



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-238

Proposal Title: Future Stewards: Expanding Native Habitat and Outdoor Education

Project Manager Information

Name: Brennan Blue

Organization: Great River Greening

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Great River Greening will enhance Minnesota schools by restoring school forests and creating on-campus outdoor classrooms with native habitat, while engaging students and volunteers in hands-on education and stewardship.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$299,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 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): Central, Metro, SE, SW,

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

Region(s): Central, Metro, SE, SW,

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.

Minnesota students are spending more time indoors, even as research and lived experience show that time outside supports mental health, attention, and connection. Teachers want to use the outdoors more often, but many schools do not have healthy, accessible outdoor spaces that make standards-aligned outdoor education realistic during the school day.

Some schools have a school forest, but it is often dominated by invasive plants and low biodiversity, limiting habitat value and limiting what students can observe and study. Other schools have little or no nearby nature space at all, leaving students disproportionately deprived of safe, routine access to natural spaces. In both cases, schools typically lack the capacity to plan and execute the intensive work needed to restore native habitat or create an on-site outdoor classroom, and maintain it through establishment.

Future Stewards was developed to meet this need. The program pairs standards-aligned education with hands-on stewardship and delivers pathways based on site conditions: restoration of an existing school forest, or creation of an on-campus outdoor classroom planted with native habitat. By improving biodiversity and making outdoor education feasible and routine, this project helps students get outside more often while building stewardship skills and career awareness in natural resources.

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.

Great River Greening will expand Future Stewards by partnering with Minnesota DNR School Forest sites and additional Minnesota schools to deliver standards-aligned outdoor education through two pathways: school forest restoration or creation of an on-campus outdoor classroom planted with native habitat.

Where a school forest with high potential for engaging youth exists, Great River Greening will complete the restoration work schools typically cannot take on, including invasive plant removal and site preparation to create conditions where students can engage with revegetation efforts and establishment care. Updated stewardship plans will be created with school forest committees, educators, and Minnesota DNR school foresters to ensure long-term care. Where a school lacks a forested site, Great River Greening will use a participatory design process to engage students and teachers in creating an outdoor classroom that brings accessible native habitat to school grounds and makes outdoor education feasible during the school day.

Participating schools will be culturally, socioeconomically, and geographically diverse. School forest site priorities range from roughly 3 to 20 acres across communities from New Ulm to Blaine. Culturally relevant environmental educators will be engaged to support populations traditionally underserved by the conservation movement.

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?

Increase biodiversity by removing invasives and planting native species at 5 Minnesota DNR School Forests, engaging 1,200 students.

Create on-campus outdoor classrooms at 3 schools, engaging 300 students through native plantings and stewardship.

Increase community access to restored spaces for outdoor education and stewardship.

Provide 2 site trainings per participating school for coordinators, administrators, and committees to support long-term maintenance.

Integrate 3 outdoor education modules per school into existing curricula; partner with an indigenous educator(s) to deliver 2 modules per school on traditional native usage.

Host 3 volunteer restoration events to support planting and community stewardship.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Ecological Restoration and Biological Enhancement of DNR School Forests

Activity Budget: \$169,180

Activity Description:

Each school forest site will receive a site assessment and restoration plan developed by Great River Greening to guide invasive plant removal and revegetation with native species. Plans will specify priority infestations, treatment methods, disposal needs, and follow-up maintenance to set each site up for long-term success.

Implementation will then be strategically phased. For three initial sites, the first round of woody invasive removal will occur during winter 2027–2028 using methods such as cut-and-treat and forestry mowing. Large-scale invasive removal at the remaining two sites will begin in fall 2028. Great River Greening will assess progress and refine next steps, including revegetation timing and maintenance needs.

Each restoration plan will include defined tasks appropriate for volunteers and students, paired with professional restoration tasks beyond volunteer capacity. Plans will be reviewed with school forest coordinators, school forest committees, and DNR school foresters to align restoration work with site use, stewardship goals, and long-term care. Student participation will include learning why invasive species must be controlled, how to identify the targeted invasive species in their school forest, and methodology for sustained removal and control. Students will co-design a management plan in Activity 2 using what the skills they have learned here.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Site assessments completed for 3 of 5 sites. Restoration plan in place for each site	December 31, 2027
Initial large invasive removals at 3 of 5 sites completed; Revegetation work begins at sites	June 30, 2028
Site assessments, restoration plan, and necessary agreements completed at 5 of 5 sites	December 31, 2028
Revegetation completed at 3 site; invasive removal and revegetation underway at 4th and 5th site	June 30, 2029
One year of establishment maintenance completed through biomonitoring, goat intervention and organized volunteer work	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Stakeholder Empowerment, Youth Project-Based Learning and Community Stewardship in School Forests

Activity Budget: \$70,875

Activity Description:

Great River Greening's education coordinator will visit each school 3 times per year for direct instruction with students in their school forest. Core lessons will guide students through modules that build project leadership and stewardship. Students will shape and carry out site goals, contributing to restoration actions and long-term care developed with Great River Greening, the DNR, and school forest committees.

