation outcomes while delivering on long-term public benefit transforming an underutilized school forest into a resilient community arboretum serving as a living classroom and public green space.

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.

Marine Village School proposes to transform the Marine Community and School Forest into a resilient community arboretum integrating forest restoration, outdoor education, and public engagement. Funding will support active stewardship of the 1.5-acre, publicly accessible forest to improve ecological health, increase native species diversity, and restore areas impacted by invasive species.

The project will implement a coordinated program of invasive species removal, native tree and understory establishment, and long-term stewardship guided by best practices and technical expertise from state and local partners. A full-time Community and School Forest Coordinator will oversee implementation, coordinate partners and volunteers, while ensuring accountability and reporting.

The arboretum will serve as a living classroom and public green space, supporting standards-aligned outdoor learning for all Marine Village School students, shared programming with Paul and Sheila Wellstone Elementary School, and the community. Students will engage in hands-on stewardship, seasonal monitoring, and outdoor recreation activities that build environmental literacy and resilience. Community members will participate through volunteer stewardship events, interpretive materials, community science activities, and guided learning opportunities that encourage ongoing public use and care. Together, these efforts will create a lasting public resource that strengthens ecosystems, expands equitable access to outdoor education, and fosters long-term stewardship.

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?

The project will enhance Minnesota's natural resources by restoring and managing a city owned school forest to improve ecological health, biodiversity, and long-term resilience. Outcomes include reduced invasive species, increased native tree diversity and canopy cover, and improved forest structure to withstand climate and storm impacts. The project will preserve and enhance the site as a publicly accessible arboretum that supports conservation-focused recreation and education. By engaging students and community members in hands-on stewardship and monitoring, the project builds environmental literacy and fosters lasting conservation behaviors. These outcomes collectively protect, conserve, and enhance natural resources while ensuring sustained public benefit

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Arboretum Development and Forest Restoration

Activity Budget: \$19,335

Activity Description:

Objective:

Improve ecological health and long-term resilience of the Marine Community and School Forest through invasive species management, native tree establishment, and stewardship planning.

Tasks and Methods:

Project staff and partners will implement forest restoration guided by best practices and technical assistance from the MN DNR School Forest program as designed in the related Forest Stewardship Plan for the Marine Community and School Forest completed in spring 2026. Tasks include targeted invasive species removal, site preparation, native tree planting to increase species diversity and canopy resilience, and development of long-term stewardship practices. Restoration activities will occur on publicly owned land and follow conservation guidelines to protect soil, habitat, and water resources. Students and community volunteers will participate in stewardship activities under staff supervision during annual spring and fall Friends of the Forest events on Arbor Day (April) and Public Lands Day (Oct).

Outputs and Impact:

Outputs include restored forest acreage and cover types, increased native tree diversity, and a healthier, more resilient forest structure. These improvements enhance habitat quality, reduce future management costs, and preserve the site as a durable public natural resource. Evaluation will include tracking invasive reduction, number and survival of trees planted, and documentation of forest condition.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Finalize forest stewardship framework with MN DNR support.	July 31, 2026
Conduct invasive species removal and site preparation.	July 31, 2027
Install and operate a gravel-bed tree nursery; involve students in propagation and care.	July 31, 2027
Transplant propagated trees into the forest to restore canopy diversity and canopy cover types.	July 31, 2030
Complete planting cover types as outlined in demo forest outline.	July 31, 2030

Activity 2: Education, Recreation, and Partnerships

Activity Budget: \$25,665

Activity Description:

Objective:

Expand equitable access to outdoor education and recreation through hands-on learning and stewardship activities in the community school forest.

Tasks and Methods:

The project will integrate forest-based learning into Marine Village School's K-5 curriculum and provide joint programming with Paul and Sheila Wellstone Elementary School. Activities include frequent outdoor learning days, forest stewardship experiences, phenology monitoring, and guided recreation opportunities such as hiking, birding, nature exploration and observation. Educators and partners will deliver standards-aligned instruction and support student participation. Virtual and in-person exchanges will connect rural MVS students and urban Wellstone students.

