



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-374

Proposal Title: The Observation Yurt: A Hub for Nature Journaling

Project Manager Information

Name: Lindsay Bjorklund

Organization: Deep Portage Learning Center

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Deep Portage's yurt classroom and surrounding forest area will become a hub for hands-on environmental observation, nature journaling, and outdoor learning, fostering ecological literacy, stewardship, and public engagement.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$42,000

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

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

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Minnesota students and community members benefit most from hands-on, place-based learning that connects them to local ecosystems. However, opportunities for structured observation, journaling, and experiential engagement in natural settings remain limited. Journaling is a powerful reflective practice that strengthens observation, critical thinking, and personal connection to place, while also providing educators with a meaningful tool for assessment. Through student writing and drawing, educators can evaluate understanding of ecological concepts, track growth in observational skills, and document changes in environmental awareness over time.

Deep Portage operates an existing yurt that offers a unique satellite learning environment, but its aging structure, limited accessibility, and lack of year-round usability have constrained its educational impact. The site's lack of electrical power also limits the use of instructional tools and opportunities to integrate renewable energy concepts into programming.

As a result, school groups, summer campers, homeschool students, and public visitors have fewer opportunities to practice observation, engage in reflective journaling, and demonstrate learning through authentic assessment. This project will address these gaps by upgrading the physical space, improving learning infrastructure, and expanding opportunities for both structured educational programming and self-guided environmental learning.

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.

To address the limitations of the existing yurt and expand environmental learning opportunities, Deep Portage proposes a comprehensive renovation and programming enhancement project. The yurt will be restored with new sidewalls, roof materials, and insulation to ensure durability and four-season usability. An accessible entrance ramp will be added, and the space will be electrified using a small off-grid solar array, hopefully installed in partnership with tribal college students. This infrastructure will provide safe, reliable power for lighting and instructional tools while modeling sustainable energy use.

The interior will be outfitted with flexible work surfaces, storage, field guides, magnifying tools, and journaling materials, enabling school groups, summer campers, and homeschool students to engage in structured observation, data collection, and nature journaling. Surrounding the yurt, interactive outdoor stations and seating areas will provide prompts for observation, creative expression, and ecological exploration, extending learning into the forested landscape.

Existing nature journaling curriculum will be updated to integrate both indoor and outdoor spaces, while self-guided materials will inform public visitors about site availability and engagement opportunities. Together, these improvements create a year-round hub for hands-on environmental education, fostering ecological literacy, stewardship behaviors, and long-term connections to Minnesota's natural resources.

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?

Renovating the yurt and developing interactive indoor and outdoor learning spaces will provide students and the public with hands-on opportunities to observe, document, and reflect on Minnesota's ecosystems. Participants will develop skills in species identification, habitat observation, phenology tracking, and environmental journaling, fostering ecological literacy and stewardship behaviors. By expanding awareness of forest biodiversity, seasonal processes, and watershed functions, the project enhances understanding of natural resource interconnections. Self-guided materials and public access ensure that visitors can engage independently, supporting long-term conservation awareness and encouraging behaviors that protect, preserve, and responsibly interact with Minnesota's natural resources.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Yurt Renovation & Renewable Energy Integration

Activity Budget: \$22,000

Activity Description:

Deep Portage will renovate its existing Pacific Yurt, located approximately one-half mile from the main campus building, to restore and modernize this satellite environmental education facility. The project will replace aging sidewalls and roof materials and add insulation to improve durability, safety, and four-season usability in Minnesota's climate. To increase equitable access to environmental education programming, an accessible ramp will be added at the entrance.

The yurt will then be electrified using a small off-grid solar energy system that incorporates existing solar panels, battery storage, and necessary electrical components to safely power interior lighting and instructional equipment. Installation of the solar array will occur in partnership with tribal college students, providing hands-on workforce experience while modeling collaborative and sustainable energy development.

This activity preserves and enhances an existing educational asset while demonstrating responsible infrastructure and renewable energy use in a remote, natural setting. The upgraded facility will serve as a visible example of conservation-minded design and renewable energy application within an environmental learning context.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Final renovation design and solar integration plan completed	September 30, 2027
Yurt sidewalls, roof replacement, and insulation installed	November 30, 2027
Accessible entrance ramp constructed and completed	November 30, 2028
Solar system installed with battery storage and electrical wiring	November 30, 2028
Solar-powered electrical system fully operational and tested	September 30, 2029

Activity 2: Interior Environmental Learning Space and Nature Observation Hub

Activity Budget: \$7,000

Activity Description:

Following completion of the yurt renovation and solar electrification, Deep Portage will outfit the interior as a hands-on environmental learning and nature observation hub. The space will include flexible work surfaces and seating, storage for field equipment, and displays highlighting Minnesota's forest ecology, biodiversity, and seasonal processes. Students will have access to field journals, magnifying tools, and regional field guides to document observations and participate in structured data collection and phenology tracking activities.

