

# Final Abstract

Final Report Approved on July 30, 2024

## M.L. 2020 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2024

**Project Title:** Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals

**Project Manager:** Deborah Loon

**Affiliation:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust Inc

**Mailing Address:** 3815 East American Boulevard

**City/State/Zip:** Bloomington, MN 55425

**Phone:** (612) 801-1935

**E-mail:** dloon@mnvalleytrust.org

**Website:** <http://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>

**Funding Source:**

**Fiscal Year:**

**Legal Citation:** M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05d

**Appropriation Amount:** \$500,000

**Amount Spent:** \$500,000

**Amount Remaining:** -

### Sound bite of Project Outcomes and Results

“Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals” employed 16 emerging professionals in full-time developmental positions over two years on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Participants worked alongside USFWS professionals in conservation biology, visitor services, community outreach and environmental education as they learned, built skills, and explored conservation careers.

### Overall Project Outcome and Results

Four participants became integral members of the team through their two-year apprenticeships at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The two Conservation Biology Apprentices co-led the design and implementation of numerous habitat projects, conducted biological surveys, assisted with educational programs on the Refuge, and helped write an environmental assessment. The two apprentices in Visitor Services and Outreach coordinated the Refuge’s social media and website, helped manage visitor centers, planned events, delivered interpretive programs and engaged community partners.

Twelve participants held one-year internships in Environmental Education (EE) through the project (four each during

three terms September 2021 – May 2024). The Educators delivered programming to 6,500 students, families, and teachers annually on the Refuge, in the schools and libraries, and (during the pandemic) virtually. They supported partner schools and teachers, coordinated volunteers, co-led interpretive programs, and engaged the public in the visitor centers and on Refuge trails.

A core objective and outcome of Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals is to enable interns and apprentices to explore career opportunities in the conservation field. They participate in numerous trainings, build skills, shadow and network with professionals in the field. Through this project, most participants identified their desired professional future and secured their next opportunity, which included permanent positions with a federal, state or nonprofit conservation agency, or admission to a graduate program in the conservation field.

As FWS match, the Refuge's High School Internship program (DUCKS) engaged 36 students in paid internships (part-time during the school year and full-time during the summers). Interns were introduced to the conservation field through numerous and varied activities, including ice fishing, snowshoeing, paddling, Refuge education programs, native seed collection, invasive species removal, and job shadowing.

### **Project Results Use and Dissemination**

The Minnesota Valley Trust's website (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>) prominently features the "Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals" program and funding from the ENRTF, as recommended by the LCCMR.

Recruitment materials for the internship and apprenticeship opportunities are available on the Trust (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>) and Refuge websites, as well as through Refuge social media and partner organizations.

A program led by our Community Outreach Apprentice that connected new Minnesotans to nature through fishing was featured in the following Minnesota Public Radio News -- <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/09/13/new-program-connects-english-language-classes-with-minnesotas-green-spaces>.



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2020 Approved Final Report

### General Information

**Date:** November 18, 2024

**ID Number:** 2020-038

**Staff Lead:** Michael Varien

**Project Title:** Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals

**Project Budget:** \$500,000

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Deborah Loon

**Organization:** Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust Inc

**Office Telephone:** (612) 801-1935

**Email:** dloon@mnvalleytrust.org

**Web Address:** <http://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>

### Project Reporting

**Final Report Approved:** July 30, 2024

**Reporting Status:** Project Completed

**Date of Last Action:** July 30, 2024

**Project Completion:** June 30, 2024

### Legal Information

**Legal Citation:** M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05d

**Appropriation Language:** \$500,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc., to provide paid internships and apprenticeships for diverse young people to learn about careers in the conservation field from United States Fish and Wildlife Service professionals while working at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District.

**Appropriation End Date:** June 30, 2024



## Narrative

**Project Summary:** Internships and apprenticeships on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District will introduce 40 diverse young people over two years to careers in the conservation field.

