



**WILDERNESS
INQUIRY**

Connecting Youth to Minnesota's Cultural & Outdoor Heritage



Students participate in a water quality activity on the grass



ARTS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FUND
Legacy Amendment 2021 Annual Report
M.L 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 4, Sect. 2, Subd. 6
Report Date January 15, 2022



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Wilderness Inquiry's award winning Canoemobile program brings history and cultural heritage alive for over 9,000 students on their local lands and waterways, fostering a passion for Minnesota's culture and investing in the preservation of our outdoor heritage. Canoemobile features place-based, educational and experiential day trips with land and water activities ranging from local history, water quality science, macroinvertebrate science, fire building, teambuilding, canoeing, and other natural and cultural histories and sciences unique to Minnesota. With support from the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and many other program partners, students receive an in-person opportunity to learn from a variety of experts and are additionally provided an introduction to professionals and future careers in the outdoors. In the event in person programming is unsafe, Canoemobile programming will be shared virtually, allowing youth to connect to Minnesota's heritage from the safety of their home. A portion of the 9,000 students will participate in remote outdoor focused activities aligned with the Minnesota history graduation standards. As part of our engagement with youth we are leading a virtual Mississippi River Explorers Summer Camp in partnership with the National Park Service. This provides live day trip experiences surrounding the Mississippi River aligned with academic standards for youth grades 5-8.

GRANTEE

WILDERNESS INQUIRY
1611 County Rd B W Suite 315
Saint Paul, MN 55113

NELL HOLDEN, PROJECT MANAGER
612-676-9400
nell@wildernessinquiry.org

GRANTEE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ed Spencer - Kate Hartfiel
Beth Finch - John Hinck
Cecile Bedor - Louis Lambert
John Butler - Dan Moreno
Jack Driscoll - Mikisha Nation
Paul Fischer - Dotun Obadina
Laura Forero - Craig Peterson
John Grady - Bill Schmoker
Mary Hanley - Jaime Stilson

CANOEMOBILE WEBSITE

www.canoemobile.org/programs/canoemobile/program-overview



Students work on activities in the grass



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PROJECT APPROPRIATION

Through the generous support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, \$727,000 over two fiscal years was appropriated to Wilderness Inquiry to connect youth to Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage. For the 2021 fiscal year, Wilderness Inquiry received \$363,750 and allocated \$265,398 to direct project expenses. In July and August, 2021 Wilderness Inquiry allocated an additional \$93,262.50 and completed the project on August 31, 2021. There were no administrative expenses allocated to this project.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING & LEVERAGE

This project has leveraged additional funding from private sources including: the Bigelow Foundation, the Marbrook Foundation, the McNeely Foundation, Nature Valley, Otto Bremer Trust, Thomson Reuters, Winnebago Industries, and additional corporate, foundation, and individual support. Funding from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund also allowed us to embark on a new six-week program serving charter schools in the Minneapolis area in partnership with Great MN Schools and with support from their generous donors.

DURATION OF PROJECT

July 1, 2019 - August 31, 2021 (Project extension through August 31, 2021 included in this report)

FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS FUNDED

1.11 (FY20) / 4.1 (FY21)

PROPOSED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

- More than 9,000 Minnesota students experience state history through hands-on experiences on their local lands and waterways or through remote outdoor focused learning aligned with Minnesota history graduation standards.
- Preserve Minnesota's outdoor history and cultural heritage by reconnecting youth to our natural resources.
- Motivate Minnesota youth to explore, enjoy, and support local, state and federal public lands.
- Connect youth to educational, recreational, and career opportunities across the outdoor sector.
- Streamline partnerships with multiple Minnesota school districts to boost academic achievement through the educational, social, and emotional benefits of place-based education.
- Create a platform of outdoor youth programs that can scale to serve more young people and more communities, exploring statewide partnerships with the Minnesota Department of Education and others

ACHIEVED PROPOSED OUTCOMES

Wilderness Inquiry exceeded our total project service outcome goal of 9,000 by serving 12,060 participants between July 1, 2019 - August 31, 2021

3,700

participants served in FY20

7,642

participants served in FY21

718

participants served in FY21
extension (July - August, 2021)

12,060

Total participants between July 1, 2019 - August 31, 2021



Students practice fire-building techniques



A National Park Ranger stands on the Stone Arch Bridge motioning towards the river for a virtual event



Students practice compass skills with an Outdoor Leader



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ACHIEVED PROPOSED OUTCOMES

6,063 Minnesota students participated in live virtual experiences focused on Minnesota's cultural and outdoor heritage during FY21.

In order to maintain the safety and health of participants and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canoemobile programming went virtual through our Virtual Explorers programs for youth: "Mississippi River Explorers", "Minnesota Freshwater Quest", "No Boundaries to the Boundary Waters", and "Careers in the Outdoors". Launched in 2020, participation for Minnesota youth was funded by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Through these programs, students participated 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 were given an opportunity to engage with peers and adult educators safely from their own homes or classrooms, supporting academic and socioemotional engagement and development.

Program Feedback - Mississippi River Explorers, FY21

85%

of participants agree they are more interested in helping the environment after participating in the program

78%

of participants agree they want to spend more time outside after participating in the program

57%

of participants agree they are more interested in jobs where they work in nature or the outdoors

Program Feedback - Freshwater Quest, FY21

80%

of participants agree they want to spend more time outside after participating in the program

74%

of participants agree they are more interested in helping the environment after participating in the program

51%

of participants agree they are more interested in jobs where they work in nature or the outdoors

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

ACHIEVED PROPOSED OUTCOMES

1,254 unique users took advantage of online learning resources featuring land, waterway, and outdoor recreation content.

