



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-570

Proposal Title: Building Environmental Connections Between PWLC and the Community

Project Manager Information

Name: Micayla Nelson

Organization: Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The ENRTF grant will provide two full-time Naturalist Educators to extend programming at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center beyond what the FPWLC have currently allocated through June of 2028.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$328,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (C)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Region(s): NW

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.

In fall 2023, it was anticipated that funding would not be available to replace retiring environmental education staff from the USFWS at the PWLC. Prior to this staffing gap, students from area schools—including homeschooled students—regularly participated in scheduled, guided field trips that explored a variety of nature-based topics. These programs covered themes such as ecosystems, prairie and wetland habitats, habitat restoration, seasonal hibernation and migration patterns of waterfowl and songbirds, and species adaptations. Environmental learning at PWLC was part of a unique partnership with Fergus Falls Public Schools. Through this collaboration, 200 students attended daily classes led by elementary-certified educators alongside USFWS staff. With a strong emphasis on outdoor learning, coursework was aligned with Minnesota State Science Standards and incorporated hands-on scientific practices. Students used field journals to record and analyze observations, developing skills in data collection and longitudinal study. By documenting daily and seasonal changes, students learned how to identify patterns, form hypotheses, and test their ideas. Instruction emphasized careful observation, enabling students to examine topics such as weather trends, the identification of native versus invasive prairie plants, and differences between terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates. Programs were significantly curtailed when staff positions remained unfilled.

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.

Using ENRTF grant funds, the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) would hire two full-time Naturalist Educators to sustain existing educational programming for area schools while expanding outreach to a broader and more diverse community audience. These positions would ensure the continuation of high-quality environmental education experiences for students while also increasing opportunities for participation beyond the traditional school calendar.

Expanded programming would include activities offered outside the academic year and would engage a wider range of participants, including additional student groups, families, and adult learners. This support would also allow the PWLC Visitor Center to be open to the public on a consistent and regular basis.

Regular public access to the Visitor Center would provide visitors with educational resources, interpretive displays, and guidance about the unique habitats and wildlife found at the PWLC. In addition, visitors would gain a deeper understanding of the ecological importance of Minnesota's prairie wetland ecosystems, including the plants, animals, and conservation efforts that sustain these landscapes.

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?

By hiring two additional naturalists, environmental education programming in the community will increase by approximately 25 percent and expand beyond elementary students to include learners of all ages. Visitor Center hours will grow from two half-days during the summer to at least three full days per week for six months, providing greater public access to educational resources and exhibits. Expanding outdoor programming at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) fosters curiosity and appreciation for prairie wetland ecosystems. These experiences help build a strong foundation for environmental stewardship and inspire the next generation of conservationists.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Increase participation in environmental programs to students in area schools during the academic year.

Activity Budget: \$235,500

Activity Description:

The two full-time Naturalist Educators will expand environmental education by increasing school visits by approximately 20 percent and extending programming beyond elementary students to include middle and high school learners. Each class will participate in three visits over the academic year—fall, winter, and spring—allowing students to observe and study prairie and wetland ecosystems across seasonal changes.

Tasks include designing age-appropriate lesson plans, leading outdoor field experiences, and guiding students in recording observations and collecting data in field journals. These tasks will be accomplished through hands-on activities, interactive demonstrations, and structured data collection exercises.

Outputs include detailed student journals, seasonal observation records, and enhanced understanding of local wildlife and habitats. These materials will support classroom learning, allow study of seasonal ecosystem changes, and foster critical thinking and scientific inquiry skills.

The impact includes increased environmental literacy, stronger connections to local ecosystems, and cultivation of stewardship values among students.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Academic yearly wages for two full-time Naturalist Educators	June 30, 2028
Academic yearly wages for two full-time Naturalist Educators	June 30, 2029
Academic yearly wages for two full-time Naturalist Educators	June 30, 2030
School visits increase 20% by the end of the three years	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Increase summer environmental education and interpretation

Activity Budget: \$88,500

Activity Description:

This activity will enhance summer environmental education at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC), emphasizing interpretation and learning for a broad audience, including students, families, and community members. The two full-time Naturalist Educators will facilitate a mix of structured and unstructured programming, encouraging exploration, curiosity, and personal connection to the prairie wetland ecosystem.

Tasks will include leading interpretive experiences such as guided nature hikes, ranger talks, and Monarch butterfly tagging, as well as offering less structured activities like nature journaling, self-guided exploration, and observation opportunities. Signature events like Biology Camp for 5th and 6th graders will provide immersive, seasonal learning experiences. The Visitor Center will be open at least three full days per week offering informal education.

Outputs will include participant observations and journals, attendance records, and documented interactions with natural habitats. These outputs will foster environmental literacy, personal engagement with nature, and stewardship values.

Evaluation will focus on participant engagement and feedback from both structured and unstructured experiences. Over three years, the program aims to offer a minimum of eight summer workshops, events, or activities annually, broadening access and deepening community connection to local ecosystems.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Summer salary for two full-time Naturalist Educators	September 30, 2028
Summer salary for two full-time Naturalist Educators	September 30, 2029
Summer salary for two full-time Naturalist Educators	June 30, 2030
Increase summer programming to 8 events per year	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Expand Community Engagement

Activity Budget: \$4,000

Activity Description:

This activity will increase awareness of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) and the importance of prairie wetland ecosystems by engaging a broader and more diverse community. The two full-time Naturalist Educators will lead outreach efforts using multiple platforms, including social media, the PWLC and Friends of PWLC websites, flyers, posters, and in-person community events.