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

As one of just 14 urban wildlife refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District is charged with engaging the next generation of youth who, for a variety of reasons, are not connected to outdoors and nature. This is critical to ensuring a future constituency passionate about protecting our public lands, as well as encouraging a diversity of youth to consider conservation careers.

The Refuge offers vast opportunities for Twin Cities residents to connect with wildlife, learn about their habitats and enjoy nature-based recreation. Given its location and varied habitats, the Refuge and District is able to serve as a learning laboratory and training site for future conservationists, natural resource biologists and environmental educators. Currently, this is done through a handful of unpaid internships every year. However, with the rising costs of a college education and intransigent economic disparities, many students cannot afford unpaid internships. This is especially true for young people of color and low-income. Students often must take jobs outside of their chosen field to pay for college or help support their families. Without good internships, they do not gain experience and connections needed to compete for quality jobs.

**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.**

We will build an extensive program of summer internships and full-time apprenticeship opportunities on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District. This grant program will attract students with diverse backgrounds, introduce them to the conservation field and provide mentorship and job skills to these future resource professionals. The participants will be given paid positions and the opportunity to work side-by-side with and learn from USFWS professionals and other conservation partners. They will design and deliver environmental education programs, plan and co-lead wildlife interpretive and nature-based activities, assist USFWS personnel with habitat restoration and enhancement projects, conduct biological surveys, develop and maintain visitor use amenities, and explore conservation-related career options. Some of the participants will experience outdoor activities like fishing, paddling, orienteering, birding and hunting for the first time.

The ENRTF grant will fund 7 full-time positions -- 3 two-year apprenticeships (Refuge Biology, Community Outreach and Visitor Services) and 4 one-year Teaching Internships (8 over 2 years).

Other non-ENRTF sources will fund a two-year apprenticeship in Wetland Management District Operations, 12 high school internships on the Refuge's two-year SEAK Green Team, 5 summer internships in Biology, Maintenance and Visitor Services, and a full-time Intern Coordinator.

**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 internship and apprenticeship program will introduce 40 young people over 2 years to careers in the conservation field (11 with grant funds and 29 with other funds). They will explore conservation career options, then be able to compete for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. Through mentorship, we will build a diverse pool of conservationists who will contribute to protecting, restoring and enhancing Minnesota's natural resources. Their 50,000 hours of service will enhance over 600 acres of prairie, wetland and forest, and introduce thousands of children to the wonders of the natural world through environmental education and nature-based recreation.

## Project Location

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

Statewide

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

Statewide

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: 3 Full-Time Apprentices will work alongside USFWS personnel and gain hands-on experience in Biology, Community Outreach and Visitor Services

**Activity Budget:** \$225,000

**Activity Description:**

3 recent college graduates will have full-time paid apprenticeships with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge for 2 years each. They will work with and be mentored by USFWS professionals. The Refuge Biology Apprentice will build skills in biological monitoring, habitat restoration and enhancement planning and implementation, visitor engagement, and balancing needs of wildlife and visitors. The Community Outreach Apprentice will develop and present engaging outreach programs to urban and suburban youth and families on the Refuge and in the community, develop new partnerships to reach urban youth, and attend community events and festivals to engage urban audiences in nature-based activities. The Visitor Services Apprentice will increase visitor trips to and experiences on the Refuge through strategic communications and marketing, improved visitor experience tools (e.g., interpretation, education, equipment) and enhanced signage.

Other funds will support a District Operations Apprentice who will do biological monitoring, plan and implement habitat restoration and enhancement projects, and develop, construct and maintain visitor use amenities on the Wetland Management District.

