



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-152

Proposal Title: The Boundary Waters Is Our Backyard

Project Manager Information

Name: Alison Nyenhuis

Organization: Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Office Telephone: (612) 263-0347

Email: alison@friends-bwca.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Increasing access for Northeastern Minnesota students, teachers, and families to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness through immersive outdoor education, training opportunities for educators, and supportive family programming.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$655,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

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): NE

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

Region(s): NE

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.

Since 2024, our ENRTF-funded "Boundary Waters Is Our Backyard" program has connected hundreds of Northeastern Minnesota students to the wilderness at their doorstep through immersive outdoor education activities. Despite the proximity, many local students, including those in Ely, Cook County, and surrounding Tribal Nations, have never experienced the Boundary Waters.

Through this programming, students gain lifelong skills and knowledge as they explore the wilderness, many for the first time. Teachers are enthusiastic about continuing the education program, but lack funding to fully continue these trips independently.

We have also received feedback that educators and families, and not just students, are interested in gaining more knowledge and skills related to exploring the wilderness area.

Not all teachers feel well-trained to utilize the wilderness in their teaching and limited opportunities exist for educator professional development in the region. Addressing this would equip educators with tools to utilize local natural resources in their classrooms alongside the cumulative outdoor activities provided by our programming.

Families, including those in our partner schools, have expressed a strong desire for more support in independently exploring the wilderness. Many are interested in a BWCA trip, but lack the necessary knowledge or resources for a safe and enjoyable experience.

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.

Friends of the Boundary Waters is uniquely qualified to offer hands-on, engaging, natural-resource-based outdoor education for students, teachers, and families, building on strong relationships with local schools, community groups, and outfitters.

Immersive outdoor programming will connect Northeastern Minnesota students to the nearby public lands and waters of the BWCA via curriculum content areas like water quality, ecology, and Indigenous studies while fostering teamwork, lifelong skills, and awareness of career opportunities. Programming will be tailored to the goals of the unique school community and grade level, progressing in depth and skill.

For Northeastern Minnesota educators, we will host a 2-day workshop, focusing on innovative ways to utilize the nearby Boundary Waters to enhance instruction in and outside the classroom, and allow teachers to build on the outdoor experiences we carry out. These include standards-aligned outdoor education, field study curriculum, Indigenous language, and water quality instruction.

For families, we will implement year-round progressive skills courses, such as seasonal sessions focusing on different tools and skills for planning a BWCA trip. Examples include a wilderness workshop with paddling and camping skills, a trip-planning information session, and a practice overnight at a Forest Service campground.

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?

Our project addresses barriers to accessing the wilderness at Northeastern Minnesotans' "backyard" on a variety of levels. Advancing access to the wilderness is crucial to advancing conservation and stewardship of Minnesota's natural resources crown jewel, the Boundary Waters.

Outcomes for student, teacher, and family participants include:

- Lifelong skills leading to increased recreation in Minnesota's outdoors
- Connection to the lands and waters of Minnesota, the Boundary Waters specifically, through increased understanding of their ecosystem, and subsequent desire for increased stewardship
- Introduction to and awareness of conservation-related career opportunities
- Gaining tools, resources, and skills for independent BWCA exploration

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Connecting Northeast MN students with the wilderness through 4,000+ immersive outdoor education experiences in and around the Boundary Waters.

Activity Budget: \$559,000

Activity Description:

We will provide day and overnight field trips in the nearby Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness to students in schools within 60 miles of the wilderness, as well as the Tribal Nations of Grand Portage, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac. This region has unique access to year-round exploration opportunities including dogsledding, ice fishing, canoeing, and water quality sampling.

Current programming includes partnerships with the Cook County district, Ely district, Northeast Range schools, Grand Portage, Bois Forte, and Fond du Lac. We intend to expand to the Rock Ridge district (Eveleth, Gilbert, Virginia), and Lake Superior district (Silver Bay). This project reaches many Indigenous students attending these schools and intentionally partners with Indigenous communities, offering culturally-relevant wilderness experiences taught by members of these communities.

