



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-310

Proposal Title: Season Watch: Nature for Every Generation

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Bignall

Organization: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

Office Telephone: (218) 326-1234

Email: sbignall@kaxe.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Season Watch strengthens multi generational stewardship by providing accessible seasonal education, classroom phenology training, and Indigenous ecological knowledge that increase understanding and care for Minnesota's land, water, and wildlife.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$201,000

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?

Statewide

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

Statewide

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's land and water are experiencing measurable change due to shifting seasonal patterns, climate pressures, and human activity. Forest composition, shoreline stability, pollinator populations, and wildlife migration timing are all affected by seasonal change. While scientists track environmental impacts, many Minnesotans feel disconnected from nature.

A significant barrier to stewardship is confidence. Many residents believe environmental knowledge is reserved for experts. People often say they are not "birders" because they cannot identify every species or feel intimidated by scientific terminology. Without accessible guidance, a relationship with nature may not develop.

For 43 years, KAXE's Phenology program has helped Minnesotans observe and understand seasonal change. With prior ENRTF support, this work expanded into classrooms, building youth engagement in ecological observation. However, adults and families across the state still lack accessible, structured opportunities to build seasonal literacy and stewardship confidence.

This project serves three audiences: adults seeking an approachable way to learn about nature, students participating in classroom phenology observations, and community members and Indigenous knowledge holders sharing seasonal knowledge.

KAXE is more than radio. It is a trusted community connection that breaks down barriers. Through podcasts, newsletters, and radio, we create opportunities for environmental participation because nature is for everyone.

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.

Season Watch addresses the barrier of participation by making seasonal environmental learning accessible, welcoming, culturally inclusive and multi-generational.

First, we will produce weekly Season Watch podcasts and newsletters that translate seasonal ecological science into clear, practical knowledge. These episodes will connect observable seasonal changes to shoreline protection, pollinator health, wildlife habitat, and responsible recreation.

Second, we will create four seasonal guided walk audio experiences each year. These calming recordings will guide listeners through what they might see, hear, or smell during each season and help them interpret ecological signals anywhere in Minnesota. These tools build confidence in observing nature without requiring prior expertise.

Third, we will continue and expand classroom phenology training, supporting students who submit weekly seasonal observations. Long-term stewardship habits can be built early in life.

Finally, we will integrate Indigenous ecological knowledge through twice monthly segments with Erika Bailey-Johnson and conversations with tribal elders. This ensures seasonal learning reflects both scientific and traditional ways of knowing like the sacredness of water and wild rice.

Together, these activities strengthen environmental literacy and build confidence to care and be in relationship with Minnesota's land and water.

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?

Season Watch will increase ecological literacy and stewardship behaviors across generations and cultures in Minnesota. Participants will gain confidence in identifying seasonal changes that affect shorelines, pollinators, wildlife, and forest health. The project will expand classroom phenology reporting, increase public participation in seasonal observation, and integrate Indigenous ecological knowledge into statewide environmental education. By removing barriers to nature participation and providing accessible seasonal guidance, the project supports informed shoreline protection practices, responsible recreation, pollinator habitat support, and long-term care for Minnesota's land and water.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Season Watch Podcast, Newsletter and Guided Walk Series

Activity Budget: \$79,877

Activity Description:

This activity will produce free, weekly Season Watch nature podcasts and companion newsletters that translate seasonal ecological science into clear, accessible guidance. Episodes will connect observable seasonal changes to shoreline protection, pollinator health, wildlife habitat, and responsible recreation practices.

The project will also create four seasonal guided walk audio experiences each year. These recordings will provide structured, calming guidance on what participants might see, hear, and smell during each season and how those observations relate to ecosystem health. The guided walks can be used anywhere in Minnesota, removing barriers to participation and prior expertise.

Indigenous ecological knowledge will be integrated throughout these programs with Erika Bailey-Johnson and conversations with tribal elders, broadening seasonal understanding through traditional perspectives.