As full-time employees of the Minnesota Valley Trust, apprentices will be paid \$15.50/hour (wage will increase \$0.50/hour/year), covered by workers compensation insurance and eligible for benefits.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
3 Apprentices complete 12 months	August 31, 2022
3 Apprentices complete 12 months	August 31, 2023

### Activity 2: 4 Full-Time Environmental Education Teaching Interns will broaden their understanding of environmental education and build their teaching skills

**Activity Budget:** \$275,000

**Activity Description:**

4 recent college graduates at a time will have one-year paid Environmental Education Teaching experiences on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (8 total interns over 2 years). They will learn from and be mentored by USFWS professionals, design and deliver quality environmental educational programs to over 4,000 children, teachers and families who visit the Refuge from schools throughout the Twin Cities metro area, and lead interpretive programs for the public on the Refuge. The interns will be paid \$15.50/hour as full-time employees of the Minnesota Valley Trust (wage will increase \$0.50/hour/year). They will be covered by workers compensation insurance and provided employment benefits.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
4 Teaching Practicum Interns complete year 1	August 31, 2022
4 Teaching Practicum Interns complete year 2	August 31, 2023





## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Sarena Selbo	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District	Supervise, support and engage the interns and apprentices as they design and deliver environmental education programs, plan and co-lead wildlife interpretive and nature-based activities, assist USFWS personnel with habitat restoration and enhancement projects, conduct biological surveys, improve visitor facilities, and explore conservation-related career options.	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.**

Minnesota Valley Trust and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge will share information about our Internship and Apprenticeship Program and the ENRTF grant through our websites, social media and news releases.

Postings about the new positions will be broadly disseminated for recruitment of youth participants, including through secondary and post-secondary schools with highly diverse student populations, local culturally-specific media outlets, community partners, job boards, websites and social media.

## 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 Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge & Wetland Management District are committed to maintaining this robust internship and apprenticeship program for the long-term. Future funding will be sought through philanthropic efforts with foundations, corporations, civic organizations and individuals by the Trust and Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, as well as through other state and federal sources of funds (e.g., workforce grant programs).

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Metro Conservation Corridors Phase VIII - Priority Expansion of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 09g	\$500,000

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount	\$ Amount Spent	\$ Amount Remaining
<b>Personnel</b>										
Refuge Visitor Services Apprentice		1 Apprentice will work with the Refuge Visitor Services team for 2 years to increase public use and enjoyment of the Refuge through strategic communications and marketing, enhanced public use materials and tools, and improved signage. The grant will fund wages and payroll taxes, while workers compensation and benefits will be covered by other funds.			0%	2		\$75,000	-	-
Refuge Biology Apprentices		1 Apprentice will work with the Refuge Biologist for 2 years and 1 Apprentice will work with District Biologist for 1 year to conduct biological monitoring, assist with designing and implementing habitat restoration and enhancement activities, and engage with volunteers. The grant will fund wages and payroll taxes, while workers compensation and benefits will be covered by other private funds.			0%	3		\$120,000	-	-
Community Outreach Apprentice		1 Apprentice will work with the Community Outreach team to develop and present engaging outreach programs to urban and suburban youth and families on the Refuge and in the community, develop new partnerships to reach urban youth, and attend community events and festivals to engage urban audiences in nature-based activities. The grant will fund wages and payroll taxes, while workers compensation and benefits will be covered by other funds.			0%	1		\$30,000	-	-
Environmental Education		4 Interns per year for 2 years will work with the Refuge Environmental Education team to design and deliver			0%	8		\$275,000	-	-

Teaching Interns		environmental education programming to 8,000 students, teachers and parents each year, as well as interpretive programming to the public. The grant will fund wages and payroll taxes for the interns. Other private funds will pay for workers compensation and benefits.								
							Sub Total	\$500,000	\$500,000	-
Contracts and Services										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Capital Expenditures										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Travel In Minnesota										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Travel Outside Minnesota										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Printing and Publication										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Other Expenses										