Collaborative school program elements include:

- Day trips in/near the BWCA with outdoor skills and science programming led by Friends staff and approved partners (YMCA camps, Voyageur Outward Bound School).
- Overnight experiences with approved partners for further wilderness exploration.
- Frequent meetings with school staff to scaffold experiences throughout the year for various grade levels. Most programming will target grades 6-12 due to required outdoor skills, but we can offer grade-school programming when appropriate.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year 1: 1200 day program experiences and 125 overnight experiences in / near the BWCA	June 30, 2028
Year 2: 1200 day program experiences and 150 overnight experiences in / near the BWCA	June 30, 2029
Year 3: 1200 day program experiences and 150 overnight experiences in / near the BWCA	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Host a professional development workshop to support teachers in extending learning opportunities from the wilderness to the classroom.

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

In collaborating with teachers across Northeastern Minnesota through our past programming, we have been made aware that many are interested in using the nearby natural resources of the Boundary Waters in their instruction, but desire training. Further, there is a lack of continuing education opportunities for teachers locally. In order to address this, Activity 2 would provide opportunities for teachers throughout the region to engage in professional development to incorporate the wilderness into their classrooms.

Utilizing our YMCA camp partnerships, we will host a two-day teacher training workshop at the edge of the BWCA. The training will focus on innovative ways to use the Boundary Waters to enhance instruction, covering standards-aligned outdoor education, field study curriculum, Indigenous language, water quality, and more. Teachers would come away with tools and activities to extend student learning from the outdoor experiences Friends provide in Activity 1 to their

own classrooms and subject areas.

Workshop sessions will be rooted in place-based education (PBE) principles, emphasizing community, connection, and experimentation, which has been shown to increase academic achievement and self-efficacy (Cox 2024). PBE supports the 2021 MN State Science Standards' focus on inquiry and local phenomena.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Workshop space and lodging booked with partners, and recruit any additional speakers or presenters.	September 30, 2029
Recruit teachers and provide registration materials.	November 30, 2029
Hold an overnight workshop for at least 20 Northeastern MN teachers near Ely.	November 30, 2029
Distribute CEUs from the workshop and gather feedback from attendees.	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Equipping families with skills and information to empower their independent exploration in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Activity Budget: \$46,000

Activity Description:

As more students have become proficient in the wilderness through our school programming, families and other community members have expressed an increased interest in gaining the skills and expertise to venture into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness independent of school.

To meet this need, in Activity 3 we will reach community members and families of students in the region to better equip them to travel in the wilderness on their own accord. We plan to implement progressive skills courses throughout the year, such as seasonal sessions focusing on the different resources and skills needed for planning a BWCA trip.

Some examples include:

- A wilderness workshop with paddling and camping skills
- A trip-planning information session
- A practice overnight at a more accessible location for beginners, such as a Forest Service campground.

We will provide at least 3 opportunities per year for interested families. We plan to begin in Cook County where there has been strong interest in this program, and expand to Ely if there is enough interest. We will collect pre- and post-program evaluations to continually assess learning and adjust our programming to better meet the needs of the participants.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Year 1: Hold at least 3 informational or skills sessions for families / multi-age groups.	June 30, 2028
Year 2: Hold at least 3 informational or skills sessions for families / multi-age groups.	June 30, 2029
Year 3: Hold at least 3 informational or skills sessions for families / multi-age groups.	June 30, 2030

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.

We will share any data, and results with school and community partners as well as in LCCMR reports. Content may include but is not limited to progress made toward metrics, hiring of project staff, feedback from student and adult participants, trip chaperones, and/or school staff, and inclusion in local media or news outlets. In our own materials, such as our course catalogs, the education page of the website, brochures, and online units, the LCCMR logo and ENRTF attribution language will be present according to the ENRTF Acknowledgement guidelines. Additionally, we will share with partners and news/media outlets that our work is made possible through funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and also share with them the logo and attribution language mentioned above.

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?

We will evaluate the desired outcomes named above through teacher, student, and adult participant feedback, with the opportunity for multi-year data as students progress through grade-level programs. This will drive efforts for modifications as we continue to develop this project alongside our larger No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters programming, tailored specifically for communities close in proximity to the BWCA.

We will financially support this project and the larger No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters programming through continued fundraising efforts via grants, individual donations, corporate sponsorships, and/or event revenue.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Fostering Conservation by Connecting Students to the BWCA	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05a	\$1,080,000
The Boundary Waters is Our Backyard	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05n	\$500,000
The Impacts of Climate Change on Northeastern Minnesota	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 03r	\$772,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Alison Nyenhuis

Job Title: Education Director

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

Alison Nyenhuis, Education Director, has been with the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness since 2019. She oversees the No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters program and staff, which have been partially funded by past LCCMR appropriations. Under her direction, our programming has met or exceeded the goals laid out in previous applications.