Impact will be measured through downloads, newsletter subscribers, listener surveys, and reported increases in seasonal knowledge and stewardship behaviors.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Publish 45 Season Watch podcast episodes annually (90 total)	June 30, 2029
Publish 45 Season Watch Newsletters annually (90 total)	June 30, 2029
Create 4 seasonal guided walk recordings (8 total)	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Community and Classroom Phenology Training Network

Activity Budget: \$67,203

Activity Description:

This activity will grow a statewide phenology training network that includes classrooms, environmental learning centers, and community partners like Sax Zim Bog and other regional nature centers. Educators and adult participants will receive training and guidance on identifying seasonal indicators, documenting observations, and understanding how seasonal change relates to shoreline protection, pollinator health, and ecosystem resilience.

Students will continue submitting regular phenology reports through classroom partnerships. In addition, adults and families will be invited to contribute observations through an accessible digital submission system using SpeakPipe, allowing participants to easily record and share seasonal reports from anywhere in Minnesota.

Tasks include conducting in person student trainings, providing observation materials, managing submission platforms, and supporting participant engagement.

Impact includes increased public confidence in seasonal observation, broader community participation in nature reporting, and strengthened stewardship awareness across generations and cultures.

Evaluation will track number of participating sites, total submissions received, and geographic distribution of contributors.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Conduct 4 annual classroom and community training sessions (8 total)	June 30, 2029
Collect 200 nature observations annually (400 total)	June 30, 2029
Conduct annual participant survey (2 total)	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Indigenous and Intergenerational Stewardship Dialogue Series

Activity Budget: \$53,920

Activity Description:

This activity will expand Season Watch and KAXE's weekly Phenology program to include twice monthly segments featuring Erika Bailey-Johnson, an Ojibwe educator and sustainability advocate, who will share Indigenous ecological knowledge related to seasonal change, land care, and traditional stewardship practices. In addition, conversations with tribal elders will provide intergenerational perspectives on relationships to water, forests, wildlife, and seasonal cycles.

Tasks include coordinating interviews, developing culturally grounded seasonal content, and integrating these segments into the broader Season Watch platform. Content will highlight traditional indicators of seasonal change, reciprocal relationships with land and water, and practical stewardship principles rooted in lived experience.

Impact includes broader access to traditional ecological knowledge, strengthened cultural understanding of stewardship, and increased public awareness that care for land and water is shared across generations.

Evaluation will track segment production, audience engagement, and listener feedback regarding increased understanding of Indigenous stewardship perspectives.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Launch Indigenous co host segments	September 30, 2027
Initiate monthly elder conversation series	December 31, 2027
Produce at least 24 Indigenous focused segments annually (48 Total)	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dave McMillan	Long Lake Conservation Center	Manager	No
Pam Perry	Retired	DNR Biologist	No
Mark Jacobs	Retired	Former Aitkin County Land Commissioner	No
Erika Bailey Johnson	Red Lake Department of Agriculture	Contractor	Yes
Clinton Niehaus	Sax Zim Bog	Head Naturalist	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.

The ENRTF logo will be included on the footer of the KAXE website (kaxe.org) with a link to the LCCMR webpage. Acknowledgement of ENRTF support will be included in Season Watch podcasts, phenology segments, and guided walk audio recordings. Acknowledgement will also be made during trainings and community presentations connected to the project.

An acknowledgement block and logo will appear on Season Watch web pages, podcast pages, and related articles. The ENRTF logo and credit will also be included in the Season Watch newsletter and shared across KAXE digital platforms, including social media. Project segments, stories, and podcasts will be posted on kaxe.org and distributed through Season Watch communication channels.

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?

All podcasts, guided walk recordings, classroom materials, and newsletters will remain publicly accessible statewide through KAXE platforms after project completion. Season Watch is designed to become an ongoing program embedded within Northern Community Radio's core operations. Long term support will come from diversified funding, including individual donations, sponsorships tied to the Season Watch newsletter, and future foundation and state grant opportunities. Classroom phenology partnerships will continue through existing school relationships and volunteer educator networks. By building Season Watch into established infrastructure, the project's educational and stewardship impact will continue beyond the ENRTF funding period.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Season Watch: Cultivating Young Naturalists with Phenology Education	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05o	\$180,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sarah Bignall

Job Title: CEO/GM

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

Sarah Bignall is the CEO and General Manager of Northern Community Radio, which operates KAXE in Grand Rapids and KBXE Bemidji. She has extensive experience managing state and federal funded projects and has successfully served as project manager for two Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriations.

