



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-586

Proposal Title: Expanding Outdoor Leadership Through Minnesota's Natural Resources

Project Manager Information

Name: Anna Carlson

Organization: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Bemidji State University

Office Telephone: () -

Email: anna.carlson@bemidjistate.edu

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This project expands equitable access to Minnesota's lakes, forests, rivers, and public lands through field-based outdoor recreation and environmental education delivered by Bemidji State University's Outdoor Leadership Center.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$375,000

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, NE, Central,

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

Region(s): NW, NE, Central,

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.

Many Minnesotans, particularly students and residents in rural regions, face barriers to participating in outdoor recreation and environmental learning. In northern Minnesota, many forests, lakes, rivers, and trail systems that support environmental education are located outside city limits and are not accessible by fixed-route public transportation. Without reliable transportation or access to outdoor equipment, many individuals are unable to participate in field-based experiences that connect people to Minnesota's natural resources.

This access gap has implications for long-term stewardship. Direct experiences in natural environments are one of the most effective ways to build environmental literacy and responsible recreation habits. When individuals lack opportunities to engage with Minnesota's natural landscapes, it becomes more difficult to cultivate the knowledge, appreciation, and stewardship behaviors necessary to protect those resources.

Located in the Mississippi Headwaters region, Bemidji provides immediate access to forests, lakes, and public lands that make it an ideal setting for outdoor environmental education. Institutions such as Bemidji State University are uniquely positioned to serve as hubs connecting people to nearby land and water resources. However, recent budget constraints have reduced the availability of outdoor recreation programming and enrichment opportunities, limiting access to hands-on 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.

This project will expand the Outdoor Leadership Center's capacity at Bemidji State University to provide field-based outdoor recreation and environmental education experiences focused on Minnesota's natural resources.

Over a three-year period, the project will support student-led outdoor learning experiences that introduce participants to Minnesota ecosystems, responsible recreation practices, and stewardship principles. Activities will be based at Diamond Point Park and conducted at Minnesota lakes, forests, and public lands selected for their educational value. Undergraduate outdoor leadership interns and a graduate assistant will coordinate and deliver programming that connects participants to Minnesota's natural landscapes through structured outdoor experiences. Shared-use outdoor equipment and in-state transportation will reduce barriers to participation and ensure that individuals without personal gear or vehicles can access outdoor recreation opportunities.

These experiences will help develop future stewards of Minnesota's land and water resources by building environmental knowledge, stewardship values, and leadership skills through direct engagement with natural environments.

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?

Expected outcomes include:

- 250 participants engaged in field-based outdoor recreation and environmental education activities
- 30 outdoor learning experiences conducted at Minnesota natural resource sites
- 12 undergraduate outdoor leadership interns trained in environmental education and stewardship leadership
- Publicly available reports and implementation tools documenting a replicable model for expanding access to outdoor environmental education

Through repeated engagement with Minnesota's forests, lakes, and public lands, participants will develop environmental literacy and stewardship behaviors that support long-term protection and responsible use of Minnesota's natural resources.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Deliver Outdoor Recreation and Environmental Education Programming

Activity Budget: \$346,300

Activity Description:

Participants will engage in structured outdoor activities designed to build environmental literacy, stewardship awareness, and responsible recreation practices. Programming will take place at Minnesota natural-resource sites including regional lakes, forests, and public recreation areas, with activities designed to introduce participants to local ecosystems through direct, hands-on experience.

The program will include a mix of local field experiences and extended excursions to established environmental learning centers. For example, participants may take part in overnight or day-trip experiences at Deep Portage Learning Center, where they can engage in forest ecology, water studies, and outdoor skills development in a residential learning setting. Additional excursions to Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center will expose participants to North Shore ecosystems, including Lake Superior coastal environments, boreal forest systems, and climate-related ecological change.

