



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-508

Proposal Title: River Bend Nature Center Outdoor Diversity Initiative Expansion

Project Manager Information

Name: Brad Bourn

Organization: River Bend Nature Center

Office Telephone: (612) 423-9901

Email: bourn@rbnc.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: River Bend Nature Center will actively engage 300 underrepresented youth in reforestation and environmental education through a youth conservation workforce leadership program addressing Emerald Ash Borer impacts in Faribault.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$296,000

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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project

Narrative

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

BIPOC youth and young adults experience a nature participation gap that limits access to outdoor recreation, environmental learning, and gainful careers in natural resources. A 2021 report by the Metropolitan Council found that many youth of color don't see themselves reflected in park staff and outdoor professionals, reinforcing the perception that they don't belong. Over time, perception grows and the participation gap widens- contributing to workforce gaps as youth select career paths. As Minnesota becomes more diverse, we risk increasing shortages in natural resource and outdoor recreation workers—a concern identified in workforce analyses by DEED. The Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Task Force and the Minnesota DNR highlight youth work programs and paid outdoor opportunities as key strategies to break this cycle and build a more representative workforce.

Simultaneously, Emerald Ash Borer continues to impact the region and threatens the endangered dwarf trout lily colonies at River Bend. The dwarf trout lily is found only in Rice, Goodhue, and Steele Counties and nowhere else on earth. It requires stable, shaded forest conditions to thrive. Loss of ash canopy due to EAB alters ground conditions and increases pressure from invasive species like garlic mustard and buckthorn, degrading fragile dwarf trout lily habitat.

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.

Our Outdoor Diversity Initiatives will expand our BIPOC and underrepresented youth-centered conservation and environmental education program directly addressing both the nature participation gap and forest health impacts caused by Emerald Ash Borer. The project will engage approximately 300 underrepresented youth over the project period through a combination of hands-on conservation work, expanded environmental education, and leadership development.

A core group of older youth and young adult participants will receive a combination of paid work experience, industry-recognized credentials in natural resource management, college credit from Hamline University, case management/support services, and career navigation support. These participants will assist with Emerald Ash Borer response efforts funded through existing DNR grants including forest assessment, selective removal of ash, invasive species management, and reforestation with diverse native species to improve long-term forest resilience.

Outside of conservation work and training, participants will also serve as peer leaders in River Bend's elementary school-aged environmental education programs, helping expand access to outdoor learning opportunities for additional youth.

Through culturally specific partnerships with organizations like Somali Community Resettlement Services and Faribault Community Education, we'll target recruitment to connect youth who have historically had limited access to nature-based experiences with meaningful opportunities to engage in stewardship.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

This project will:

1)Expand mentorship and leadership opportunities for up to 300 BIPOC and underrepresented youth to explore and pursue careers in the environment and natural resources - reducing social, economic, and physical barriers to participation in nature for BIPOC and underrepresented youth.

2)Improve forest health on approximately 400 of River Bend Nature Center's 823 acres through active management of EAB impacts, removal of invasive vegetation to restore and enhance the regions' ability to provide high-quality natural resource and habitat value for the federally endangered dwarf trout lily and other threatened species along the Straight River.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Adaptation and alignment of existing curriculum

Activity Budget: \$35,000

Activity Description:

River Bend Nature Center will adapt and expand existing environmental education and workforce training curriculum in partnership with Faribault Community Education, University of Minnesota Extension, and Hamline University. This work will result in a scaffolded program structure that meets participants where they are, including Adult Basic Education pathways, industry-recognized credentialing, and college-credit opportunities that prepare youth and young adults for participation in conservation and natural resource management.

In partnership with Faribault Community Education, River Bend will refine curriculum to support credit-bearing opportunities for Adult Basic Education and English Language Learner participants through development of an Integrated Education and Training (IET) model aligned with Minnesota Department of Education guidelines.

All participants will have access to age-appropriate, industry-recognized credentials offered in partnership with U of M Extension, including OSHA 10, Minnesota Master Naturalist, shade tree identification, UTV/ATV safety certification, and pesticide applicator training, ensuring safe and effective engagement in conservation work.

In partnership with Hamline University, River Bend will align curriculum to support a college-credit certificate in environmental studies for college-ready participants.

