



**WILDERNESS  
INQUIRY**

# Connecting Youth, Adults, and Families to Minnesota's Cultural and Outdoor Heritage



Youth participants paddle and explore on Lake Snelling. *Photo: Nora West*



**ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND**  
LEGACY AMENDMENT 2024 ANNUAL REPORT  
M.L. 2023, CH. 40, ART. 4, SECT. 2, SUBD. 6  
REPORT DATE JANUARY 15, 2025



## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

For over 45 years, Wilderness Inquiry has connected people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities through shared outdoor adventures so that all people can equitably experience the benefits of time spent in nature. We offer a progression of outdoor experiences that build confidence, connection, persistence, and stewardship ethics in young people, families, and communities.

Through the Legacy Grant Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Wilderness Inquiry will expand its work to provide a continuum of outdoor experiences for youth, adults, and families in communities across Minnesota by:

- Connecting 11,000 individuals of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities to Minnesota's outdoor heritage through a progression of outdoor adventures including day programs, virtual learning sessions, and overnight camping adventures.
- Providing standards-based educational content through hands-on activities that engage students with Minnesota history and culture. Program content, developed in collaboration with the National Park Service and other partners, is tied to Minnesota state standards to seamlessly integrate into school curriculum.
- Providing training and career pathway opportunities that tie to outdoor careers and Minnesota's outdoor heritage.
- Supporting the physical, mental, and social-emotional wellbeing of Minnesota youth, adults, and families through immersive outdoor experiences.
- Facilitating specific project activities that teach Minnesota history and culture while building skills in camping, fishing, canoeing, hiking, fire building, species identification, animal adaptations, and orienteering.

Park Center Hmong Boys Group participants pose for a photo during their trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. *Photo: Reggie Westgate*





## GRANTEE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ed Spencer	Laura Forero	John Hinck
Beth Finch	John Grady	Dotun Obadina
Cecile Bedor	Bill McLaughlin	Craig Peterson
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## GRANTEE

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## PROJECT APPROPRIATION

Through the generous support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, \$1,065,000 over two fiscal years (FY24 & FY25) was appropriated to Wilderness Inquiry to connect youth to Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage. For the 2024 fiscal year, Wilderness Inquiry spent \$345,396.24 all of which was allocated to direct project expenses. We have spent one third of the total project funding and served one third of the participants; we are well positioned to fulfill the grant deliverables by the end of FY25 thanks to the partner engagement and capacity building that happened in FY24. There were no Wilderness Inquiry administrative expenses allocated to the project.

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING & LEVERAGE

This project has leveraged additional funding from private sources including: Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, National Park Foundation, H.B Fuller, Nature Valley, Otto Bremer Trust, RBC Wealth Management, Thomson Reuters, Winnebago Industries, and additional corporate, foundation, and individual support.

## DURATION OF PROJECT

2024 Appropriation: Sept 16, 2023 - June 30, 2024

\*2023 Appropriation: July 1, 2023 - Sept 15, 2023 (see addendum for final report closing out previous project)

## NUMBER OF FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS FUNDED

4.43

## ORGANIZATION WEBSITE

<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org>



Student learns about local wildlife at Fort Snelling State Park. Photo: Nora West

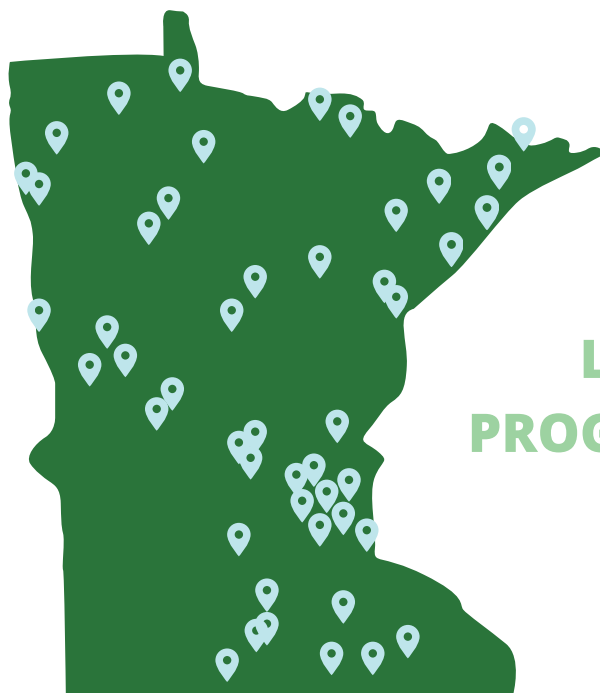


## PROPOSED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

- **Connect 11,000 individuals of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities to Minnesota's outdoor heritage through programming that:**
  - Provides training and career pathway opportunities that tie to outdoor careers and Minnesota's outdoor heritage.
  - Supports the physical, mental, and social-emotional well-being of Minnesota youth, adults, and families through immersive outdoor experiences.
  - Expands our work in Minnesota to provide a continuum of outdoor experiences for youth, adults, and families in communities across Minnesota.