Outputs and Impact:

Outputs include recurring outdoor learning experiences, student-generated ecological observations, and shared educational programming. These activities build environmental literacy, encourage outdoor recreation, and foster stewardship behaviors. Evaluation will include participation tracking, student surveys, and documentation of learning activities and observations.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Implement phenology monitoring and participatory science activities.	September 30, 2027
Develop and install educational and interpretative signage.	July 31, 2028
Host annual joint field experiences with Paul and Sheila Wellstone Elementary School.	May 31, 2030
Deliver ongoing K–6 outdoor learning activities within the arboretum.	July 31, 2030
Provide community learning events and guided outdoor experiences.	July 31, 2030

Activity 3: Coordination, Evaluation, and Outreach

Activity Budget: \$253,000

Activity Description:

Objective:

Ensure effective implementation, public engagement, and accountability through dedicated project and program coordination, and evaluation.

Tasks and Methods:

A full-time Community and School Forest Coordinator will manage project and programmatic activities, partnerships, volunteers, and reporting. This role will coordinate community stewardship and arboretum-type naturalist events to engage residents in restoration, participatory science and nature-based learning activities. Interpretive materials will be created by the Coordinator to support public understanding and self-guided use of the site. Project outcomes will be evaluated using ecological metrics, participation data, volunteer and participant surveys, and qualitative feedback.

Outputs and Impact:

Outputs include coordinated stewardship and nature events, engaged volunteers and participants, and public-facing educational materials. These outputs strengthen community ownership and ensure long-term conservation impact. Evaluation findings will inform future management and be shared with partners and the public.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Employ a full-time Community and School Forest Coordinator for project oversight.	August 31, 2027
Track ecological, educational, and participation outcomes.	July 31, 2030
Share results through public reporting, presentations, and state school forest networks.	July 31, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Hannah Milos	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	School Forester; technical and educational partner provides guidance on school forest management best practices; advises on forest stewardship, native species selection, and resilience strategies; supports alignment with DNR School Forest standards; assists with educator resources and statewide knowledge-sharing.	No
Lori Maxfield	Washington Conservation District (WCD)	Water Resource Education Specialist; conservation and community engagement partner. Supports invasive species management strategies; assists with community stewardship events; contributes expertise in participatory science, phenology, and environmental education; provides technical assistance related to soil, water, and forest health.	No
John Goodfellow	City of Marine on Saint Croix	City Council Liaison; municipal and community forestry partner - collaborates on community forest stewardship; supports gravel-bed tree propagation installation and maintenance; advises on long-term canopy management and community forestry practices; strengthens alignment with local forest and climate resilience goals.	No
Katrina Schlicker	Wild Rivers Conservancy Environmental	Education Coordinator; environmental education and stewardship partner. Provides place-based learning expertise related to the St. Croix River watershed. Supports outdoor education activities; contributes knowledge of regional conservation, recreation, and river stewardship.	No
Elizabeth Nelson	William O'Brien State Park	Park Ranger; outdoor education and recreation partner. Supports outdoor learning experiences connected to forest, river, and watershed ecology; provides interpretive and recreational context for arboretum programming; collaborates on field-based education when appropriate.	No
Dawn Windham	Paul and Sheila Wellstone Elementary	5th grade teacher; participates in collaborative student-centered programming coordinated by Marine Village School.	No

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

Project data and methods will be documented and disseminated through structured reporting, professional networks, public-facing materials, and digital archiving to ensure broad benefit and accessibility. Ecological monitoring data (invasive reduction percentages, tree survival rates, canopy diversity metrics, and phenology observations) will be compiled annually and submitted in required ENRTF reports. A final technical summary will include restoration methods, species lists, establishment techniques, adaptive management findings, and evaluation results. This document will be shared with the MN DNR School Forest Program, project collaborators, and made publicly accessible through the Marine Village School website.

Student and volunteer-collected phenology data will be entered into established participatory science platforms ensuring long-term data retention and availability. Educational materials and stewardship protocols developed through the project will be archived digitally for use by other Minnesota schools and community forest initiatives. Results will be presented to regional and statewide conservation networks at the MN DNR School Forest Conference, the annual St. Croix Youth Summit hosted by the Wild Rivers Conservancy, and the annual St. Croix River Research Rendezvous hosted by the St. Croix Watershed Research Station to promote replication. Durable interpretive signage installed on-site will communicate biome demonstration zones, restoration processes, and climate resilience strategies. Together, these efforts ensure transparency, support improved natural resource management, extend the lifespan of project data and materials, and promote stewardship behaviors among Minnesotans.

ENRTF will be acknowledged on all print and electronic media, publications, signage and other communications and outreach.

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?