The interior layout will support multiple program formats, including school groups, summer campers, homeschool students, and public self-guided participants, enabling place-based learning and experiential education throughout the year. The space will also provide designated areas for reflection and creative expression, integrating nature journaling and observational drawing as tools to enhance ecological understanding, foster stewardship behaviors, and act as an assessment tool for educators.

By transforming the yurt interior into an active learning environment, this activity leverages the renovated facility to advance environmental literacy, strengthen student connection to Minnesota's natural resources, and provide a durable, year-round setting for hands-on ecological investigation. Students will gain practical skills in observation,

species identification, and environmental monitoring, laying a foundation for long-term conservation awareness and stewardship practices.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Interior layout and learning station plan finalized	March 31, 2028
Flexible work surfaces, seating, and storage units installed	August 31, 2028
Field guides, magnifying tools, and art/journaling materials stocked	August 31, 2028
Educational displays installed	August 31, 2028
Interior space fully set up and ready for programming	September 30, 2028

Activity 3: Outdoor Observation and Experiential Learning Area

Activity Budget: \$13,000

Activity Description:

Deep Portage will develop the area surrounding the yurt into a structured outdoor environment that encourages active observation, nature journaling, and creative exploration. Durable interpretive displays will be designed as invitations for participation rather than traditional informational signs, prompting students and visitors to engage in guided exercises such as sketching flora and fauna, recording seasonal changes, mapping soundscapes, or observing ecological patterns.

Designated observation points and seating areas will be created to support both guided and self-directed learning, allowing school groups, summer campers, homeschool students, and public visitors to engage meaningfully with the forest environment. Students will use these stations to document ecological observations, track phenology, and connect sensory experiences to understanding of Minnesota's natural systems.

By transforming the outdoor space into an interactive learning area, this activity expands place-based environmental education beyond the indoor classroom, fostering ecological literacy, observational skills, and stewardship behaviors. Participants will develop practical skills in species recognition, habitat observation, and environmental reflection, strengthening their connection to natural resources and inspiring long-term conservation awareness.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design of interactive outdoor prompts and observation stations finalized	March 31, 2028
Durable interpretive displays fabricated and prepared for installation	April 30, 2028
Seating and designated observation areas installed	September 30, 2028
Interactive outdoor stations installed around yurt	September 30, 2028
Outdoor learning area fully ready for student and public programs	October 31, 2028

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.

Deep Portage will share print and digital information about the nature journaling hub and interpretive learning features with visiting schools, educators, and public visitors. This will help partners understand how the space can support observation-based environmental learning and inspire similar approaches in their own settings.

Information about the project will be shared through newsletter articles, mailings, and social media posts, highlighting both the development process and ways students and visitors engage with the space. These communications will include examples of nature journaling, interpretive prompts, and photos of participants to build awareness of place-based environmental education practices.

Interpretive signage at the site will serve as an ongoing tool for self-guided exploration and engagement with natural resources. Physical signage will also acknowledge the infrastructure and educational enhancements supported by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and the Fund will be credited on all project print and electronic media, publications, and signage according to ENRTF guidelines.

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?

The renovated yurt and outdoor learning areas will be fully integrated into Deep Portage's existing school, summer camp, and homeschool programming, ensuring immediate use by students. Updated nature journaling curriculum and self-guided public materials will provide ongoing educational opportunities for community visitors. Staff will maintain and refresh materials as part of routine program operations, and facility upkeep will be supported through Deep Portage's existing maintenance budget. Future program enhancements, curriculum updates, and materials replacement will be funded through a combination of program fees, memberships, and ongoing fundraising, ensuring the project's sustainability and continued public benefit.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Increasing K-12 Student Learning to Achieve ENRTF's Goals	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$1,602,000
Increasing Accessibility of Environmental Education at Deep Portage	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05q	\$228,000
Outdoor School for Minnesota K-12 Students	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05f	\$3,992,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Lindsay Bjorklund

Job Title: Executive Director

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

Lindsay Bjorklund has served as Director of Deep Portage since 2022 and has been with the organization since 2014. She has managed multiple LCCMR grants, including the current \$228,000 accessibility project (2024-188) and collaborated with Minnesota overnight Outdoor School providers on the 2022 and 2025 LCCMR scholarship grants. She has also overseen several smaller grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Lindsay is detail-oriented and committed to the accurate and ethical use of funds, maintaining strict recordkeeping and compliance standards.

Organization: Deep Portage Learning Center

Organization Description:

Deep Portage Learning Center is an overnight environmental learning center, fully accredited by Cognia. Thousands of students from more than seventy schools from all over Minnesota visit Deep Portage each year to take part in high-quality environmental education/outdoor recreation programs.