Tasks include aligning curriculum with industry competencies, integrating hands-on conservation work, and formalizing credential pathways.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Realignment of existing credentials for age appropriateness	July 31, 2027
Hamline certificate finalization approval	December 31, 2027
IET approval from MN Dept. of Ed	December 31, 2027

Activity 2: Completion of Outdoor Diversity initiative Training Program

Activity Budget: \$130,500

Activity Description:

River Bend Nature will implement an additional three years of our Outdoor Diversity initiatives- a culturally specific youth and young adult conservation workforce program to carry out forest restoration and environmental education activities addressing Emerald Ash Borer impacts. Over the three-year project period, 45 youth and young adult participants from BIPOC or other underrepresented communities will be recruited and employed in paid conservation positions through culturally specific partners such as Somali Community Resettlement Services and Faribault Public Schools Community Education. LCCMR will support 20 participants within this larger program.

Participants will complete approximately 480 hours of culturally contextualized training, earning credentials while engaging in hands-on conservation work and providing leadership and mentorship to elementary school-aged learners in River Bend's youth programming.

Participants will receive wages while implementing restoration activities through supervised field crews working across

River Bend’s 823-acre nature preserve. Field activities include invasive species management, tree identification and assessment, vegetation management, habitat restoration, and trail and land stewardship tasks, including Emerald Ash Borer response and reforestation with diverse native species.

Participants will also serve as peer leaders, helping deliver outdoor learning and stewardship activities to approximately 235 additional youth in school, camp, and youth groups visiting the nature center.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Culturally specific partners recruit participants for cohort 1	June 30, 2027
Cohort 1 participants engage in 480 program hours as described in Activity Description	September 30, 2027
Culturally specific partners recruit participants for cohort 2	June 30, 2028
Cohort 2 participants engage in 480 program hours as described in Activity Description	September 30, 2028
Culturally specific partners recruit participants for cohort 3	June 30, 2029
Cohort 3 participants engage in 480 program hours as described in Activity Description	September 30, 2029

Activity 3: Completion of conservation and EAB Mitigation work outlined in proposal

Activity Budget: \$130,500

Activity Description:

Participants will support River Bend’s implementation of various DNR Conservation Partners Legacy Grants focused on forest restoration and habitat enhancement activities across approximately 400 acres of River Bend’s 823-acre nature preserve to address Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) impacts and invasive species degradation.

Forested areas, particularly floodplain and upland woodlands, are experiencing significant canopy loss due to EAB, coupled with high densities of invasive species including buckthorn, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, and dame’s rocket, which suppress native regeneration and degrade habitat quality.

Restoration activities will include mechanical and chemical removal of invasive woody and herbaceous species, including cut-stump treatment of woody invasives, followed by repeated follow-up treatments to prevent re-establishment. Selective removal of ash trees impacted by EAB will be conducted to improve site safety and prepare areas for reforestation. Restoration will be sequenced over multiple years to ensure effectiveness and long-term ecological resilience.

Efforts will include planting and seeding of diverse native tree, shrub, and groundlayer species to restore canopy structure, improve biodiversity, and enhance habitat conditions. These efforts are critical to protecting sensitive ecosystems, including dwarf trout lily habitat.

Outcomes include measurable reductions in invasive species, improved forest health, increased native species diversity, and enhanced habitat continuity across River Bend’s

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Participants engage in supervised initial invasive species removal on 150 acres by September 2027	September 30, 2027
Participants engage in supervised initial invasive species removal on 150 acres by September	September 30, 2028
Participants engage in achieving targeted invasive reduction and improved forest conditions by Sept 2029	September 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Cassandra Riopelle-Community Education Director	Faribault Public Schools-Community Education	Faribault Public Schools is the primary public educator in the region of both youth and adult learners from diverse backgrounds. Adult community education program staff are educational experts with experience in delivering pre/employment/work readiness curriculum and assist with recruitment and program delivery.	Yes
Sharif Hared-Executive Director	Somali Community Resettlement Services	SCRS is one of Faribault's only immigrant led organizations focused on resettlement services. SCRS will assist with contextualizing learning opportunities in BIPOC and immigrant communities, assist in recruitment of participants, and help facilitate some program content.	Yes
Patty Born Selly	Hamline University Environmental Studies Department	Hamline University's Environmental Studies department will co facilitate select trainings, assist in curriculum adaptation, and administer certificates to select participants. Hamline brings experience to the table creating credit bearing programs through community partnerships with nature centers across Minnesota like River Bend.	Yes
Andrea Lorek Strauss	University of Minnesota Extension	U of M Extension provides curriculum and credentialing support in the Outdoor Diversity Initiatives. Extension staff work with River Bend to adapt existing curriculum for age appropriateness and cultural context/relevancy.	Yes

Dissemination

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

Project results will be disseminated through a combination of public-facing education, partner engagement, and on-site interpretation. Restoration work and outcomes will be integrated directly into River Bend's environmental education programs, where participants both learn from and communicate project outcomes to peers and younger students.