Canoemobile's virtual repertoire also included a library of online learning resources for youth, families, and educators to continue engagement with Minnesota's great outdoors from the safety of their own homes. This content is downloadable and has been shared with classrooms and students beyond the 1,254 unique users.

To learn more visit: www.wildernessinquiry.org/online-learning/

94 youth participated in career focused programming in the outdoors.

Wilderness Inquiry's virtual live programming included learning sessions connected to career resources with the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

Students from Cloquet to Northfield show off their Junior Ranger badges while participating in the Mississippi River Virtual Explorers program





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ACHIEVED PROPOSED OUTCOMES

Within the completed project, 949 total participants were served through COVID-conscience, in-person programming.

- 231 Participants served in FY21
- 718 Participants served during project extension in July & August, 2021

Starting in the summer of 2021, Canoemobile was able to return to in-person programming on local lands and waterways engaging participants in canoeing, cultural history, science, and additional outdoor recreation activities such as fire building and team building. In August, Canoemobile engaged high school aged youth from Minneapolis Public Schools through our partnership Credit Recovery program where students participated in hands-on opportunities in the outdoors connected to in-school learning. Through place-based, experiential outdoor activities, students learned about science, math, history, English language arts, and more, while receiving academic credits that help them stay on track to graduate from high school on time.

Canoemobile also partnered with Great Minnesota Schools to meet and work with youth at five school sites and nearby community parks teaching land-based educational and experiential learning content. More than 400 students, kindergarten through 8th grade, participated in six weeks of out-of-doors, place-based content covering learning objectives within social studies, reading/math, art/science, and outdoor recreation during the summer school term.

During FY21, Wilderness Inquiry participated in a program evaluation project with the Center for Applied Research in Educational Improvement with the University of Minnesota* to evaluate the outcomes of programming with youth through Great Minnesota Schools. Results of the evaluation show that:

- 79% of program staff agreed that students “strengthened their social-emotional learning skills” through participation in Wilderness Inquiry programming.
- By the end of the program, youth participants increased their level of agreement with the following statements:
 - I can be successful when I try something scary.
 - I am interested in jobs where I would work in nature.

*Potter, L., Larson, M. (2021). *Evaluation of Wilderness Inquiry's Urban Wilderness Explorers Program: September 2021*. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.)



PARTNER OUTCOMES

Despite the challenges COVID-19 brought to Canoemobile and Wilderness Inquiry programs, the support from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund allowed our youth programs to pivot in ways that continued and even expanded our relationships with partners across the state of Minnesota. By developing virtual resources and experiences, Canoemobile programming reached new communities, created new educational content about Minnesota's history and natural resources, and gave educators and students a change of pace during the many months of distance learning.

Virtual Explorers attracted many new groups to Wilderness Inquiry's Canoemobile programming. As a virtual experience, we saw higher participation rates from classrooms in rural and suburban communities. In FY21 the following new communities connected to Minnesota's cultural & outdoor heritage through Canoemobile:

- Win-E-Mac Schools in Erskine
- Saint Jude of the Lake Catholic School in Mahtomedi
- Saint Joseph's School in Grand Rapids
- Saint John's Lutheran Church and School in Lake City
- Red Lake School District ISD 38 in Red Lake
- DaVinci Academy of Arts and Science Charter School in Cambridge

We look forward to building upon these relationships to bring Canoemobile in-person programming to these communities in future years to deepen these students' understanding and access to their outdoor spaces.

Virtual Explorers covered a variety of topics: Mississippi River history and cultural significance, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area recreational opportunities, access, and animal life, as well as ways to explore nearby nature wherever you may be. After participating in Virtual Explorers, one teacher shared:

"The students wished they could go to the BWCA and are now dreaming of doing so in the future! It was fun to do the activities outside of the school and pretend we were portaging a canoe. They have talked about it nonstop and really appreciated the opportunities. Plus, we are learning about the Root Beer Lady, so this perfectly tied into our programming!" – Susan, Virtual Explorers Teacher

In June, 2021 Canoemobile safely returned to in-person programming. New partnerships were formed, including one with World Youth Connect, a youth led organization that empowers young people to make a difference in their communities. On an adventure to Fort Snelling State Park, 24 youth leaders participated in Voyageur canoeing, a nature hike, and a team-building fur trade game that explores the history of the North American Fur Trade industry and the relationship with the local Native American tribes.

In addition to the new relationships mentioned above, the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund allowed Wilderness Inquiry to continue to support and deepen longstanding partnerships with groups like Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public School districts. In FY21, we worked with Saint Paul Public School summer learning staff to provide more experiential learning opportunities for students in the classroom, as well as outside of the classroom. Throughout SPPS summer course offerings, Canoemobile visited their classroom three different times to lead activities like: orienteering, Capture the Fur (North American Fur Trade history), and water quality testing. These classroom experiences built student's skills and excitement for three culminating experiences at Fort Snelling State Park and Pickerel Lake where students paddled Voyageur canoes as a team, put their orienteering skills to the test by navigating the state park, and maybe most importantly, created positive experiences in the outdoors with their peers, teachers, and caring adults.

THANK YOU!

Through the support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Wilderness Inquiry is able to connect thousands of youth 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 Canoemobile to thousands of students across the state.