Project outcomes will continue through active use of the restored school forest as part of Marine Village School's K–6 curriculum and as a publicly accessible community resource. Stewardship practices established during the project will guide long-term management. Outdoor learning, educational programming, and community volunteer events will extend beyond the grant through existing school partnerships and support. Tree propagation and monitoring systems will remain in place to sustain future planting efforts. Ongoing costs will be covered through local partnerships, community fundraising, and future grants, ensuring lasting public benefit and continued conservation impact.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jaime Souza

Job Title: MVS Science Teacher

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

Jaime Souza, M.S. Education and current MVS Science Teacher and Co-Chair of the Marine Community and School Forest Committee will be promoted to Outdoor Learning, Community and School Forest Coordinator. Jaime spent 20 years teaching in the field of environmental and outdoor education serving in a variety of roles, such as naturalist, outdoor and environmental educator and program coordinator. Her passion for connecting people of all ages to nature has been integral in raising awareness and support for MN DNR School Forest designation and the importance of forest restoration. As the MVS Science Teacher, Ms. Souza utilizes the forest almost daily for standards-based and student-centered outdoor learning. Ms. Souza is a UMN Extension Master Naturalist and a core instructor and member of the UMN Urban Bird and Migratory Educator Workshop team. She is a National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) alumni and Wilderness Medicine Institute trained Wilderness First Responder.

Organization: Marine Village School

Organization Description:

Marine Village School is a tuition-free public charter school located in Marine on St. Croix within the ecologically significant St. Croix River watershed. We serve kindergarten through sixth-grade students from Marine on St. Croix and surrounding communities, including Stillwater, Scandia, Lake Elmo, Forest Lake, and Hugo. We provide a small, inclusive, and nurturing learning environment that blends engaging classroom instruction with enriching outdoor experiences in our MN DNR School Forest and through strong community partnerships. The Marine Community and School Forest is both an outdoor classroom and a shared community resource, offering hands-on, nature-based experiences.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Outdoor Learning, Community and School Forester Coordinator		<p>The Outdoor Learning, Community and School Forester Coordinator is a 1.0 FTE position over 3 years (40 hours per week) that serves as the primary liaison between local community partners and state and municipal land managers. The role is designed to maximize the ecological health of Marine Community and School Forest while integrating this space into school curricula and community outreach programs.</p> <p>Land Management: Develop and implement forest best practices into Marine and Community School Forest Stewardship Plan, written by the MN DNR and the Marine Village School Forest Committee to ensure biodiversity, climate and storm resiliency, invasive species control, and restoration of native understory and canopy cover types.</p> <p>Educational Integration: Collaborate with Marine Village School K-6 educators and Special Education Department to integrate cross-curricular learning opportunities within the forest.</p> <p>Community Engagement: Organize volunteer events, participatory science, arboretum-style workshops, and public tours to increase local stewardship and connections with nature.</p> <p>Compliance & Reporting: Monitor grant milestones, manage the project budget, and submit annual progress reports to stakeholders.</p>			32%	3		\$252,000
							Sub Total	\$252,000
Contracts and Services								
Service Contract 1 - Buckthorn removal and site prep	Service Contract	The contractor will implement a multi-phase invasive buckthorn removal and site restoration plan across the designated school forest area, approximately 1.5 acres. Following invasive control, the contractor will conduct site preparation, including light grading or				0.5		\$6,000

		soil scarification where appropriate, to prepare disturbed areas for restoration.						
Service Contract 2 - Educational and interpretative signage	Service Contract	The contractor will design, produce, and install durable, arboretum-style interpretive signage throughout the 1.5-acre community forest. Work includes site assessment; development of a cohesive signage plan and design theme; content layout (school- and community-provided text and images); fabrication of weather-resistant, ADA-considerate panels and mounting systems; and full installation.				0.75		\$20,165
							Sub Total	\$26,165
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Shed	Purchase tool shed to store equipment and gear.					\$4,000
	Tools and Supplies	Gravel Bed	Supplies to build an experimental gravel bed for community and student use that follows the "Guide and Construction and Management Community Gravel Beds from the University of Minnesota".					\$1,500
	Tools and Supplies	Trees, Shrubs and Plant Seedlings	Establish native biome areas in accordance with the Forest Stewardship Plan. Please see the supplemental document titled "Marine School Forest Tree Planting and Cover Types" for more detail.					\$11,835
							Sub Total	\$17,335
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								