Across all activities, undergraduate outdoor leadership interns will facilitate learning experiences that integrate environmental content with practical outdoor skills such as navigation, safety, and Leave No Trace practices. By combining local access with immersive destination-based learning, the program will provide participants with meaningful, place-based experiences that foster long-term stewardship of Minnesota’s natural resources.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Project staffing and intern cohort established	December 31, 2027
Outdoor equipment purchased and inventoried	March 31, 2028
Year 1 programming delivered	June 30, 2028
Year 2 programming delivered	June 30, 2029
Year 3 programming delivered	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Evaluate Participation and Environmental Learning

Activity Budget: \$14,000

Activity Description:

Evaluation activities will assess both participation outcomes and environmental learning impacts to ensure the project is effectively expanding access to Minnesota’s natural resources and building stewardship behaviors. Evaluation tools will be developed early in the project to establish consistent data collection across all program years.

Participation metrics will include the number of individuals served, frequency of engagement, and demographic indicators to better understand who is being reached. Evaluation will also document barriers addressed, including access to transportation, equipment, and prior outdoor experience. Pre- and post-participation surveys will be used to measure changes in participants’ confidence, knowledge, and ability to engage in outdoor recreation.

Environmental learning outcomes will focus on increases in environmental literacy, understanding of Minnesota ecosystems, and the adoption of responsible recreation practices, such as the Leave No Trace principles. Qualitative feedback, including participant reflections and instructor observations, will supplement quantitative data to provide a more complete understanding of program impact.

Annual summaries will be completed at the end of each program year to assess progress and inform any necessary adjustments. A final analysis will synthesize three years of data to evaluate overall effectiveness and identify key lessons learned. Findings will be incorporated into the final ENRTF report and

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Evaluation tools finalized	March 31, 2028
Year 1 outcomes summarized	July 31, 2028
Year 2 outcomes summarized	July 31, 2029
Final analysis completed	April 30, 2030
Final ENRTF report submitted	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Disseminate Results and Replicable Model

Activity Budget: \$14,700

Activity Description:

This activity will document project outcomes and translate lessons learned into practical resources for other Minnesota organizations to expand outdoor recreation and environmental education programming. Dissemination efforts will focus on creating clear, accessible materials that support replication in both rural and urban contexts.

Public-facing reports will summarize participation outcomes, environmental learning impacts, and strategies for reducing barriers to outdoor access. These reports will highlight key findings related to transportation, shared-use equipment, and student-led program delivery, with an emphasis on approaches that can be adapted by schools, universities, and community-based organizations.

In addition, the project will produce a structured implementation toolkit outlining program design, staffing models, safety protocols, partnership development, and evaluation methods. The toolkit will be designed as a practical guide for organizations to develop similar field-based outdoor learning programs connected to Minnesota’s natural resources.

Dissemination will include digital publication and targeted outreach to relevant networks across Minnesota. By sharing both outcomes and implementation tools, this activity will extend the impact of ENRTF funding beyond the project site and support broader efforts to increase environmental literacy, responsible recreation, and long-term stewardship of Minnesota’s land and water resources.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Dissemination plan finalized	December 31, 2028
Draft toolkit completed	December 31, 2029
Final report and toolkit published	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jerry Smith	Bemidji State University	Assistant Professor of Geography and Director of BSU's Outdoor Leadership Center	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.

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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?

After the grant period, Bemidji State University's Outdoor Leadership Center will sustain programming using the equipment, partnerships, and field-based model established through this project. ENRTF funds will create the foundational infrastructure, shared-use equipment, and evaluation framework needed to demonstrate demand and refine delivery. Project outcomes, tools, and lessons learned will be documented and shared to support replication across Minnesota. Ongoing staffing and program expansion will be supported through non-ENRTF sources, including university funding, philanthropy, and future grants. All purchased equipment will remain dedicated to outdoor recreation and environmental education, in alignment with ENRTF requirements.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Fond du Lac Deer Study - Phase 1	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 03a	\$1,441,000
Moving Minnesota towards a Lead-Free Sporting Future	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05r	\$250,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Anna Carlson

Job Title: Assistant Professor

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

Anna Carlson is a community-engaged planner, educator, and program developer with extensive experience leading interdisciplinary initiatives that advance environmental stewardship, community resilience, and equitable access to resources. As a faculty member in Geography at Bemidji State University and a leader within the School of Sustainability and Life Sciences, she brings a strong foundation in applied planning, partnership development, and program implementation.

