



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-168

Proposal Title: Season Watch: Cultivating Young Naturalists with Phenology Education

Project Manager Information

Name: Sarah Bignall

Organization: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

Office Telephone: (218) 326-1234

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This education project will continue building the next generation of conservationists in Minnesota by engaging youths and adults in science and outdoor learning through radio, podcasts, newsletters and schoolyard exploration.

Funds Requested: \$180,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Environmental Education (C)

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

Narrative

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

John Latimer has hosted the Phenology Show on KAXE for nearly four decades. KAXE is a public radio station in Grand Rapids, MN. Latimer's work has inspired thousands to observe and share nature in their backyards and woodlots. Children who grew up listening on the school bus have gone on to get PhDs in the sciences.

Latimer shares his phenology data and recent findings on the weekly Phenology Report broadcast on radio, mobile devices and podcasts. The Phenology programming includes Minnesota school children and listeners sharing observations on the radio each week. These reports encompass a wide range of observations like bobcat tracks, downy woodpeckers, and even the giant snowdrift covering a classroom window that was cleared away by a hero-custodian. These personal, often funny and touching stories about nature provide a connection to nature that is powerful. This deep connection fosters pro-environmental and conservation behavior.

Latimer's phenology legacy and our work with "Engaging Minnesotans with Phenology" has succeeded in reaching students throughout the school year. Our next phase of the project aims to reach K-12 students and listeners during summer recreation. We believe it can further foster solid relationships to the land and water of Minnesota for future generations.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

Our opportunity is to foster curiosity of natural resources in young people which could lead to change in the future. Studying seasonal changes in Minnesota's nature and comparing them to historical records is an immediate understanding of how climate is changing. This act of comparing nature year to year is critical to future generations taking action and protecting natural ecosystems for a healthier future. It has the potential to lead to innovation in sustainability, carbon emissions and energy conservation to combat climate change.

KAXE's phenology programming has already shown success in fostering appreciation, understanding, and investment in Minnesota's natural resources. Currently, 80% of our partnerships are with K-12 schools during the school year. Summer is no doubt the most popular time for Minnesotans to engage and enjoy the outdoors! KAXE will:

- Expand radio programming and podcasts that inspire listeners to engage with the outdoors and share their experiences
- Grow current partnership programs between KAXE and K-12 schools to include Environmental Learning Centers, Summer Camps, State and Local Parks, and other locations that engage K-12 students during the summer months
- Spotlight journalism and conversations on KAXE of environmental topics like water quality, sustainable lifestyles, energy, and nature conservation.

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?

- Create environmental programming for Northern Minnesota by broadcasting captivating content on radio and podcasts.
- Expand the reach of the phenology training program aimed at school children across the state by integrating phenology observation with radio broadcasting reaching students outside in the summer months.
- Broaden the scope of KAXE's newsroom reporting on environmental subjects such as water quality, sustainable living, energy, and conservation of nature, while also expanding a newsletter centered around nature-based topics.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Deliver engaging environmental programming to Northern Minnesota through radio and podcasts

Activity Budget: \$66,397

Activity Description:

We will increase the frequency of our Season Watch podcast and continue to focus on natural experiences in daily commutes, walks in town or in forests, and time spent on the water. We will continue our current programs including monthly interviews with environmental scientists, and podcasts related to the seasons of the year. These radio programs and podcasts will educate and engage people in northern MN — and throughout the state — about environmental science and its relationship to observable nature. Radio segments and podcasts about statewide phenology will be made available to other public radio stations in Minnesota via the public media exchange.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
24 radio segments that present interviews with scientists (approx 12 segments/year)	June 30, 2026
90 weekly 'Season Watch' podcast (45 episodes/year)	June 30, 2026
8 seasonal 'Season Watch' podcasts (spring, summer, fall, winter each year)	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Host phenology training events and interactive nature events

Activity Budget: \$75,411

Activity Description:

Expand existing K-12 environmental education statewide to include Environmental Learning Centers (ELCs), Summer Camps, State and Local Parks, and other locations that engage K-12 students during the summer months. We would provide training for our phenology and radio curriculum twice per year (4 workshops) rotating the location around the state and provide follow-up sessions for enhanced training twice per year (4 sessions). The curriculum involves basic phenology observations combined with developing short school phenology reports for radio broadcasts. We will offer a helpline, assist with the setup and identification of species along phenology trails, and provide 1:1 follow-up meetings to ensure strong support of implementation. In addition, we will host quarterly interactive live discussions with KAXE news team on topics like water quality, sustainable lifestyles, energy, and nature conservation.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
8 workshops/follow-up sessions (4 workshops per year)	June 30, 2026
360 radio segments created by kids in school programs (approximately 160 radio segments/year)	June 30, 2026
8 Interactive discussions (4/year)	June 30, 2026

Activity 3: Expand KAXE's coverage of environmental topics to a digital audience

Activity Budget: \$38,192

Activity Description:

KAXE's newsroom is broadening its environmental reporting on important topics like water quality, sustainable living, energy, and conservation of nature, all of which are crucial for the future health of our state. In addition to enhancing reporting, KAXE is also increasing the focus on the successful nature-based newsletter, Season Watch. In this expanded

newsletter, subscribers can expect regular updates and in-depth articles on everything from wildlife conservation to climate change to recommendations on what to look for in our daily lives. By expanding the scope while maintaining its personal, local feel, KAXE is positioning itself as a leading voice to educate and inspire sustainability in Minnesota.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
24 news stories on environmental topics (12 stories/year)	June 30, 2026
90 Season Watch Newsletter Issues (45/year)	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Stephan Carlson	University of Minnesota	Stephan Carlson is an Adjunct Professor at the U of MN who will advise us on trainings for this project.	No
Rebecca Montgomery	University of Minnesota	Rebecca will collaborate on phenology efforts throughout the state for U of MN staff	No
Dave McMillan	Long Lake Conservation Center	Dave McMillan will help to advise us on meeting targeted groups (e.g. summer camps and other state wide ELC)	No

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?

Long term: Radio broadcasts, podcasts, reporting and newsletters will be available through KAXE website.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Engaging Minnesotans With Phenology: Radio, Podcasts, Citizen Science	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$198,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sarah Bignall

Job Title: CEO/General Manager

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

The overall progress of this project will be overseen by Sarah Bignall, CEO/General Manager at KAXE. Before becoming CEO, Sarah started working at KAXE in 2015 and was promoted to Director of Operations in 2016. Her duties included on-air programming, day-to-day operations, management of staff, and coordinating and managing many of the station's events.

Sarah's professional background has led her to be uniquely suited to this role: in the non-profit world, marketing, public relations, and self-employment for many years specializing in grant writing, public relations, event coordination, and graphic design. In 2022, Sarah along with the staff at KAXE completed CPB's Digital Transformation Program. This 9-month program developed and provided by the Poynter Institute for Media Studies is designed to help public media general managers adapt their organizational culture to more effectively deploy a digital-first, audience-centric approach. Sarah Bignall is participating in a separate leadership track as part of the Digital Transformation Program. This program provides tools and support on how to effectively manage the day-to-day work as well as keep on task and motivated through big projects. In addition to this group work, Sarah was assigned a mentor Joanne Heyman. Founder and CEO of Heyman Partners, and is a highly sought-after coach, strategic advisor, lecturer, and facilitator. Ms. Heyman has led organizations and counseled leadership of foundations, non-profits, social enterprises, media companies, and creative institutions.

Organization: Northern Community Radio, Inc.

Organization Description:

Northern Community Radio is a 501(c)3 nonprofit public educational media organization that was founded in 1971. It

operates two public radio stations, 91.7 KAXE in Grand Rapids and 90.5 KBXE in Bemidji. It also operates smaller signals in Brainerd. Northern Community Radio is a member of National Public Radio and provides a mix of news and music programming to most of northern Minnesota. It also operates a website at KAXE.org and has an active presence in a variety of social media. Because the organization is headquartered in the lakes and woods region of Minnesota, much of its public affairs programming has reflected the area's unique climate and nature. For almost 40 years this programming has included Phenology, or the study of the rhythms of nature in relationship to climate. The organization has taken its phenology program into the schools to engage students in outdoor learning and science.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Production supervisor - Radio		Work with producer to train, coordinate, and assist with all aspects of radio production			29%	0.18		\$16,716
Administration		Coordinate and administer the grant to be sure outcomes are achieved, bills are paid, reporting is accomplished			33%	0.1		\$7,968
Phenologist		Host weekly phenology show, conduct teacher trainings and follow-ups and classroom visits			0%	0.42		\$20,790
Producer		Produce 24 statewide phenology episodes, weekly 'season watch' podcast and newsletter. Identify and set up interviews, enter data and produce segments from schools, produce web stories			30%	1.52		\$100,670
Production Supervisor - Digital		Work with producer to train, coordinate, and assist with all aspects of digital content			28%	0.04		\$3,560
Digital Producer		Distribute and promote nature content on social media and other digital media			30%	0.18		\$12,196
Reporter		will produce 24 stories on environmental topics and host interactive discussions			28%	0.04		\$12,100
							Sub Total	\$174,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	8 training sessions @ 375 miles/session, 2 person @ .655/mile; per commissioner's plan for lodging, 8 sessions, 1 person @ \$94/night; per commissioner's plan for food, 8 sessions, 1 person @ \$46/day	teacher training and teacher follow-up training					\$6,000
							Sub Total	\$6,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$180,000

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	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [698c35e4-819.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Handout contains an overview of the Season Watch project and testimonials. Also includes pictures Phenologist John Latimer leading nature hikes and pics from phenology in the school students outdoors and exploring nature!...

Financial Capacity

File: [9eccc0e6-48f.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Northern Community Radio BOD Approval Letter	648116cd-dee.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Testimonial KAXE Phenology in Classroom and Student Reports	173a84cc-c73.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

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 design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

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?

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