							<b>Sub Total</b>	-	-	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	-

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount	\$ Amount Spent	\$ Amount Remaining
<b>State</b>						
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-	-	-
<b>Non-State</b>						
Cash	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.	Minnesota Valley Trust will fund the District Operations Apprentice for 1 year and the Lead Environmental Educator Intern, as well as 25-30% of the Intern Coordinator position (70-75% is funded by USFWS through cooperative agreement). The Trust also will fund the workers compensation insurance and benefits for the 7 positions funded by the ENRTF grant (Refuge Biology Apprentices, Community Outreach Apprentice, Visitor Services Apprentice and 4 Environmental Education Teaching Interns).	Secured	\$200,000	\$200,000	-
Cash	US Fish and Wildlife Service, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	USFWS will fund the SEAK Green Team Interns and 3 Summer Interns through cooperative agreements with the American Conservation Experience and Hispanic Access Foundation respectively. USFWS also will fund 70-75% of the Intern Coordinator position through a cooperative agreement with the Minnesota Valley Trust.	Secured	\$300,000	\$300,000	-
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	-
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	-

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [1a0aef3f-e92.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

The attachment is a map showing the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District boundaries and units....

#### *Financial Capacity*

File: [c84b0ee9-bdd.pdf](#)

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution	<a href="#">676f48ad-2bc.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Background Check Certification Form	<a href="#">dceb8b70-60f.pdf</a>

## Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

### *Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage*

We shortened the length from 3 years to 2 years. We also reduced the number of participants.

## Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

**Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?**

N/A

**Do you agree travel expenses must 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



## Work Plan Amendments

Amendment ID	Request Type	Changes made on the following pages	Explanation & justification for Amendment Request (word limit 75)	Date Submitted	Approved	Date of LCCMR Action
1	Amendment Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget - Personnel</li> <li>• Budget - Non-ENRTF Funds Contributed</li> </ul>	<p>Our Community Outreach Apprentice left the position after 1 year, as she was offered a fulltime permanent position at the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization to lead its high school internship program. We request approval to fund the second Biology Apprentice with the grant in 2023. This does not change the planned FTEs that are funded by the grant.</p>	January 30, 2023	Yes	January 30, 2023

# Status Update Reporting

## Final Status Update August 14, 2024

**Date Submitted:** July 16, 2024

**Date Approved:** July 30, 2024

### Overall Update

Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals” achieved objectives and ended December 31, 2023. The project employed 16 emerging professionals in full-time developmental positions on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Participants worked alongside USFWS professionals to learn, build skills, and explore conservation careers.

Four participants started two-year apprenticeships in January 2022, two each in Conservation Biology and Visitor Services and Outreach. As integral members of the Refuge team, the apprentices participated in outreach program design and delivery, visitor engagement, restoration design, fieldwork and more.

Twelve participants held one-year internships in Environmental Education (EE) over the course of the project (four each September 2021 – August 2022, September 2022 – August 2023, and September 2023 – May 2024 (grant funding ended December 2023)). Interns delivered programming to 6,500 students annually.

As FWS cash match, the Refuge’s High School Internship program (DUCKS) engaged 36 students in paid internships (part-time during the school year and full-time during the summers). Interns were introduced to the conservation field through numerous and varied activities, including ice fishing, snowshoeing, paddling, co-leading education programs, native seed collection, invasive species removal, and job shadowing.

This project exceeded pledged matches with MVT at \$233,421 and FWS \$579,278.

### Activity 1

Four apprentices held full-time apprenticeships starting in January 2022. Fully integrated into the Refuge team, they participated in and assumed leadership roles for many projects.

Melisa Rodriguez, Visitor Services Apprentice, coordinated the Refuge’s social media and website, helped manage visitor centers, planned events, and delivered interpretive programs. In fall 2023, Melisa secured a permanent USFWS position as a Park Ranger at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge.

Mary Yang, Community Outreach Apprentice, engaged community partners during her apprenticeship. She led a program that connected new Minnesotans to nature through fishing, which was featured by MPR News. In late 2022, Mary secured a permanent position with Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

Dana Duran and Theresa Garrison, Conservation Biology Apprentices, co-led the design and implementation of numerous habitat projects, conducted biological surveys, assisted with educational programs on the Refuge, and helped write an environmental assessment. In fall 2023, Dana secured a permanent USFWS position as a Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho. Theresa’s apprenticeship was extended to August 2024 (not grant funded in 2024). She begins a graduate program at the University of Minnesota this fall, where she will continue research on the Refuge's oak savanna restorations.