Interpretive signage, modeled after WPA-era conservation signage, will be installed at restoration sites to clearly identify that work was completed by participants in River Bend Nature Center's Outdoor Diversity Initiative with support from the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. Signage will also interpret Emerald Ash Borer impacts, restoration techniques, and protection of sensitive species such as dwarf trout lily. These installations will provide long-term, publicly accessible education for approximately 100,000 annual visitors.

Results and lessons learned will be shared with partners including the Minnesota DNR, Faribault Public Schools, and Somali Community Resettlement Services to inform ongoing natural resource management and engagement strategies. Additional dissemination will occur through River Bend's website, newsletters, and social media platforms.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

Project results will be implemented through River Bend's ongoing land management and workforce development programs. Forest restoration activities will continue under established DNR Conservation Partners Legacy Grants and integrated into River Bend's long-term ecological management plans. Workforce training and youth engagement will be sustained through braided funding, including existing support from private and philanthropic funders, DEED and the DNR along with earned revenue from fee-based education programs. Updated curriculum and credential pathways will

remain embedded within River Bend’s programming and partnerships with Hamline University and Faribault Community Education, ensuring continued delivery beyond the grant period.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
River Bend Nature Center Outdoor Diversity Initiative	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05j	\$247,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Brad Bourn

Job Title: Executive Director

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

River Bend Nature Center staff have the proven skills and acumen to our Outdoor Diversity Initiatives bringing more than fifty years of combined experience in environmental education, program leadership, grant management, funder compliance, and fiscal stewardship. Key staff include:

Brad Bourn- Executive Director, (Project Manager)-

Responsible for team coordination, grant reporting and accountability to deliverables. Bourn holds a master’s in public administration, has more than two decades of non-profit executive/grant management and served twelve years as a commissioner on the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

Quanda Arch- Associate Director of Outdoor Diversity Initiatives

Arch has developed career pathway programs for BIPOC seekers in Minnesota, managed multiple state grants around workforce development, and is a recognized leader in STEM workforce programming. Arch is the overall project lead and will handle daily program implementation, participant tracking, curriculum delivery, job training, placement, and experiential learning coordination.

Molly Dulka- Associate Director of Programs and Engagement-

Dulka is a leader in engaging people from diverse backgrounds with nature including leading RBNC’s programs serving over 10k annual participants for the last 5 years and as a naturalist for the City of Richfield. Dulka is also a board member of the MN Naturalists Association and leads work creating more inclusive nature programming across Minnesota.

Brittany Smith- Associate Director of Environmental Stewardship-

Smith has over 10 years of experience in conservation program management and project coordination including incorporating youth and volunteers into conservation projects. Smith was a project leader for the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and the Department of Natural Resources prior to joining River Bend.

Organization: River Bend Nature Center

Organization Description:

Founded in 1978, River Bend Nature Center (RBNC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to inspire curiosity, respect, and care for nature. We do this by building lifelong, meaningful connections to nature for everyone—especially for communities historically excluded from outdoor spaces and natural resource careers. RBNC operates an 823-acre public nature preserve and environmental learning center in Faribault, Minnesota, welcoming approximately 100,000 visitors annually and engaging more than 10,000 youth and adult learners, generating over 1,000,000 contact hours in environmental and agricultural education.

RBNC is a leader in conservation-based workforce development and environmental education, with a strong focus on engaging BIPOC and underrepresented communities. The organization is majority women-led, with leadership and governance reflective of the communities it serves. RBNC has demonstrated success managing state and federal grants, including funding from DEED, DNR, and LCCMR, and has received national recognition from the National League of Cities for our work connecting underrepresented communities to nature.

Located in one of Minnesota's most diverse micropolitan communities, RBNC is a trusted partner in Faribault's BIPOC and immigrant communities and delivers inclusive programming for everyone.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Executive Director (Brad Bourn)		LCCMR Project Compliance/funder reporting			3%	0.06		\$6,900
Director of Outdoor Diversity Initiatives (Quanda Arch)		Serve as liaison between partners. Assist SCRS in recruitment efforts, provide case mgt services for jobseekers			3%	0.3		\$25,500
Director of Programs and Engagement (Molly Dulka)		Overall project mgt, curriculum adaptation, and course instruction			3%	0.3		\$25,500
Director of Environmental Stewardship (Brittany Smith)		Coordinate and supervise participants in paid work experience/internship components			3%	0.3		\$25,500
Environmental Stewardship Project Coordinator (Kate Ford)		Coordinate daily activities of youth participants, specific field days and lead crews during internship components			3%	0.75		\$38,059
Youth participant wages		Youth participants receive 480 hours of paid training and internship opportunities. $15 \times 480 \times \$18 = \$129600 + 11664(\text{Fringe\&tax}) = \141264 . LCCMR Share \$70,000			3%	12.9		\$70,000
							Sub Total	\$191,459
Contracts and Services								
Faribault Public Schools	Subaward	Approximate Budget: Program Coordinator \$75/hr Activities: Curriculum development and adapt or modify existing curriculum, and program oversight- 110 hrs x \$75/hr = \$8250 Instructor/Mgr \$44/hr Activities: Register students, administer assessments, prep, evaluate data, deliver				0.5		\$20,000