As a former classroom teacher, youth wilderness guide, and environmental educator, she has a wealth of experience in

outdoor education, project management, and inspiring young learners of all backgrounds. She is skilled in organizing and administering large-scale projects.

Organization: Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Organization Description:

Since 1976, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness has been the leading voice for the ongoing protection, preservation, and restoration of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA). Our organization was instrumental in the passage of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978, which made the Boundary Waters what it is today.

The mission of the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness is to protect the Boundary Waters and to connect people of all backgrounds to the wilderness, so that this and future generations benefit from this special place.

We envision a permanently protected Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, where all people can experience the magic of the wilderness, and support its protection. Our mission and vision drive our day-to-day work and we foresee the greatest impact to come through our No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters program where young people can take advantage of opportunities to connect to the lands and waters of Minnesota and become future environmental stewards.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Program Manager (Ely)		The program manager in Ely will oversee local project activities and partnerships in Ely, Bois Forte, the Iron Range, and Fond du Lac, including immersive outdoor experiences for students and the professional development educator workshop.			25%	0.75		\$55,000
Program Coordinator (Ely)		The program coordinator in Ely will implement project activities in Ely, Bois Forte, the Iron Range, and Fond du Lac. This includes planning and executing immersive outdoor experiences in and around the BWCA with community partners, as well as coordinating the professional development educator workshop.			25%	3		\$165,000
Program Manager (Grand Marais)		The program manager in Grand Marais will oversee and implement project activities and partnerships in Grand Marais, Grand Portage, and the North Shore. This includes coordinating with school and community partners to plan and execute immersive outdoor experiences in and around the BWCA, and launching family-focused progressive skills programming.			25%	2.25		\$157,500
Seasonal Facilitator (Grand Marais)		Assist with project programming in Grand Marais, Grand Portage, and the North Shore part-time during the summer and fall. \$18 / hour X 20 hours X 16 weeks = \$5,760 X 3 years = \$17,000			0%	0.45		\$17,000
							Sub Total	\$394,500
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Gear for students to use on trail such as rain gear, fleece layers, winter boots, etc. \$2,000 per year for replacing and adding gear as needed.	Especially when traveling in the shoulder seasons, these items are necessary for a positive trip experience,					\$6,000

			and many students do not have these readily available. Our program has existing gear libraries in Ely and Grand Marais to lend out rain gear, fleeces, etc. But occasional new needs come up, such as a few pairs of winter boots for students for a program, or gear is misplaced or damaged and needs replacement. For these instances we budget \$2000/year for replenishing gear and responding to arising gear needs.					
	Equipment	Equipment to practice cultural harvesting programming in the Boundary Waters, such as ricing, spearfishing, or sugarbushing.	Specialized equipment will enhance and support culturally-focused BWCA day trips or overnights tailored to Indigenous communities, in partnership with Indigenous organizations or Tribal Bands.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$7,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel in Northeast Minnesota, often between Ely, Grand Marais, and BWCA entry points. Average of 250 miles round trip x 12 times a year x 3 years = 9,000 miles, roughly \$6000 in mileage. 8 overnight stays during travel per year X\$125 = \$3000. Remaining \$1,000 for food while traveling.	Travel to Ely, Grand Marais, and other Northeast Minnesota communities to plan and implement the project. Though these areas are geographically close, the travel time between them is significant due to the available routes around the wilderness area.					\$10,000
	Other	Transportation of students to field trip experiences: an average of \$5 dollars per student for bus transportation to experiences in or near the Boundary Waters. \$5X3000 students = \$15,000.	Transportation is one of the largest barriers faced in getting students out in the wilderness area. This category will provide full reimbursements to each					\$15,000