*(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)*

## **Activity 2**

Twelve young professionals held one-year internships in Environmental Education (EE) over the course of this grant. The Educators annually delivered EE programming to 6,500 students, families, and teachers on the Refuge, in the schools and libraries, and (during the pandemic) virtually.

Additional projects Educators led included updating and translating a handout welcoming partner school families to the Refuge, strengthening relationships with MN Green Corps and MN PCA's Get the Lead Out, developing self-guided Bird Bingo activity sheets at visitor center bird feeders, and developing an introductory photography program for high schoolers.

Educators participated in first aid/CPR training, prescribed burns, other habitat enhancement activities on the Refuge, and other USFWS trainings. They attended the Minnesota Naturalists' Association Conference and a BEETLES training by Three Rivers Park District to better understand that approach to environmental education.

Each Educator assumed leadership responsibilities to deliver on the Refuge's goals. They supported school partnerships and partner teachers, coordinated volunteers, and engaged with the public in the visitor centers and on Refuge trails.

Many Interns successfully obtained permanent federal positions (e.g., Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, White River National Forest) and with partner conservation nonprofits.

*(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)*

## **Dissemination**

The Minnesota Valley Trust's website (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>) prominently features the "Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals" program and funding from the ENRTF, as recommended by the LCCMR.

Recruitment materials for the internship and apprenticeship opportunities are available on the Trust (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>) and Refuge websites, as well as through Refuge social media and partner organizations.

Find the above-mentioned MPR story here -- <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/09/13/new-program-connects-english-language-classes-with-minnesotas-green-spaces>

# Status Update Reporting

## Status Update February 1, 2024

**Date Submitted:** February 2, 2024

**Date Approved:** February 5, 2024

### Overall Update

Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals” has achieved the grant objectives. Since fall 2021, it has employed 16 emerging professionals in full-time developmental positions on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Participants worked alongside USFWS professionals to learn, build skills, and explore conservation careers.

During July through December 2023:

Three apprentices continued their two-year apprenticeships (started January 2022) in Conservation Biology, Visitor Services and Outreach. Two apprentices concluded their terms in fall 2023, as they successfully obtained permanent positions within the USFWS.

In summer-fall 2023, we said goodbye to the four environmental education (EE) interns whose positions started September 2022 and welcomed a new cohort of three interns for nine-month positions starting September 2023. An additional EE Lead (MVT cash match) rounded out both teams. The EE interns deliver programming to 6,500 students annually.

The Refuge’s High School Internship program (FWS cash match) engaged 12 students in a 9-week full-time, paid summer internship, which started in June 2023 on the Refuge and concluded with a week in the BWCA. The program then recruited 12 students for paid internships for the 2023-24 school year.

This project exceeded the pledged matches with MVT at \$233,421 and FWS \$579,278.

### Activity 1

Three apprentices continued their full-time apprenticeships at the Refuge that started in January 2022. Fully integrated into the Refuge team, they participated in and assumed leadership roles for many projects. July – December highlights for the apprentices included:

Melisa Rodriguez, the Visitor Services and Outreach Apprentice, coordinated the Refuge’s social media and website, helped manage the visitor centers and played a key role planning events and delivering interpretive programs on the Refuge.

Dana Duran and Theresa Garrison, the Conservation Biology Apprentices, co-led the design and implementation of numerous habitat enhancement projects with FWS colleagues, conducted biological surveys, assisted with public educational programs on the Refuge, co-led CCMI crew projects, and assisted with writing an environmental assessment.

With their Public Lands Corps certificates in hand, Melisa and Dana both pursued and were offered permanent positions within the USFWS. In fall 2023, Melisa became a Park Ranger at Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge and Dana became a Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge (both in Idaho).