Supporting lessons will include 2 sessions led by an Indigenous educator focused on native plant identification and traditional cultural uses with the goals of deepening relationships to place and strengthening understanding of ecological function through Indigenous knowledge. Lessons will align with existing curricula and grade-level standards, so teachers can use the forest as a consistent outdoor education space. Great River Greening will also provide training for school forest coordinators and teachers, informed by an internal survey, with research-based strategies for setting expectations outdoors, meeting standards, and establishing a regular outdoor education schedule.

Finally, Great River Greening will coordinate 3 volunteer stewardship events to support restoration, engaging up to 30 public volunteers per event. Great River Greening will provide tools, safety guidance, and training, and establish a core volunteer group to support ongoing maintenance beyond the grant period.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
First meeting with GRG, School Forest committees, and DNR foresters. Survey implemented for teacher feedback	December 31, 2027
Core community volunteer group established; trainings underway	December 31, 2028
All trainings completed; at least one public volunteer event completed	June 30, 2029
200 students engaged from each school to co-design forest stewardship plan w/DNR and GRG	December 31, 2029
At least three public volunteer events completed	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: On-Campus Outdoor Classroom Creation, Maintenance, and Stewardship

Activity Budget: \$58,945

Activity Description:

Within Future Stewards programming, on-campus outdoor classrooms are Great River Greening's hands-on, multi-year approach to bringing standards-aligned outdoor education to PreK–12 students, prioritizing communities that have historically faced barriers to safe outdoor spaces and environmental education. In 2025, this work served more than 1,200 students across five schools, and since 2022, six on-campus habitat projects have been established and maintained. Projects align with Minnesota science standards, include adaptations for math and social studies, and are scaled for PreK–12.

Schools begin with an introductory lesson on Minnesota native plant communities, followed by a student-led site assessment to understand sun, soil, moisture, and use patterns that inform plant selection. Students research and select native plants, trees, and shrubs and create a simple planting plan that maps where species should be installed based on height and site conditions.

After installation, Great River Greening supports establishment care and continued student stewardship so these spaces become consistently used outdoor classrooms. Students conduct plant surveys, biomonitoring, seed collection, and propagation, with activities evolving as the habitat matures. This activity will support maintenance and continued engagement at four current schools while adding three new schools, reaching an additional 300 students.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Outreach to new schools through communications, attendance at teacher development events and conferences	December 31, 2027
Classroom pre-learning, site preparation, and ground breaking complete at 1 school	June 30, 2028
Classroom pre-learning, ground breaking at 2nd school; hands-on, outdoor engagements underway at 1st school	December 31, 2028
Classroom pre-learning, ground breaking for 3rd school; hands-on engagements at first two school underway/ongoing	June 30, 2029
Longterm stewardship plans developed for each site, including school-designated stewardship lead at each site	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Laura Duffey	MN DNR	DNR School Forest Program Coordinator	No
New Ulm Middle School	New Ulm Middle School	Partner School	No
Jenny Eckman	Harambee Elementary School	Partner / Teacher	No
Carmen Gavin Vanegas	South High School	Partner / Teacher	No
Nathan Goldade	Royalton Public High School	Partner / Teacher	No
Emily Stripe	Twin Cities Academy	Partner / Teacher	No
Pete Stenross	Stillwater High School	Partner / Teacher	No
Tara Leuttel	Faribault Middle School	Partner / Teacher	No
Allie Peterson	Faribault High School	Partner / Teacher	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.

Funding acknowledgments will appear on all project-facing materials and communications, consistent with ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines, and will be stated verbally at volunteer events, trainings, and school sessions. Great River Greening will document and share project outputs and results including site plans, invasive removal and revegetation actions, outdoor classroom installations, tree and plant species lists, maintenance actions, and photo documentation. We will report participation data for students, educators, and volunteers and summarize participant feedback and demographic information, as appropriate, to improve project delivery over time. Results and lessons learned will be shared through our website, newsletter, and partner updates, and included in interim and final reports to LCCMR/ENRTF.

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?