							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Education and Outreach Materials	Event flyers and student learning materials to support community engagement and environmental education for 3 years.					\$1,500
	Printing	Reporting and Administrative Printing	Printing/copying costs related to required ENRTF reporting, semi-annual reports, documentation, and final summary materials for 3 years.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$2,500
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$298,000

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: \$298,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
0603119230019	Washington	Forested - The DNR-certified school forest is located within the ecologically significant St. Croix River watershed, providing important habitat, biodiversity value, and watershed protection functions. Its restoration and enhancement deliver direct conservation benefits while ensuring long-term public access for education, outdoor recreation, and community stewardship.	Restoration	0.3	0	\$32,220	Public	City of Marine on St. Croix	Has Not Begun
0603119230031	Washington	Forested/Prairie - The DNR-certified school forest is located within the ecologically significant St. Croix River watershed, providing important habitat, biodiversity value, and watershed protection functions. Its restoration and enhancement deliver direct conservation benefits while ensuring long-term public access for education, outdoor recreation, and community stewardship.	Restoration	1.2	0.5	\$65,800	Public	City of Marine on St. Croix	In Progress
				-	-	-			
Totals				1.5	0.5	\$98,020			

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

All restoration activities funded through this project will occur on the Marine Community and School Forest, which is owned by the City of Marine on St. Croix. The City confirms that there are no plans to alter, repurpose, or develop the site for the next five years. The parcels will remain dedicated to conservation, education, and public benefit purposes, ensuring that ENRTF-funded restoration investments are protected and maintained in alignment with long-term stewardship objectives. Please see the letter of support.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

Restoration plans will include invasive species removal, native tree and understory establishment, canopy diversification, soil stabilization, and long-term forest health monitoring. A stewardship framework developed in collaboration with MN DNR will guide implementation, maintenance schedules, and adaptive management practices. Plans and supporting documentation will be maintained in school administrative records and shared with partners. Long-term implementation will rely on established partnerships, school-based stewardship programming, and ongoing community engagement to ensure continued management and conservation outcomes.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

Restoration efforts will follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator support. Native species selection will reflect site-appropriate ecological communities, prioritize biodiversity, and include flowering understory species beneficial to pollinators. Site preparation, planting methods, and follow-up management will align with BWSR best practices to support successful establishment and long-term habitat function.

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

Long-term maintenance will be guided by the stewardship framework and integrated into school programming and community volunteer efforts. Ongoing needs such as invasive management, replanting, and monitoring will be supported through local partnerships, volunteer labor, and future public or private grants. The site’s integration into curriculum and community use ensures continued oversight and care beyond the grant period.

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

The project is supported by a strong network of local and regional community partners who will assist with restoration implementation. However, we would consider contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for eligible restoration activities, including invasive species removal and site preparation, if it aligns with project scope.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

The project commits to conducting evaluations on restored parcels both immediately following activity completion and again three years later. Evaluations will assess invasive species reduction, native species establishment, tree survival rates, habitat improvements, and overall alignment with project goals. Findings will document successes, identify implementation challenges, and inform adaptive management strategies to strengthen future restoration efforts at this site and in similar community forest settings.

Project results, data, and lessons learned will be documented and shared to ensure broad public benefit. Ecological monitoring data, restoration methods, and educational materials will be compiled into reports and shared with project partners, local government, MN DNR School Forest Program staff, and other conservation practitioners to support improved resource management statewide. Presentations will be offered through school forest networks and community forums to promote awareness and replication. Educational signage and accessible summaries will be provided on-site and online to ensure transparency and public understanding. These dissemination efforts will promote informed stewardship behaviors, encourage community participation in conservation, and highlight the role of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund in advancing Minnesota's environmental protection and enhancement goals.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [7b4a1de3-9f4.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

The map depicts an aerial view with the parcels around Marine Village School that make up the school forest. The boundaries are outlined in a white dotted line. The map also represents the school forest's placement in Washington County with a north arrow and scale....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Evidence of Good Standing	b04437c4-e60.pdf
MVS Form 990	d59a9bdd-0e0.pdf
MVS Financial Statement	6bdb2a91-b77.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
MVS Board Letter	6260baf9-a15.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Marine Community and School Forest Parcel List	a8013e91-471.pdf
Marine Village School Tree Planting and Cover Types	483d2f68-2cb.pdf
Nonprofit Renewal Filing	6e0d3a3d-4c3.pdf
City of Marine on Saint Croix Letter of Support	c48a67f7-31a.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

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:

Leah Mahoney, Marine Community and School Forest Committee Co-Chair

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