

## **2010 Project Abstract**

For the Period Ending June 30, 2013

**PROJECT TITLE:** Urban Wilderness Youth Outdoor Education  
**PROJECT MANAGER:** Greg Lais  
**AFFILIATION:** Wilderness Inquiry  
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**FUNDING SOURCE:** Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund  
**LEGAL CITATION:** M.L. 2010, Chp. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 8d

**APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$557,000**

### **Overall Project Outcome and Results**

The goal of Urban Wilderness Youth Outdoor Education (UWYOE) was to provide accessible, outdoor education and recreation opportunities on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for more than 20,000 urban youth over a three-year period. UWYOE was developed in response to the sharp decline in participation in outdoor education and activities such as canoeing, camping, hunting and fishing by urban youth.

UWYOE provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 24,899 Twin Cities middle and high school students, exceeding our initial goal of 20,000. 80% of the youth served identify as a person of color and 80% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The majority, 76%, had very little or no prior experience with outdoor activities.

Environmental education experiences were provided through outdoor workshops on local lakes and rivers, guided day trips on the Mississippi River, and overnight camping trips in local parks. National Park Service Rangers and Wilderness Inquiry guides provided natural and cultural history and science lessons as part of each program activity. We developed, refined and implemented classroom activities, provided three teacher trainings for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, and developed a program website. We also purchased four 24' Voyageur canoes to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

A three-year evaluation was conducted by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Major outcomes include:

- 77% of participants reported an increased interest in science and the environment
- 87% of teachers agreed that students learned about environmental issues
- 100% of students said they would like to participate in an outdoor activity like this again

This program has gained national attention as a model for engaging urban youth with the environment and building skills to grow future stewards and managers of our public lands. In the summer of 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Governor Mark Dayton recognized the program as a leader in America's Great Outdoors initiative.

### **Project Results Use and Dissemination**

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund's investment in UWYOE has resulted in the establishment of a model program for engaging youth in the outdoors, which we now call Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA). The UWCA has been recognized by the EPA, the Department of Interior, and Gov. Mark Dayton, among others, as a leader in America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Within the National Park Service and National Forest Service, the UWCA is being held up as an example of how these agencies need to engage in urban communities across the country.

In 2010, Wilderness Inquiry and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area unit of the National Park Service piloted the UWCA concept developed in the Twin Cities to Washington DC, with support from the National Park Service, US Forest Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and several DC based nonprofit organizations. Serving 1,000 DC area school kids on the Anacostia River, this effort helping bring together 20 DC area organizations focused on though and/or the Anacostia River. To build on this success, we launched the "Canoemobile" to introduce youth to urban waters in multiple cities, and to help build local coalitions dedicated to providing outdoor opportunities to disadvantaged youth. In 2013, the Canoemobile will serve youth in Milwaukee, Michigan City, Chicago, Louisville, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington DC. Nature Valley has signed on as a sponsor of the Canoemobile.

We held two outcomes briefings (one in 2011 and one in 2013) to present the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) evaluation results. The first was hosted by the Minneapolis Foundation and the second by Mayor Chris Coleman and the Saint Paul Foundation. Each had more than 35 community leaders, funders, and educators present. Information about the project has also been disseminated through the project website.

The UWCA has received coverage on Kare 11 News, the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, and Mpls/St. Paul Magazine.

## **Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2010 Work Program**

**Date of Report:** June 30, 2013  
**Date of Next Progress Report:** Final Report  
**Work Program Approval:** May 10, 2010  
**Work Program Amendment Approval:** August 22, 2012  
**Project Completion Date:** June 30, 2013

### **I. PROJECT TITLE: Urban Wilderness Youth Outdoor Education**

**Project Manager:** Greg Lais  
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**Web Site Address:** <http://www.wildernessinquiry.org>

**Location:** Mississippi River Watershed in the Urban Core of Minneapolis and St. Paul and surrounding metropolitan areas.

<b>Total ENRTF Project Budget:</b>	<b>ENRTF Appropriation</b>	<b>\$ 557,000.00</b>
	<b>Minus Amount Spent:</b>	<b>\$ 557,000.00</b>
	<b>Equal Balance:</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>

**Legal Citation:** M.L. 2010, Chp. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 8d

#### **Appropriation Language:**

\$557,000 is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Wilderness Inquiry to provide an outdoor education and recreation program on the Mississippi River. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2013, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

### **II. FINAL PROJECT SUMMARY AND RESULTS:**

The goal of Urban Wilderness Youth Outdoor Education (UWYOE) was to provide accessible, outdoor education and recreation opportunities on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for more than 20,000 urban youth over a three-year period. UWYOE was developed in response to the sharp decline in participation in outdoor education and activities such as canoeing, camping, hunting and fishing by urban youth.