		curriculum, student support- 267.05 hrs x \$44/hr = 11750						
TBD / State of Minnesota	Service Contract	Non-Commercial Pesticide License study materials and exam fees for up to 15 participants.				0		\$500
Somali Community Resettlement Services	Service Contract	Contracted recruitment and program co-facilitation not to exceed \$10,000. Anticipated program coordinator rate (including fringe) \$33/hr x 303 hrs over total project = \$9999				0.12		\$10,000
Blue Heron llc (chainsaw training) / TBD	Service Contract	Industry recognized chainsaw training certifications for up to 40 track 1 and 2 participants. 4 sessions X \$2000 per session				-		\$8,000
Hamline University	Subaward	Adaptation of existing curriculum into credit bearing certificate in Environmental Studies for college ready participants. Anticipated instructor/Hamline staff rate \$60/hr x 250 hrs = 15,000				0		\$15,000
University of Minnesota Extension	Subaward	UM extension fees. Negotiated rate for UofM to provide a menu of trainings ranging from Master Naturalist, Shade Tree Inspector, Pesticide lic. more. Anticipated rate \$500/participant.				0		\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$68,500
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	General program supplies, PPE, tools, and gear: Grounds supplies: \$4221 PPE and gear \$5793 Project tools (chainsaws, shovels, etc) \$1000 Items necessary for experiential learning and demonstration projects 11,014	Items necessary for experiential learning and demonstration projects					\$11,041
							Sub Total	\$11,041
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-

Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Culturally Specific Ambassadors	Local culturally ambassadors / organizations will receive stipends and will primarily be responsible for recruitment of participants, ongoing support, translation, co-facilitation of classes, and case mgt for job seekers. Ambassadors and organizations will make 1:1 contact with potential participants to suggest enrollment in the program, go into culturally familiar locations like mosques, community centers, and other locations where English may not be a prevalent language to conduct outreach activities with potential participants and their families to overcome potential and perceived barriers to participation, and walk participants through the enrollment process as well as provide ongoing support to RBNC staff. We anticipate partnering with between 1-4 ambassadors/partners including individual community members and local organizations like Faribault Somali Youth Empowerment, Community Action, Healthy Community Initiative, and more. Stipend amounts will be					\$25,000

			negotiated with each ambassador/organization. The budget number was determined using historical data for similar agreements RBNC has utilized along with preliminary conversations with potential ambassadors/orgs.					
							Sub Total	\$25,000
							Grand Total	\$296,000

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				
Cash	Multiple DNR CPL grants	River Bend has multiple land restoration projects happening through CPL grants. Participants will be able to learn about projects and participate during their cohort.	Secured	\$500,000
Cash	DEED Pathways to Prosperity Workforce Development Grant	River Bend has received partial program funding from DEED's P2P grant. The grant will supplement participant wages, purchase laptops, supplement tuition allowances, and provide transportation stipends. Additionally funds will help support multiple progra	Secured	\$350,000
			State Sub Total	\$850,000
Non-State				
Cash	National Park and Recreation Association Workforce Grant	This will supplement staff time not covered by grant as well as program materials used in demonstration projects- tools, vehicles, supplies, etc.	Secured	\$20,000
Cash	River Bend endowments and unrestricted donations	This will supplement staff time not covered by grant as well as program materials used in demonstration projects- tools, vehicles, supplies, etc.	Secured	\$50,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$70,000
			Funds Total	\$920,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,216,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [2622c24f-40a.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

News article from August of 2025 showing work of River Bend's Outdoor Diversity Initiative....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	8515dda7-340.pdf
2024 audit and 990 combined file	35165843-b50.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board resolution	52e74824-197.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
University of Minnesota Extension Letter of Support	f2b33773-6c5.pdf
Faribault Public School Letter of Support	69aa3a31-43c.pdf
Somali Community Resettlement Services Support Letter	8bbad982-eaf.pdf
Hamline University Support Letter	75620cac-03a.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")?

No

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

None

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