Carlson has played a central role in designing and launching innovative, place-based programs that connect academic learning with community impact. She co-founded the Outdoor Leadership Center at Bemidji State University, where she helped secure \$110,000 in Industry Sector Funding to establish the program, develop a new certificate curriculum, hire and supervise student staff, and build the operational infrastructure needed to deliver outdoor education and leadership training. Her work emphasizes reducing barriers to participation and ensuring programs are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to regional needs.

In addition to her work in outdoor leadership, Carlson is actively engaged in regional planning efforts, including leading components of the City of Bemidji's Comprehensive Plan update and collaborating with community partners on initiatives related to housing, sustainability, and climate resilience. She has a demonstrated track record of working across sectors to align institutional resources with community priorities and to translate planning concepts into actionable programs.

Carlson's approach integrates strategic vision with practical implementation, combining grant writing, stakeholder engagement, curriculum development, and evaluation. Her leadership ensures that projects are not only well-designed but also grounded in community context and positioned for long-term sustainability. Through this project, she brings the experience and capacity necessary to successfully manage partnerships, deliver high-quality programming, and document outcomes that can inform broader replication across Minnesota.

Organization: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities - Bemidji State University

Organization Description:

Bemidji State University (BSU) is a regional public university in northern Minnesota committed to place-based education, community engagement, and environmental stewardship. Located on the shores of Lake Bemidji and surrounded by extensive forests, lakes, and public lands, BSU integrates the region's natural assets into its teaching, research, and outreach.

Within BSU, the School of Sustainability and Life Sciences houses the Outdoor Leadership Center (OLC), which delivers applied outdoor education and leadership development. The OLC provides field-based learning experiences that connect students and community members to Minnesota's natural environments while building skills in responsible recreation, safety, and environmental stewardship. Undergraduate students serve as trained leaders and instructors, gaining hands-on experience in facilitating activities such as paddling, camping, hiking, and environmental interpretation.

The OLC emphasizes equitable access to outdoor experiences by reducing barriers related to transportation, equipment, and experience level. Through partnerships with local schools, community organizations, and public agencies, the program delivers inclusive programming that reflects regional needs and priorities.

By aligning academic programs with community-based outdoor education, BSU and the Outdoor Leadership Center contribute to workforce development, environmental literacy, and expanded access to Minnesota's natural resources, serving as a regional hub for outdoor leadership and stewardship.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Faculty		Faculty will provide training, mentorship, evaluation support, and supervision to all activities.			22%	0.78		\$91,000
4 Undergraduate Interns		Outdoor Leadership Interns will be responsible for designing, facilitating, implementing, and leading outdoor experiences.			0%	6		\$122,000
Graduate Assistant		The Graduate Assistant will be responsible for leading the evaluation and assessment portion of this project as well as assist in the leadership, development, and facilitation of the outdoor experiences.			0%	1.5		\$72,000
							Sub Total	\$285,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Outdoor equipment associated with outdoor activities including, bikes, snowshoes, skis, ski poles, backpacks, paddles, sleeping bags, tents, sleeping pads, stoves, and first aid kits.	Provide equipment to engage in a variety of outdoor activities and build skills in planning and executing outdoor excursions safely and responsibly.					\$36,000
	Tools and Supplies	Consumables and Maintenance items, including camp food, and replacement parts for equipment	Support the successful implementation of outdoor activities					\$9,000
							Sub Total	\$45,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Instate Vehicle rentals and mileage reimbursement for three main trips per year for 15 people and 3 shorter excursions each year for 30 people	Primary transportation strategies for transporting participants and gear to Minnesota field sites.					\$30,000
							Sub Total	\$30,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Storytelling and Evaluation Support	Video, Audio, and Photographic expertise to assist in telling the stories of our participants and evaluating the experiences and effectiveness of our programs.					\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$15,000
							Grand Total	\$375,000

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: \$375,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [598f97a7-540.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

This one pager describes BSU's Outdoor Leadership Center...

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Budget Supplement	565608d2-d05.xlsx

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:

Jeanna Trisko, Bemidji State University

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

N/A