Bignall managed ENRTF award 2020-021, Engaging Minnesotans With Phenology: Radio, Podcasts, Citizen Science, and 2024-168, Season Watch: Cultivating Young Naturalists with Phenology Education, overseeing budgeting, compliance, contracts, reporting, and milestone delivery. She also managed and ensured all deliverables were completed on schedule and in accordance with state financial and reporting requirements. Both projects expanded statewide phenology education and strengthened youth engagement in environmental observation.

Bignall works closely with Phenologist John Latimer, Phenology Coordinator Charlie Mitchell, and Director of Content at KAXE Heidi Holtan to align educational content with environmental outcomes and grant objectives. Her leadership ensures that program vision, financial stewardship, and state requirements remain fully integrated.

With a demonstrated record of successful ENRTF project management and organizational oversight, Bignall is well qualified to manage the proposed Season Watch initiative and ensure responsible use of public funds.

Organization: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

Organization Description:

Northern Community Radio, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit public educational media organization serving Minnesota through KAXE (Grand Rapids) and KBXE (Bemidji), with a translator in Brainerd. We serve most of Northern Minnesota. Founded in 1976 as the first community owned public radio station in the United States, the organization has a long history of environmental education and public service.

For over four decades, KAXE has produced the Phenology program, focused on seasonal ecological observation and climate awareness. This work expanded through prior ENRTF support into structured classroom phenology education reaching students statewide.

Northern Community Radio serves a broad and growing audience. In 2025, KAXE.org welcomed over 747,000 unique visitors and generated more than 1.5 million pageviews. The station's combined radio, streaming, podcast, and newsletter platforms reach listeners across Minnesota, including rural and underserved communities.

Northern Community Radio maintains strong financial oversight systems and a demonstrated record of successfully managing state funded environmental education initiatives.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Producer		Produce statewide phenology episodes, weekly 'season watch' podcast and newsletter. Identify and set up interviews, enter data and produce segments from schools, produce web stories			23%	1.54		\$108,672
Production supervisor - Radio		Work with producer to train, coordinate, and assist with all aspects of radio production			27%	0.2		\$20,098
Phenologist		Host weekly phenology show, conduct teacher trainings and follow-ups and classroom visits			0%	0.46		\$20,790
Audience Engagement		Distribute and promote nature content on social media and other digital media			28%	0.18		\$17,892
Administration		Coordinate and administer the grant to be sure outcomes are achieved, bills are paid, reporting is accomplished			30%	0.1		\$10,031
							Sub Total	\$177,483
Contracts and Services								
Contract Producer	Service Contract	Indigenous educator providing twice monthly segments and coordinating tribal elder conversations to incorporate Indigenous ecological knowledge into Season Watch programming.				0.1		\$12,480
							Sub Total	\$12,480
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	8 training sessions @ 375 miles/session, 2 person @ .655/mile; per commissioner's plan for lodging, 8 sessions, 1 person @ \$94/night; per commissioner's plan for food, 8 sessions, 1 person @ \$46/day	teacher training and teacher follow-up training					\$6,537
							Sub Total	\$6,537
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	calendars (3000 copies	phenology calendars for distribution to students and others to track nature sightings					\$4,250
	Printing	PIMS cards for classrooms (100 copies)	Classroom phenology sequencing activity cards					\$250
							Sub Total	\$4,500
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$201,000

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: \$201,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [c4d17c5b-0b5.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A one page infographic titled Season Watch: Nature Learning for Every Generation showing the project's audiences, activities, and outcomes. It highlights adults, students, and community and Indigenous knowledge holders, along with project activities including podcasts, guided walks, seasonal observations, and Indigenous ecological knowledge leading to greater environmental stewardship....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
FY24 990	310bbc34-98d.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
NCR BOD Resolution 30526	e32aee7c-596.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Season Watch Samples	445e7f00-bc8.pdf
Community Comments on Nature Programming	be1684be-d1e.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")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Sarah Bignall and Heidi Holtan

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