Theresa’s apprenticeship has been extended to August 2023, when she will start a graduate program at the University of

Minnesota and continue her work and research on the Refuge's oak savanna restorations.

*(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)*

## **Activity 2**

During the July – December 2023 period, 3 environmental education (EE) interns and 1 EE Lead delivered in-person programming to 2,687 students from 8 schools, both on the Refuge and in the schools. Additional projects in which the educators played key roles included updating and translating a handout welcoming partner school families to the Refuge, strengthening our relationship with MN Green Corps to bring volunteers to the Refuge EE programming, and developing self-guided Bird Bingo activity sheets at visitor center bird feeders.

All interns attended the Minnesota Naturalists' Association Conference in November at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. Throughout October and early November, two educators participated in a multi-session BEETLES training led by staff from Three Rivers Park District to better understand that philosophy and approach to environmental education.

Each educator assumed leadership responsibilities to deliver on the Refuge's education and partnership goals. They support school partnerships and partner teachers, coordinate volunteers and engage with the public in the visitor centers and on Refuge trails.

The interns who finished their positions successfully obtained permanent positions within the federal government (Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, White River National Forest) and with a partner nonprofit (Wilderness Inquiry).

*(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)*

## **Dissemination**

The Minnesota Valley Trust's website (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>) prominently features the "Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals" program and funding from the ENRTF, as recommended by the LCCMR.

Recruitment materials for the internship and apprenticeship opportunities are available on the Trust (<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>) and Refuge websites, as well as through Refuge social media and partner organizations.

# Status Update Reporting

## Status Update August 1, 2023

**Date Submitted:** August 1, 2023

**Date Approved:** September 5, 2023

### Overall Update

Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals” launched in fall 2021. The Minnesota Valley Trust employs eight emerging professionals who work alongside staff of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to learn, build skills and explore careers in conservation.

January through June 2023 highlights include:

Three apprentices continued their two-year apprenticeships that started January 2022. They are integrated into Refuge teams in Conservation Biology, Visitor Services and Outreach.

Four environmental education interns continued their one-year positions that started September 2022. An additional environmental education lead (MVT cash match) rounded out the team. They deliver programming as integral members of the Refuge’s Environmental Education team to 6,500 students annually.

In January 2023, the apprentices and interns worked with their USFWS supervisors and the Internship Coordinator (cash match) to create Individual Development Plans. They identified career, training and skill-building objectives to pursue during the balance of their time at the Refuge.

The Refuge’s High School Internship program (FWS cash match) engaged 12 students in paid internships through the 2022-23 school year. Monthly activities included ice fishing, snowshoeing, and co-leading education programs. The program then recruited 12 students (6 continued) for a 9-week full-time, paid summer internship, which started in June 2023.

### Activity 1

During the January – June 2023 period, three apprentices continued their full-time apprenticeships at the Refuge that started in January 2022. They have participated in and assumed leadership roles of many projects on the Refuge and its Wetland Management District. Highlights for the apprentices during the January – June 2023 period included the following:

Melisa Rodriguez, the Visitor Services and Outreach Apprentice, leads the Refuge’s social media, coordinates the development and maintenance of the Refuge’s new website and helps manage the visitor centers. She played a key role working with community partners to plan for the Refuge’s biggest event of the year, Latino Conservation Week Festival.

Dana Duran and Theresa Garrison, the two Conservation Biology Apprentices, are involved in numerous habitat restoration and management projects and are each co-leading the design and implementation of a habitat enhancement project with a FWS colleague. They have been developing their skills in leading biological surveys, educating the public, and operating heavy equipment. In February, they attended the 2023 annual meeting for the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society, where they networked with professionals and presented posters on the ongoing oak savanna restoration (Theresa) and prairie restoration seeding techniques (Dana).