In the summer, Deep Portage offers a variety of youth camps. Topics include firearms safety, hunting skills, fishing, science, conservation, and outdoor recreation. Additionally, Deep Portage serves groups, organizations, area residents, and visitors with interpretive programs, tours, and events. Our eleven miles of trails are open year-round for birding, hiking, and skiing, and the conservation reserve (public county land) features over 6000 acres of woods, lakes, bogs, and more.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Yurt removal and replacement part installation				0		\$4,000
TBD	Service Contract	Accessibility Ramp Construction				0		\$4,000
TBD	Service Contract	Professional design of interactive, hands-on signage to encourage nature observation, journaling, and art activities around the yurt.				0		\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$11,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Interpretive Prompt Panels (8 weather-resistant panels)	Install interactive prompts inviting public participation in observation activities.					\$6,000
	Equipment	Outdoor Seating and Activity Stations (4 weather-resistant benches/log seating areas)	Create structured outdoor journaling and observation zones surrounding the yurt.					\$4,000
	Tools and Supplies	Field Observation Tools Set (class set: 20 magnifiers, 20 clipboards, field guides, whiteboards, etc)	Equip students to practice species identification, phenology tracking, and ecological observation skills.					\$2,000
	Equipment	Work tables, seating, and storage	Support hands-on journaling, specimen observation, and small group environmental learning activities.					\$4,000
	Equipment	Replacement Yurt Sidewalls (1)	Replace aging wall fabric to restore structural integrity and improve durability for long-term environmental education use.					\$5,000
	Equipment	Yurt Insulation Package (1)	Improve energy efficiency and support four-season educational programming.					\$3,000
	Equipment	Art Prints and Frames (10-15)	Purchase and install nature-themed artwork and prints (local artists when					\$1,000

			possible) to create an engaging, inspiring environment for students. Supports creativity, observation, and connection to Minnesota ecosystems.					
							Sub Total	\$25,000
Capital Equipment								
		Replacement Yurt Roof Cover (1)	Ensure weatherproofing and extend usable lifespan of the environmental learning facility.	X				\$6,000
							Sub Total	\$6,000
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$42,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Equipment		Replacement Yurt Roof Cover (1)	The replacement yurt roof cover slightly exceeds the \$5,000 capital equipment threshold but is necessary to restore the weatherproof integrity of an existing outdoor classroom used for environmental education programming. This one-time capital improvement will ensure the yurt remains safe and functional for hands-on learning activities such as nature observation and journaling. The budget reflects manufacturer pricing with a modest contingency for shipping and materials. Deep Portage is also contributing non-ENRTF funds to the project, demonstrating organizational commitment while ensuring the structure can continue serving Minnesota students and visitors for many years. Additional Explanation : The replacement yurt roof cover will support ongoing environmental education programming at Deep Portage. The renovated yurt will serve as a dedicated space for nature observation, journaling, and hands-on ecological learning for school groups, summer campers, homeschool students, and public visitors. These programs serve thousands of Minnesota participants annually. The replacement roof is expected to last approximately 15–20 years and will ensure the structure remains weatherproof and safe for year-round educational use. Deep Portage will maintain the yurt as part of its regular facilities program so it can continue supporting environmental education and public engagement activities focused on Minnesota’s natural resources throughout its useful life.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Deep Portage	Deep Portage will contribute approximately \$12,000 in non-ENRTF cash funds to support completion of the yurt's off-grid solar power system. This work includes purchase and installation of system components such as solar panels, charge controller, batteries, inverter, mounting hardware, and wiring to integrate existing solar panels and provide electricity for interior lighting and instructional tools. The project team anticipates partnering with Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL) to assist with this work and coordinate installation with Deep Portage staff and other contractors as needed. Depending on project timing, there may be opportunities to involve workforce trainees from Leech Lake Tribal College in the installation process. RREAL may also pursue complementary funding sources to support portions of the labor and related travel costs, which could reduce direct project expenditures while expanding workforce training opportunities.	Pending	\$12,000
In-Kind	Deep Portage	Building on Deep Portage's existing nature journaling programming, Deep Portage staff will adapt and expand lessons to fully utilize the renovated yurt interior and interactive outdoor observation areas. Updates will include new journaling prompts, guided observation exercises, and creative environmental art activities for students, emphasizing Minnesota's forest ecology, seasonal changes, species identification, and ecological interconnections. These enhancements will provide hands-on, place-based learning opportunities for school groups, summer campers, and homeschool students. In addition, materials will be developed to inform the public about the yurt and surrounding learning areas, offering self-guided prompts for journaling, ecological observation, and creative expression. This ensures community members and families can independently engage with the site while reinforcing environmental literacy and stewardship principles.	Secured	\$2,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$14,000
			Funds Total	\$14,000

Total Project Cost: \$56,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [ba437349-8f9.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Figure 1: Conceptual layout of the yurt and surrounding area.

Figure 2: A photograph of Deep Portage's existing yurt.

Figure 3: Example student nature journals....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2025 Deep Portage Audit	bb75db04-937.pdf
2025 Deep Portage 990	cd2b17a2-a90.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Deep Portage Board Resolution	7437d814-cb6.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support/Proposal from RREAL Solar	fb455594-6eb.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

N/A

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

Yes

Do you certify that background checks are performed for background check crimes, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 299C.61, Subd. 2, on all employees, contractors, and volunteers who have or may have access to a child to whom children's services are provided by your organization?

Yes

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

Dan Ryan, Deep Portage Learning Center

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