UWYOE provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 24,899 Twin Cities middle and high school students, exceeding our initial goal of 20,000. 80% of the youth served identify as a person of color and 80% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The majority, 76%, had very little or no prior experience with outdoor activities.

Environmental education experiences were provided through outdoor workshops on local lakes and rivers, guided day trips on the Mississippi River, and overnight camping

trips in local parks. National Park Service Rangers and Wilderness Inquiry guides provided natural and cultural history and science lessons as part of each program activity. We developed, refined and implemented classroom activities, provided three teacher trainings for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, and developed a program website. We also purchased four 24' Voyageur canoes to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

A three-year evaluation was conducted by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Major outcomes include:

- 77% of participants reported an increased interest in science and the environment
- 87% of teachers agreed that students learned about environmental issues
- 100% of students said they would like to participate in an outdoor activity like this again

This program has gained national attention as a model for engaging urban youth with the environment and building skills to grow future stewards and managers of our public lands. In the summer of 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Governor Mark Dayton recognized the program as a leader in America's Great Outdoors initiative.

### **III. PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF 1/15/2011:**

Since launching the program in July of 2010, we have provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 5,338 urban youth, developed and implemented classroom curricula, provided a teacher training for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, and completed an evaluation of the program with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. Staff have reviewed the program evaluation, and have begun planning for 2011 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

We also purchased two 24' Voyageur canoes for the program to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

### **PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF 12/15/2011:**

Since launching the program in July of 2010, we have provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 13,405 urban youth, developed and implemented classroom curricula, provided two teacher trainings for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, and completed two years of program evaluation with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Staff have reviewed the program evaluation, and have begun planning for 2012 events including strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material. We also purchased four 24' Voyageur canoes for the program to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

### **PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF 7/6/2012:**

Since launching the program in July of 2010, we have provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 16,952 urban youth, developed and implemented classroom curricula, provided two teacher trainings for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, and completed two years of program evaluation with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Staff have reviewed the program evaluation, and have begun planning for fall 2012 and 2013 events including strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material. We also purchased four 24' Voyageur canoes for the program to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

**Approved Amendment Request (8/22/12)**

Request for Funds to be <b><u>moved from:</u></b>	Request for Funds to be <b><u>moved to:</u></b>	Amount	Reason
Result 1  Line Item - Personnel: Trail Guides	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$16,000	Due factors beyond our control (i.e. extreme weather, 2011 State shut down, etc.), we are conducting fewer introductory outdoor workshops than originally planned. We are, however, conducting more day events in Result 2 than originally planned. Also, program coordination became much more complicated due to flooding and voluntary discontinued use of locks to prevent spread of Asian Carp. All routes had to be reconfigured and program coordinators are having to work with land owners to develop new landings.
Result 1  Line Item - Personnel: Benefits and taxes	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Benefits and taxes	\$2,400	See above.
Result 1  Line Item - Food	Result 2  Line Item – Equipment and Supplies	\$3,275	See above. Due to increase in number of youth serving at each event, need more life jackets than originally projected.
Result 1  Line Item - Insurance	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$ 800	Insurance costs were slightly lower than originally projected. Requesting to move these dollars to help cover increased costs of program coordinators in result 2.

Request for Funds to be <b><u>moved from:</u></b>	Request for Funds to be <b><u>moved to:</u></b>	Amount	Reason
Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Trail Guides	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$10,000	We have benefitted from more volunteers than originally planned for, resulting in lower trail staff salary costs. Program coordination became much more complicated as described above.
Result 2  Line Item - Food	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$4,000	Cost of food for day trips is less than originally projected. Requesting to move these dollars to help cover increased costs of program coordinators in result 2.
Result 2  Line Item - Insurance	Result 2  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$ 5,000	Insurance costs were slightly lower than originally projected. Requesting to move these dollars to help cover increased costs of program coordinators in result 2.
Result 3  Line Item - Insurance	Result 3  Line Item - Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$ 4,000	Insurance costs were slightly lower than originally projected. Requesting to move these dollars to help cover increased costs of program coordinators in result 3.
Result 3  Line Item – Permits and Fees	Result 3 Line Item – Personnel: Program Coordinators	\$10,000	We had fewer camping fees at Fort Snelling than expected because of flooding and the State shut down. The additional cost for program coordinators is a result of needing to reschedule and move events to other locations.

In addition to the above budget requests, we would like to amend the language in the Equipment and supplies line item for result two to include: These are examples of the kinds of supplies that we will purchase for the project. Other supplies may be needed (i.e. porta potties, fishing supplies, etc).