## SOME OF PROPOSED OUTCOMES ACHIEVED IN FY24

- Wilderness Inquiry achieved some of the proposed measurable outcomes in Year 1 (FY24) of the project.
- Wilderness Inquiry is on track to meet or exceed the proposed outcome of serving 11,000 Minnesotans by June 30, 2025.
- For the FY24 project year, Wilderness Inquiry served 3,513 participants through this project.



LEGACY  
PROGRAMMING  
SITES





*For the 2024 appropriation, Wilderness Inquiry has served:*

**3,286**

Participants were served through place-based, hands-on, in-person programming in FY24.

**227**

Minnesota students participated in two-day live virtual experiences focused on Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage.

**3,513**

**TOTAL PARTICIPANTS**

Kulture Klub participants pose in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. Photo: Carolyn Masimore



## SOME OF MEASURABLE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED IN FY24

# 3,286

Participants were served through place-based, hands-on, in-person programming in FY24.

Wilderness Inquiry programs teach Minnesota history and culture while building skills in camping, fishing, canoeing, hiking, fire building, species identification, animal adaptations, and orienteering. Our programs engaged participants across the state of Minnesota offering place-based, outdoor education on local lands and waterways from the Zumbro River in Rochester to Rainy Lake in International Falls, and along state parks and trails such as Whitewater State Park. In winter, students experienced the outdoors on snowshoes, around ice-fishing holes, and overnight in winter cabins, learning about the rich natural and cultural histories of Minnesota in winter. A few highlights include:

**Cedar-Riverside Community Mothers & Daughters Superior Hiking Trail:** In partnership with Pillsbury United Communities, Wilderness Inquiry hosted a 3-day camping trip on the Superior Hiking Trail for a Mothers and Daughters group from Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. This group of three mothers and seven daughters, all East African and primarily Somali, spent 3 days in October 2023 exploring Minnesota's North Shore along the Superior Hiking Trail. This was the first time they had ever seen Lake Superior and been outside of the busy city.

***"This is the most impactful trip that Wilderness Inquiry does with Pillsbury United. I've seen many positive changes in the girls and mothers. Everyone wants to go now! Including the fathers and sons."***

*- Pillsbury United Communities Group Leader*

Participants from Cedar-Riverside Community Mothers & Daughters explore the beauty of the Superior Hiking Trail in the fall. *Photo: Laura Nolan*





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**Canoemobile on Rainy Lake in International Falls:** 90 students from Littlefork-Big Falls and International Falls school districts paddled in North Canoes on Voyageurs National Park's Rainy Lake. Minnesota DNR Fish and Wildlife Division joined to provide Fishing for Kids programming for students.

**Harding Earth Club Pyramid of Outdoor Engagement Progression:** Saint Paul Harding High School's Earth Club participated in a progression of events with Wilderness Inquiry this year. The Pyramid of Outdoor Engagement offers opportunities to engage with the outdoors through introductory experiences leading to multi-night backcountry camping adventures. Harding Earth Club students cross-country skied at Battle Creek to prepare for a 4-day winter trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in February 2024. They paddled on the St. Croix River in May 2024, camped in Whitewater State Park for a fly-fishing trip in June in partnership with Trout Unlimited Twin Cities, and explored the Boundary Waters Canoe Area on a 5-day backcountry camping trip in June in partnership with Friends of the Boundary Waters.

***"I appreciate all you've helped us do ... the Winter Menogyn trip was one of the best high school memories I have made so far."***

***"If it wasn't for going up to Menogyn with your organization, I don't think I would've started my environmental advocacy career."***

*- Harding Earth Club students*

**Wilderness Inquiry Outdoor Fellowship:** Wilderness Inquiry's paid fellowship program is specifically designed as an introductory career learning opportunity for people whose identities are underrepresented in the outdoor industry – people who identify as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and/or as an individual with a disability. In FY24, Wilderness Inquiry hired five Outdoor Fellows and four American Sign Language Communication Facilitator Fellows for a 10-week program structured around professional skills and development – such as STEM and outdoor education, first-aid, resume and cover letter training, and networking skills alongside wilderness travel and risk management skills, and operations and logistics training.