### Activity 2

During the January – June 2023 period, four environmental education interns (educators) delivered or facilitated in-

person programming to 4,854 students from 18 schools, both on the Refuge and in the schools.

Additional projects in which the educators played key roles included developing and translating a chaperone's expectation document to bolster and strengthen participation, strengthening our relationship with MN PCA's Get the Lead Out to involve them on our fishing field trips, developing an introductory photography program for high schoolers for a partner organization called CORE, and designing engaging flyers to help recruit for open positions on the larger Refuge team. Three educators participated in first aid/CPR training and one educator became a Certified Interpretive Guide through the National Association of Interpretation.

Each educator assumed primary leadership responsibility to deliver on the Refuge's education and partnership goals. They manage school partnerships, support partner teachers and engage with the public in the Bloomington Visitor Center and on Refuge trails.

As cash match, one intern from the 21-22 cohort served as Environmental Education Lead, providing guidance and mentorship to the educators while simultaneously gaining leadership experience, exploring future career paths and developing new skills.

### **Dissemination**

We have been recruiting for our next cohort of Environmental Education Interns to start late August 2023 -- <https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>

# Status Update Reporting

## Status Update October 1, 2022

**Date Submitted:** October 5, 2022

**Date Approved:** October 24, 2022

### Overall Update

The Minnesota Valley Trust (Trust) and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) launched “Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals” in fall 2021. The Trust employs eight emerging professionals who work alongside Refuge staff, lead projects, explore careers in conservation and engage in professional development.

Four apprentices continued their two-year, full-time apprenticeships that started January 2022. They are integrated into Refuge teams in Conservation Biology, Community Outreach and Visitor Services.

In August 2022, our first cohort of four environmental education interns completed their one-year internships. They were replaced by the second cohort for September 2022 – August 2023 and are integral to the Refuge’s Environmental Education team.

Our Internship Coordinator (cash match) leads recruitment, training and support of interns and apprentices through monthly workshops and outings, as well as networking and shadowing opportunities with USFWS staff and partners.

The Refuge engaged 19 students in its paid High School Internship program (cash match) for the 2021-22 school year and full-time for nine weeks in summer 2022. Interns engage in native seed collection, invasives removal, trash cleanup, community outreach, career readiness skill-building, conservation career exploration and outdoor recreation. A kayaking trip in the Apostle Islands was a highlight for the full-time summer interns.

### Activity 1

During this reporting period, the four apprentices continued their full-time apprenticeships at the Refuge that started in January 2022. They have participated in many projects, as well as assumed leadership roles for projects integral to the Refuge’s mission.

The Visitor Services Apprentice leads the Refuge’s social media and assists with development of a new website, as well as management of the visitor centers. The Outreach Apprentice has been engaged in many programs in the community and was tagged to lead a program with partners that connects new Minnesotans to nature through fishing. This program was featured in a MPR article in which our apprentice was interviewed and funding by LCCMR / ENRTF was featured.

The two Conservation Biology Apprentices have been involved in numerous habitat restoration and management projects, including an effort that enhanced 230 acres of grasslands habitat. They are now planning and executing their own habitat enhancement projects with support of USFWS Biologists, which includes developing work scopes, issuing RFPs and overseeing contractors.

The apprentices meet monthly as a cohort with the Internship Coordinator for professional development workshops, outdoor recreation and community-based experiences. They are beginning to leverage their growing network to explore opportunities in the conservation field.

### Activity 2

During the April – September 2022 period, the environmental education interns (educators) delivered programming,



both virtually and in-person, to 950 students from 5 schools. They also developed new interpretive programs that connected 150 new visitors to the Refuge.

In addition, the educators worked collaboratively with their USFWS supervisor to build a professional development plan. Each of them assumed primary leadership responsibility of a focus area to deliver on the Refuge's education and partnership goals (e.g., managing school partnerships and coordinating large-scale community events). These activities were paired with monthly professional development sessions with our Internship Coordinator.

