



Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund  
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Wilderness Inquiry  
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## Connecting Youth to Minnesota's Cultural & Outdoor Heritage

### Project description:

Wilderness Inquiry's award winning Canoemobile program brings history and cultural heritage alive for over 8,600 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.



City of Woodbury Parks and Recreation Safety Camp paddles on Carver Lake

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 8,600 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.



Saint Paul Public Schools American Indian Ed Program Paddles the Mississippi River

**Grantee:**

Wilderness Inquiry

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**Grantee Board of Directors:**

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**Canoemobile Website:**

<https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/programs/canoemobile/program-overview/>

**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 2020 fiscal year, Wilderness Inquiry received and allocated \$363,500 to direct project expenses and plans to fully complete the project based on the proposed measurable outcomes. There were no administrative expenses allocated to this project.

**Additional funding and 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.

**Duration of project:** July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2021

**Number of full-time equivalents funded:** 1.11 (FY20) / 4.1 (FY21)

### Proposed Measurable Outcomes

- More than 8,600 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



National Park Service rangers join students on the Mississippi River

Achieved most of the proposed outcomes:

**In FY20, more than 3,700 Minnesota students participated in Canoemobile programming and we are on track to meet our proposed outcomes before the project completion date.**

⇒ **2,521 Minnesota students participated in live experiences focused on Minnesota’s cultural and outdoor heritage to date.**

July through September 2019, Canoemobile engaged Minnesota students statewide at sites such as Fort Snelling State Park, Lake Phalen, William O’Brien State Park, Theodore Wirth Park, Carver Lake Park, Bald Eagle Lake, Lake Elmo, Wild River State Park, and the Mississippi River. In October 2019, Canoemobile headed to central and southern Minnesota to work with students in St. Cloud at St. John’s University, on the Zumbro River in Rochester, and at Chester Woods County Park with Stewartville Public Schools reaching youth in the southern communities of Olmsted County.

At these sites, students participated in activities such as canoeing, fire building, fur trade history, water quality science, orienteering, water safety, macroinvertebrate and freshwater mussel science, hiking safety, fishing, teambuilding, animal adaptations, nature art, and camping skills.



Wilderness Inquiry

In November and January, students from Edison High School, Harding High School, and Saint Paul Public Schools AVID program had a chance to stay in cabins in Afton State Park and Baker Near Wilderness Settlement where they learned winter camping skills and experienced cold-weather recreation activities.

⇒ **More than 1,200 unique users took advantage of online learning resources featuring land, waterway, and outdoor recreation content.**

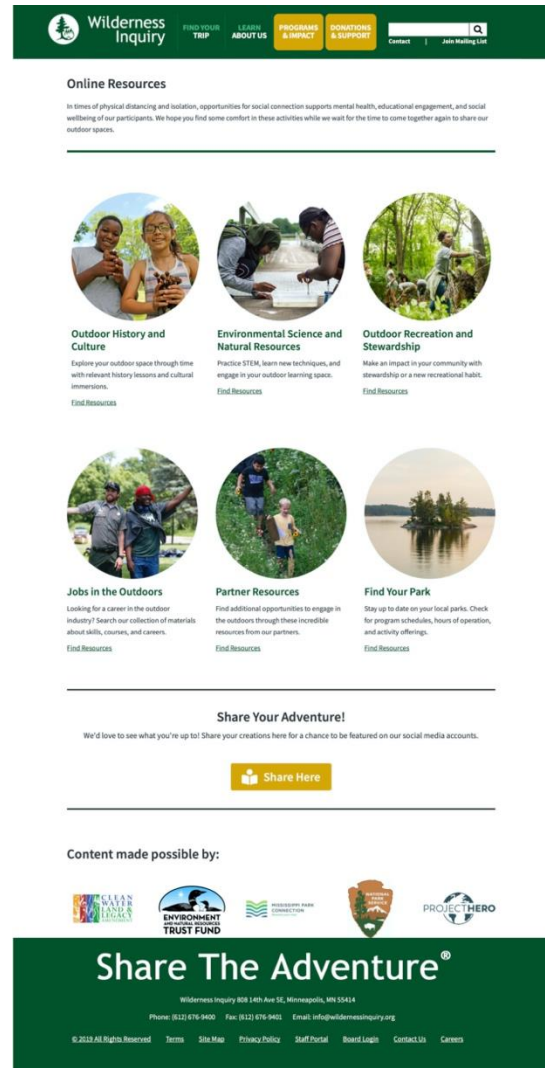
When COVID-19 moved Minnesota schools to remote learning, Canoemobile went virtual as well, launching online learning resources for youth, families, and educators to continue engagement with Minnesota’s great outdoors from the safety of their own homes. This content is downloadable and has been shared with classrooms and students beyond the 1,200 unique users. To learn more visit: <https://www.wildernessinquiry.org/online-learning/>

⇒ **169 unique users accessed resources for career opportunities in the outdoors:**

Wilderness Inquiry’s online learning platform featured connections to career resources with the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service.

**Partner outcomes:**

Wilderness Inquiry has worked collaboratively and strategically to deepen relationships with educators and groups across Minnesota. The Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund supported the development of a partnership with teacher Patti Nelson and the Bear Cave Intermediate School in the Stewartville Public School District outside of Rochester, MN. October 2019 marked Canoemobile’s second year of programming with Bear Cave Intermediate students serving over 300 youth. We were able to provide place-based experiences for Patti’s students (see quote below), and her personal interest in outdoor education and network within the community helped the partnership grow. Since our first time working together, Patti has connected Canoemobile with two new teachers in Olmsted County, one new connection at Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools in Dodge County, and participated in our newest virtual endeavor, Mississippi River Youth Explorers with 89 5th and 6th graders at Bear Cave.



Screenshot of Wilderness Inquiry’s Online Resources learning web page

We look forward to continuing to build our partnership with Patti and school districts in the Rochester area, hopefully with in-person paddling adventures again soon!

*"First of all thank you for another wonderful experience. I'm such a believer in outdoor education and giving students the opportunity to participate in activities that promote healthy, lifelong experiences. Again, thank you so much."* - Patti Nelson from Bear Cave Intermediate School



Patrick Henry High School paddles the Mississippi River with Representative Fue Lee

Another partnership that has developed with the support of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund is with Minneapolis Public Schools, specifically Patrick Henry High School. Thomas Johnson, a teacher at Patrick Henry, has found that paddling experiences on the Mississippi River give his students, who struggle with a variety of emotional and behavioral disorders, the opportunity to experience learning in new ways without the, at times, restrictive four walls of a classroom.

Below, Thomas shares his experience from a September 2019 trip on the Mississippi River. This particular paddle down the river welcomed current and former students from Patrick Henry with special guest, Representative Fue Lee. In the photo (left), you'll see Representative Lee stand proudly next to current Patrick Henry students waiting to load-up the Voyageur canoes and finish their paddle down the river.

*"A sincere thank you for helping to make the Patrick Henry trip happen! Our kids had a wonderful time learning with your staff on the river and thanks for all your help with sorting the planning details out. ... [P]lease pass on the thanks to our trip leaders from the day - they were phenomenal. Thanks for the work you do and for making these outdoor experiences possible for our kids who rarely get the chance to do so."*

- Thomas Johnson, Patrick Henry High School

### **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.