***"Wilderness Inquiry's Fellowship helped me further my passion for the outdoors. I was able to learn leadership skills and build a community with the cohort of Fellows. I look forward to taking all of this knowledge to educate others."***

*- Mariah Davis, 2024 Fellow*

Meet the 2024 Fellows and learn more about the programs here:  
<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/current-news/news-notes/expanding-the-wilderness-inquiry-fellowship/>





## SOME OF MEASURABLE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED IN FY24

# 227

**Minnesota students participated in two-day live virtual experiences focused on Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage.**

Wilderness Inquiry's virtual programming allows Minnesota youth to engage in new, creative, and accessible ways that remain in demand beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Through consecutive two-day virtual instruction, Wilderness Inquiry delivers hands-on educational experiences in the outdoors that tie to classroom learning and enhance the distance-learning experience.

Participation in virtual programming for Minnesota youth is fully funded by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Through these programs, students participate in live, virtual, place-based educational content focused on science, social studies, and the cultural and outdoor heritage of Minnesota. Collaboratively planned and led by Wilderness Inquiry staff and National Park Service rangers, students are given an opportunity to engage with peers and adult educators safely from their own homes or classrooms, supporting academic and socioemotional engagement and development.

To learn more about Wilderness Inquiry's Virtual Explorers opportunities for Minnesota youth, visit our website here: <https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/virtual-explorers-for-youth/>



Students paddle on Chester Lake in Rochester.  
Photo: Pip Boucher



Students enjoy s'mores after learning fire-building skills. Photo: Nora West



Harding Earth Club students learn how to fly fish in Whitewater State Park. Photo: Sinthang Has



# THANK YOU!

Through the support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Wilderness Inquiry is able to connect thousands of people across the state to the rich culture and outdoor heritage that makes Minnesota unique.

Wilderness Inquiry and ACHF share a commitment to preserving Minnesota's outdoor heritage through hands-on education and programming, fostering student development as recreationalists and natural resource stewards. We thank you for the opportunity to bring Wilderness Inquiry to thousands of Minnesotans across the state.





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# **FY24 Annual Report Addendum, Addressing FY23 Funding Extension Report**

M.L 2021, 1st Special Session, Ch. 1, Art. 4, Sect. 2, Subd. 6  
Connecting Youth to Minnesota's Cultural & Outdoor Heritage

*Note: In addition to the full report above on FY24 Legacy funding, Wilderness Inquiry also completed programming during this grant period using funding from FY23. Please see below for an addendum report on the use and impact of the FY23 funds, and the successful completion of that project in September 2023, as noted below.*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Wilderness Inquiry was delayed in starting the FY22/23 project until September 1, 2021 and did not draw down the entirety of the project funds by June 30, 2023. Wilderness Inquiry received an extension and completed the project and spent all funds as of September 15, 2023 before starting the new project on September 16, 2023. We are including this addendum to report on final project completion.

## **Project Appropriation:**

Through the generous support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, \$776,000 over two fiscal years (FY22 & FY23) was appropriated to Wilderness Inquiry to connect youth to Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage. For the 2024 fiscal year, Wilderness Inquiry spent \$131,926.47, all of which was allocated to direct project expenses. There were no Wilderness Inquiry administrative expenses allocated to the project.

## **Duration of Project:**

2023 Appropriation spent in FY2024: July 1, 2023 - Sept 15, 2023

## **Proposed Measurable Outcomes:**

- 11,000 youth across the state will connect to Minnesota's outdoor heritage through place-based education. These youth will:
  - Show increased motivation to explore, enjoy and support local, state and federal public lands
  - Receive educational content and credit that meets Minnesota state history standards
  - Have a greater understanding of educational, recreational and career opportunities across the outdoor sector
- Expanded partnerships for Minnesota school districts, teachers, and youth serving organizations. Through these partnerships and delivering place-based education we expect positive outcomes in social emotional growth.

## **All of Proposed Outcomes Achieved for FY23:**

- Wilderness Inquiry achieved all of the proposed measurable outcomes for the project.
- In total, Wilderness Inquiry served 12,198 participants since the beginning of the project in September 2021.
- The extension for this project was July 1 - Sept 15, 2023. In that performance period, Wilderness Inquiry served 1,294 participants.