**PROJECT TITLE: Jay C. Hormel Nature Center Supplemental Teaching Staff**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

Following completion of a new Interpretive Center in 2017, demand for school, children’s and family programs has increased at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center (HNC). Schools that do not make early requests are turned away. This project will expand the HNC environmental education program to surrounding communities in greater Mower County and southeast Minnesota by funding a new teacher/naturalist for 3 years and one intern per year for three years. Those employees would be tasked with scheduling up to 80 additional school groups (over 1600 students) and 15 additional summer programs for each of the three years of this grant, proving that the demand exists for such programming.

Since 1988, HNC has provided environmental education curricula to *every* Austin Public or private school student for the first eight years of their education, K – 7th grades. This grant would expand that opportunity to more schools in the surrounding area. In 2018, HNC staff provided 172 classes to 4,961 students from Austin and other public/private schools. Programs are made possible by partnerships between the City of Austin, schools, The Hormel Foundation, the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center, and other local nonprofits. Curricula were developed by the former Director in conjunction with local science teachers to meet state standards. Currently, we are not able to expand the environmental education programs because we are limited by staffing resources, as each class requires two teachers; a full-time staff member and an intern.

In 2017, the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center opened a new interpretive center that more than doubled our teaching and exhibit spaces. It was funded by the Hormel Foundation, Friends of the Hormel Nature Center, the City of Austin, the Hormel Foods Charitable Trust, and by private donations. Though the new building greatly expanded teaching spaces, staffing remained the same. Thus, hiring additional staff will allow HNC to provide our high-demand environmental education to additional schools in the surrounding communities (Albert Lea, Hayfield, Lyle, Grand Meadow, Blooming Prairie, NRHEG, LeRoy, Southland, etc.) to participate in our programs. No other opportunities like this exist within a 25 mile radius of Austin and few (Quarry Hill Nature Center, Riverbend Nature Center, and Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center) within a 50 mile radius. For a long time HNC has provided environmental education with few resources. It is time to demonstrate the reach and positive impact these programs have to southeastern MN by providing more classes and programs to meet the needs of students in southeast Minnesota.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity 1 Title: Expand Environmental Education Opportunities with Additional Intern**  **Description:**The objective of this activity is to provide additional educational programming to surrounding communities by hiring an additional environmental educator / naturalist for three years, as well as an intern, on a one-year term for each of the three years of the grant, to assist the environmental educator / naturalist with programming. The educator and intern will use curricula that is already developed. The curricula are tied to state science standards and include the following themes: nature discovery, seasons, five senses, living vs. non-living nature, seed dispersal, animal habitat requirements, tree anatomy (maple syruping), winter survival, and aquatic macroinvertebrates. Summer curricula themes expand on these ideas and include: monarch butterfly life/migration, radical raptors, canoeing/kayaking, fish ecology, climbing, water programs, nature at night, sounds of nature, and nature art, photography, and music.  Activities will be evaluated by surveying teachers and adjusting programming to meet individual school or class requirements. A log will be kept to track the numbers and origins of classes participating in programs.  **ENRTF BUDGET: $252,898.64** | |  |
| **Outcome** | **Completion Date** |
| *1. Schedule at least 80 additional school groups for the 2020-21 school year.* | *June 2021* |
| *2. Provide 15 more summer programs than were provided in the summer of 2020.* | *August 2021* |
| *3. Maintain 250+ school groups attending HNC programs for the 2021-22 school year.* | *June 2022* |
| *4. Provide at least 45 summer programs for the 2021 summer.* | *August 2022* |
| *5. Maintain 250+ school groups attending HNC programs for the 2022-23 school year.* | *June 2023* |
| *6. Provide at least 45 summer programs for the 2022 summer.* | *August 2023* |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**

* **Austin Public Schools and other participating schools – bussing and fees**
* **Friends of the Hormel Nature Center – fund the annual intern and specific program supplies**
* **The Hormel Foundation -- $45,000 annually for the education programs**
* **Mower Soil and Water Conservation District – staff and scientists help teach the 7th grade water ecology curriculum**
* **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency -- staff and scientists help teach the 7th grade water ecology curriculum**
* **Austin Audubon – Helps with bird programming and provides summer scholarships.**
* **Austin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League – Funds an entomologist to visit 7th grade classes to prepare for the water ecology field trip.**

**IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**

Once hiring is completed, new staff would immediately work to expand the environmental education programming by scheduling additional schools from nearby communities. Historically, schools stay committed to participating in our programs after their initial encounter with the environmental education programming. We also have a robust evaluation process where staff survey participating teachers to ensure that the students’ needs are met and that the program adequately fit expectations and standards. This critical feedback allows updates and modifications to the programming for each individualized school. The ability for HNC to customize the programming makes our programming unique and valued by school districts.

This grant will also serve as a pilot project to prove the environmental education demand and that we can successfully meet the needs of more of the region’s schools. After the grant period, HNC would, with local and regional organizations’ support, commit to permanently funding these positions.

**V. SEE ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL COMPONENTS:**

**A. Proposal Budget Spreadsheet**

**F. Project Manager Qualifications and Organization Description**

**G. Letter or Resolution**