The internships for our first cohort ended in early September 2022, while the second cohort started in late August after a robust recruitment effort over the summer. The two cohorts overlapped for one week of orientation. One member of the first cohort extended their employment with the Trust into December to assist with training and guiding the new cohort of educators.

### **Dissemination**

The Minnesota Valley Trust's website prominently features the "Mentoring the Next Generation" program and funding from the ENRTF:

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>.

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/news>

Recruitment flyers for the internship and apprenticeship opportunities are available on the Trust website through the above links.

Find the above-mentioned MPR story here -- <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/09/13/new-program-connects-english-language-classes-with-minnesotas-green-spaces>

# Status Update Reporting

## Status Update April 1, 2022

**Date Submitted:** May 2, 2022

**Date Approved:** May 3, 2022

### Overall Update

In Fall 2021, the Minnesota Valley Trust (Trust) and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) launched their expanded internship and apprenticeship program, "Mentoring the Next Generation of Conservation Professionals." Four Environmental Education Teaching Interns started one-year, full-time internships in September 2021. Four Apprentices started two-year, full-time apprenticeships in January 2022. All are integrated into Refuge teams in Environmental Education, Biology, Outreach and Visitor Services.

Our Internship Coordinator (cash match) leads recruitment, onboarding, training and support of the interns and apprentices. Support includes monthly professional development seminars and a mentorship program where apprentices are paired with Refuge staff and provided opportunities for networking.

Wages and taxes for seven positions are funded by the ENRTF grant. The Trust funds the eighth position and benefits for all, including paid time off, health and dental insurance, life and disability insurance, workers compensation insurance and retirement plan match (cash match).

The Refuge also created a High School Internship program (cash match to be included in next report). During the 2021-22 school year, 12 students from Burnsville, Richfield and St. Paul schools are engaged in monthly career discovery, restoration and recreation activities. Recruitment is underway for the summer 2022 paid internships.

### Activity 1

Following a robust recruitment effort in the Fall of 2021, four apprentices started their two-year, full-time apprenticeships at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District (Refuge) on January 24, 2022. Three positions are funded by the ENRTF grant and one is funded by the Minnesota Valley Trust (Trust).

The apprentices are Trust employees and active members of the following teams at the Refuge – two apprentices work alongside Refuge Biologists, one apprentice is on the Refuge's Community Outreach team, and one is on the Visitor Services team.

Through daily guidance from US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) professionals, apprentices have gained necessary on-the-job skills through trainings such as herbicide application, prescribed wildfire and heavy equipment operation. They are completing plant surveys, helping plan habitat enhancement activities, communicating with the public through the Refuge's website and social media channels, planning community outreach programs and more.

Monthly check-ins with the Internship Coordinator provide a supportive environment to hone interpersonal and project management skills. Through the support of their mentor, apprentices are broadening their professional network and gaining exposure to a variety of career pathways in the USFWS.

### Activity 2

Following a robust recruitment effort in the Spring of 2021, four teaching interns started their one-year, full-time internships at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) on September 7, 2021.

The interns are Minnesota Valley Trust (Trust) employees and integral members of the Refuge's Environmental Education team. They plan and lead lessons and activities that are delivered to thousands of school children each year. Programming is provided virtually and in-person, both at school locations and at the Refuge's two visitor centers in Bloomington and Carver. In the seven-month period September 2021 through March 2022, the teaching interns delivered educational programming to 7,000 students from 15 schools.

In addition, the teaching interns worked collaboratively with their USFWS supervisor to build a professional development plan. Each intern selected a focus area to support education delivery and partnership support. Monthly learning opportunities are created for them to study outdoor learning pedagogy and natural resources management.

### **Dissemination**

The Minnesota Valley Trust recently launched a new website that prominently features the "Mentoring the Next Generation" program and funding from the ENRTF:

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/>.

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/careers>

<https://www.mnvalleytrust.org/news>

Recruitment flyers for the internship and apprenticeship opportunities are available on the Trust website through the above links.