			school for transportation costs, and have been estimated with rates from bus companies used by the schools along with the transportation needs experienced in our first years of programming.					
							Sub Total	\$25,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Trip journals for students on overnight trips (\$7/student X425 = \$3000)	Trip journals feature curriculum on reflection, leadership, ecology in the Boundary Waters, and Indigenous language. Students will use these on trail and continue to revisit their journals after a trip.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Other Expenses								
		Outfitting or activity fees for students, paid to local camps, outfitters, or other outdoor education partners to support immersive outdoor experiences in and near the BWCA. On average, a day trip experience costs \$30/ student, and an overnight costs \$200/night. To provide 1,200 day experiences and 150 overnight visits per year, the cost would be roughly \$65,000 x 3 years is \$195,000.	To reach large groups of students from schools, our programming works with several outfitters, camps, and other organizations (such as the International Wolf Center) to provide a wide breadth of program experiences in or near the BWCA.					\$195,000
		Outfitting or activity fees for family participants, paid to local camps, outfitters, or other outdoor education partners to support family skills programming, such as equipment use or activity fees for overnight and skill-building sessions. On average, \$50 / person for 40 people per year = \$2,000 per year.	Program fees for family informational and activity sessions. For example, rental canoe fees at a local outfitter, campsite reservations, or gear rental.					\$6,000
		Lodging (and included meals) for 2-day teacher workshop (\$225 / person for 20 teachers)	Though many teachers are local to the area, lodging will alleviate transportation costs and allow a wider					\$4,500

			audience of teachers to attend. By offering lodging, teachers will be able to invest more time in connecting with the wilderness area, as well as with other local educators.					
		Stipends for teachers working outside of their contract hours such as supervising overnight experiences or attending the training weekend: \$300/teacher, roughly 30 teachers on overnight experiences and 20 teachers in the training conference.	Our program requires school staff to chaperone each student group on overnight trip experiences, which is outside of their typical working hours. The stipend amount was determined through conversations with teachers on what similar extra-curricular responsibilities have paid. We also plan to compensate teachers outside of their typical working hours for the extra time during the 2-day workshop, as it will take place over a weekend (with the same stipend rate, as the time commitment was similar).					\$15,000
		Stipends for speakers or presenters to bring additional expertise to programming, for example, in curriculum content areas such as Indigenous culture, water quality, ecology, or other relevant topics. \$500 / presenter, 10 presenters over the 3 years.	To bring additional expertise to outdoor programming, especially pertaining to incorporating Indigenous topics on day or overnight trips. For example, our past Fond du Lac youth overnight trips have included presentations from staff at Fond du Lac Natural Resources on subsistence fishing or Baaga'adowewin (Indigenous Lacrosse).					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$225,500
							Grand Total	\$655,000

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				
In-Kind	Individual donations and/or foundation grants which support general operations	Additional staff support from the Operations Director and Education Director. (.1 FTE per year X 3 years = \$30,000)	Secured	\$30,000
Cash	Individual donations and/or foundation grants which support outfitting fees for students	Additional funds to support outfitting or activity fees for day or overnight trip experiences.	Secured	\$10,000
Cash	Individual donations and/or foundation grants which support outfitting fees for students	Additional funds to support outfitting or activity fees for day or overnight trip experiences.	Potential	\$5,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$45,000
			Funds Total	\$45,000

Total Project Cost: \$700,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [aede30d9-c14.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

1-page document with photos of students on canoe trips and working together under the title "The Boundary Waters is our Backyard." Project description, including the number of students on day trips and overnights listed in the milestones, along with a map of the area reached in Northeastern MN....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Friends of the Boundary Waters Certificate of Good Standing	0907930e-3bc.pdf
Friends of the Boundary Waters Audit	f7fdeacd-bf6.pdf
Friends of the Boundary Waters 990	7c2e6070-a37.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Friends of the Boundary Waters Board Resolution	0a182b6b-c5c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Support Letter from Cook Soil and Water Conservation District: Amanda Weberg	4047574e-e3b.pdf
Support Letter from Great Expectations School: Rachael Lehman	7e0cf643-b7e.pdf
Support Letter from the Grand Portage Band of Chippewa: Erik Redix	f7ec39ce-e17.pdf
Support Letter from Tower-Sudan School: Sarah Hansen	74cae193-c56.pdf
Support Letter from Ely Community Resource: Jill Swanson	20ebecdb-d10.pdf
Support Letter from Waawaate Programs: Ryan Bajan	fb17036b-f0f.pdf
Support Letter from Ely Public Schools: Molly Olson	e2d18c63-266.pdf
Support Letter from Cook County Schools: Chris Lindholm	f5b79468-5a3.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?

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:

Alison Nyenhuis: Friends of the Boundary Waters, Karen Johnson: Friends of the Boundary Waters, Bree Sikorski: Friends of the Boundary Waters, Chris Knopf: Friends of the Boundary Waters

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