Great River Greening will implement project results through site-specific management plans and trained local stewardship teams that continue care after the grant ends. For each school forest, we will develop a land management plan in collaboration with the DNR and school forest coordinators to guide ongoing maintenance by school forest committees, community volunteers, and students. On-campus outdoor classrooms will be used for standards-aligned outdoor education with stewardship tasks built into school routines. Long-term efforts will be supported through school and partner maintenance commitments, GRG's youth education program match funding, and additional public and private funding for future phases and expansions.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Engaging a Diverse Public in Environmental Stewardship	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05d	\$300,000
Biochar Implementation in Habitat Restoration: A Pilot	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 07b	\$185,000
Pollinator Central III: Habitat Improvement with Community Monitoring	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08g	\$190,000
Restoring Forests and Savannas Using Silvopasture - Phase2	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08h	\$674,000
Building Resilient Urban Forests for Climate Change	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 07b	\$752,000
Pollinator Central IV: Habitat Improvement with Public Engagement	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08e	\$698,000
Engaging our Diverse Public in Environmental Stewardship - Phase 2	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05e	\$249,000
Accelerated Genetic Migration of Bur Oak- 10yr Data	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08e	\$223,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Brennan Blue

Job Title: Environmental Stewardship Director

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

As Environmental Stewardship Director, Brennan Blue is responsible for developing and implementing Great River Greening's diverse stewardship goals by supporting individuals, organizations, and community partners to connect with and care for the natural world. Brennan is a Master Naturalist and Certified Tree Inspector who joined Great River Greening after spending 11 years as a faith community leader and completing his Doctor of Ministry in community-based anti-racism identity development work. He is particularly interested community-centric conservation, environmental justice, and fostering an action-based conservation ethic in the public.

Organization: Great River Greening

Organization Description:

Great River Greening's mission is to inspire, engage and lead local communities in conserving and caring for the land and water that enrich our lives.

Great River Greening (GRG) as a non-profit has been restoring, adapting, and sustainably managing ecosystems to address climate change, providing benefits for both people and the environment since 1995. To achieve our vision of healthy, climate change resilient ecosystems throughout MN, GRG leans into the practices and projects that can truly impact our shared climate future. Our land-based restoration centers on three pillars of impact: (1) Restoring resilient landscapes, (2) Addressing critical biodiversity loss, and (3) Increasing carbon sequestration and storage.

Environmental stewardship is one of our core commitments. We partner with the communities we serve to increase environmental connection, teach environmental restoration, and ultimately empower committed individuals to join us in caring for our shared natural resources, engaging 6,000+ volunteers annually.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager, Ecologist		Project Manager, Ecologist			21%	0.45		\$67,700
Grant Administration		Grant Administration			21%	0.12		\$10,300
Field Crew		Field Crew			21%	0.51		\$73,000
							Sub Total	\$151,000
Contracts and Services								
Land management service contracts following state bidding requirements	Service Contract	Invasive removals, revegetation, establishment maintenance				0.09		\$75,600
Indigenous Educators	Service Contract	Plant identification and cultural uses				0.06		\$7,500
Bus transportation following state bidding requirements for youth educational visits	Service Contract	Student transportation to/from project sites				0.03		\$1,100
							Sub Total	\$84,200
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies to support Activity 2 and 3 goals including seeds, plugs, plants, shrubs, trees, classroom kits, and classroom supplies, erosion blankets, and other restoration supplies, breakdown in attachments	Youth Project-Based Learning and Community Stewardship and On-Campus Outdoor Classroom Creation, Maintenance, and Stewardship					\$58,300

	Tools and Supplies	Youth Event Supplies (tools, gloves, resource books, binoculars, healthy snacks)	Supplies necessary to carryout student event activities	X				\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$60,300
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Approximately 2,400 miles of travel	Vehicle mileage to community schools, restoration events, community engagement, and to meet project deliverables. All travel expenses will abide by the Travel Reimbursement and Documentation Guide for OHF and LCCMR projects.					\$1,700
							Sub Total	\$1,700
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Educational materials, journals, and field guides	Student educational purposes					\$1,800
							Sub Total	\$1,800
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$299,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		Youth Event Supplies (tools, gloves, resource books, binoculars, healthy snacks)	Healthy snack options for maximum engagement and student health

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Great River Greening	Great River Greening expenses required to do the work for this grant.	Potential	\$75,000
In-Kind	Volunteers	Event volunteer time	Potential	\$10,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$85,000
			Funds Total	\$85,000

Total Project Cost: \$384,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [d38e6f40-16c.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

An informational overview flyer with inspiring images of students engaging in outdoor, hands-on environmental education...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
GRG Good Standing	b9e08aba-c14.pdf
2024 GRG Audit	5cc77248-17e.pdf
2024 GRG 990	0bfc9d40-f21.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Letter	229aa511-f95.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
South High School Letter of Support	ea01e71f-d57.pdf
Harambee School Letter of Support	55dc745d-a11.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:

Melissa Greenwood, Grant Administration Manager, Great River Greening; Jessica Drummond, Education and Outreach Coordinator, Great River Greening

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