Tasks include creating and distributing informational materials, promoting programs and events, and attending local community gatherings, to connect participants with PWLC’s mission. Activities will be designed to appeal to diverse audiences and encourage ongoing participation in environmental education programs.

Outputs will include increased attendance at events, expanded digital engagement metrics (social media reach, website traffic), distribution of printed materials, and documented community interactions by 20%. These outputs will raise public awareness, enhance PWLC visibility, and foster community stewardship of local ecosystems.

Evaluation will include post-activity surveys, feedback forms, participation tracking, and analysis of digital engagement. Data collected will inform outreach strategies, ensuring programming is accessible and effective while reaching a diverse demographic over the three-year period.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Increase event attendance by 20%	June 30, 2030
Increase digital engagement by 20%	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Naomi Baucom	US Fish and Wildlife Service	Supervisory Ranger/Director of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. Supervises staff and oversees projects involving the PWLC. Will be providing the Friends with support, updates and progress reviews.	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.

Results, data, and products from all three activities will be shared widely to ensure engagement, utility, and long-term impact. Student journals, observation records, and program documentation will be used to inform participating schools, teachers, and students about seasonal ecological patterns and conservation practices. Community outreach, interpretive programs, and Visitor Center exhibits will provide public access to information, encouraging understanding and stewardship of prairie wetland ecosystems.

Digital dissemination will include updates via social media, the PWLC website, and email newsletters to reach a broader and more diverse audience. Printed materials, flyers, and posters will supplement in-person programs and events, supporting ongoing community engagement. Data and program outputs will also be shared with relevant Minnesota conservation agencies, educators, and environmental organizations to inform resource management and educational practices.

Long-term preservation of student work, interpretive materials, and program documentation will ensure these resources remain available for future educational use. Collectively, these dissemination efforts will promote environmental awareness, support behavior change toward conservation, and demonstrate the impact of the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund on local ecosystems and communities in Minnesota.

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?

This expanded programming and outreach will strengthen partnerships and increase community engagement, fostering broader support and sustainable funding to ensure the continuation of these new positions.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Micayla Nelson

Job Title: President of Friends of PWLC

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

As President and member of the grant writing committee for the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, I am in a position to manage the distribution of funds made available to the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center by this MN State Granting agency. The association of Friends groups was originally set up in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the purposes of providing environmental education programming and activities to the community of Fergus Falls and surrounding areas.

Organization: Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center

Organization Description:

Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center was established in 1990 after incorporation as a 501.c 3 with the State of Minnesota by way of the Office of the Secretary of State in accordance with the IRS and request for tax exempt status (EIN 41-1699443). Annual reports are submitted to the Minnesota Attorney General Office as required by the Minnesota Charitable Solicitation Act. As an incorporated group that is part of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Friends of PWLC exist to support the environmental programming of the National Wildlife Refuge System at the local level. As presented in the original Bylaws of this organization, its purpose (Article IV) is to establish, maintain, support, endow, and assist in operating in the City of Fergus Falls ... a learning center advocating the preservation of prairie wetlands and grasslands, promoting of general environmental education for all persons, entities, corporations, and interested parties; enhancing implementation of Prairie Wetlands Learning Center goals; enhancing awareness of the PWLC and soliciting community, regional, state, and federal support, including soliciting funds for the PWLC.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Naturalist Educator		Instruct students and visitors in environmental education and interpretation about prairie wetland ecosystem.			15%	3		\$151,000
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							Sub Total	\$302,000
Contracts and Services								
Molly Stoddard	Service Contract	Guest instructor #1 - Teaching in the outdoor classroom.				3		\$4,500
Mona Davis	Service Contract	Guest Instructor #2 - Teaching in the outdoor classroom				3		\$4,500
							Sub Total	\$9,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Field guides, office supplies, classroom educator supplies, field supplies to cover 24 summer events and 200 students throughout the school year.	To enhance learning in both indoor and outdoor settings.					\$9,000
							Sub Total	\$9,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								

	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	3 trips (1/year), 1200 miles, 2 people, lodging 24 nights (2 rooms/trip), per diem	Training					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Copies, booklets, flyers, posters for 24 summer events and for 200 students during the school year.	Advertising and promotion of workshops, events, and activities.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$328,000

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				
Cash	Friends of the Prairie Wetland Learning Center	The Friends of the PWLC will provide 100% of funds for the PWLC part-time administrator. The administrator will receive payments and track progress on reporting for ENRTF with USFWS Director of the PWLC, Naomi Baucom, and Micayla Nelson, President of the Friends of the PWLC.	Secured	\$8,000
In-Kind	US Fish & Wildlife Service, Fergus Falls Wetlands Management District, Prairie Wetlands Learning Center	USFWS will provide office space, equipment, and supplies for Naturalist Educators during their full-time employment at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. The value of supervision and mentoring of Naturalist Educators hired by the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center is not included in the in-kind estimate.	Secured	\$21,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$29,000
			Funds Total	\$29,000

Total Project Cost: \$357,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [cab3dfc2-041.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A page titled "Help the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center support these activities & events!" with graphics describing Summer Explorers Biology Camp, Teaching in the Outdoor Classroom Educator Workshop, and examples of student programming including nature journals and winter lessons on the prairie....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
FPWLC_2024_990-990EZ	9a83dea3-54a.pdf
FPWLC Business Filing Details	84b71806-6b5.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
2027 FPWLC Board Letter	61b083e7-ba3.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:

Kristine Askerooth, Friends of PWLC Board Member; Don Schultz, Friends of PWLC Board Member

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