### **PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF 12/31/2012:**

Since launching the program in July of 2010, we have provided experiential environmental learning experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 21,950 urban youth, exceeding our initial goal of serving 20,000 youth through the project. We also developed, refined and implemented classroom curricula, provided two teacher trainings for Minneapolis Public Schools summer school staff, developed a program website (<http://www.urbanwildernesscanoeadventures.org>) and completed two years of program evaluation with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI), which is attached. Staff have reviewed the program evaluation, and have begun planning for 2013 events including

strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material. We also purchased four 24' Voyageur canoes for the program to expand our capacity to serve more youth.

This program has gained national attention as a model for engaging urban youth with the environment and building skills to grow future stewards and managers of our public lands. In the summer of 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Governor Mark Dayton recognized the program as a leader in America's Great Outdoors initiative.

#### IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

##### RESULT/ACTIVITY 1: Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences

**Description:** We will provide introductory canoe and outdoor education experiences serving ~~40,000~~ 5,500 urban youth and families on Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth and families will paddle in 24' Voyageur canoes at community events such as Juneteenth and the Stone Arch Festival to introduce them to water safety, basic canoe training, natural history interpretation, and, for many, their first experience getting in a canoe. We will also provide other introductory outdoor activities such as hiking, fishing, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

##### Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 1:

<b>ENRTF Budget:</b>	<b>\$ <del>50,000.00</del></b>
<b>Revised Budget:</b>	<b>\$ 27,525.00</b>
<b>Amount Spent:</b>	<b>\$ 27,525.00</b>
<b>Balance:</b>	<b>0.00</b>

<b>Deliverable/Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>1.</b> Provide introductory or "gateway" canoe and outdoor education experiences for 2,000 youth and families. Cost per youth served: \$5.	June 30, 2011	\$10,000
<b>2.</b> Provide introductory or "gateway" canoe and outdoor education experiences for <del>3,500</del> 800 youth and families. Cost per youth served: \$5.	June 30, 2012	<del>\$17,500</del> \$ 4,025
<b>3.</b> Provide introductory or "gateway" canoe and outdoor education experiences for <del>4,500</del> <u>2,700</u> youth and families. Cost per youth served: \$5.	June 30, 2013	<del>22,500</del> \$13,500

**Result Completion Date:** June 30, 2013

##### Result Status as of January 15, 2011:

We provided three environmental learning workshops serving 284 urban youth and families from the Twin Cities area. Participants were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of areas in the Mississippi watershed.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences and began planning for 2011 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of December 15, 2011:**

We have provided a total of 16 introductory canoe and outdoor education experiences serving 2,953 youth and families on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth and families paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes at community events such as Juneteenth and National Get Outdoors day. We introduced them to water safety, basic canoe training, and natural history interpretation. For many, this was their first exposure to canoeing on local rivers and lakes.

We also provided 16 in-classroom presentations for 250 students on educational and career opportunities in the outdoors through our speakers' bureau.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences and have begun planning for 2012 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, further developing and preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of July 6, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 24 introductory canoe and outdoor education experiences serving 3,867 youth and families on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth and families paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes at community events such as Juneteenth and National Get Outdoors day. We introduced them to water safety, basic canoe training, and natural history interpretation. For many, this was their first exposure to canoeing and other outdoor experiences on local rivers and lakes.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences and have begun planning for fall 2012 events and 2013 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, further developing and preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of December 31, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 30 introductory canoe and outdoor education experiences serving 5,693 youth and families on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth and families paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes at community events such as Juneteenth, National Get Outdoors day, and Dragon Festival. We introduced urban youth and families to water safety, basic canoe training, and natural history interpretation. For many, this was their first exposure to canoeing and other outdoor experiences on local rivers and lakes.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences and have begun planning for winter and spring 2013 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, further developing and preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Final Report Summary:**

We have provided a total of 43 introductory canoe and outdoor education experiences serving 7,127 youth and families on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in



the Twin Cities metro area. Youth and families paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes at community events such as Juneteenth, National Get Outdoors day, and Dragon Festival. We introduced urban youth and families to water safety, basic canoe training, and natural history interpretation. For many, this was their first exposure to canoeing and other outdoor experiences on local rivers and lakes.

## **RESULT/ACTIVITY 2: Environmental Learning Day Trips**

**Description:** We will provide environmental learning day trips serving ~~42,000~~ 15,000 urban youth on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed in the Twin Cities metro area. These trips will be coupled with more traditional classroom sessions both before and after the day trip.

Youth will paddle in 24' Voyageur canoes to introduce them to the outdoors and provide environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River and its surrounding watershed. Other environmental learning activities will involve hiking, snowshoeing, fishing, etc. Youth will participate in environmental education, service learning, river clean up, and habitat restoration activities, creating a foundation for stewardship.

Through a carefully crafted set of modules developed by the National Park Service (as an in-kind contribution to this project), we will assist teachers in linking the indoor and outdoor classrooms for maximum effect. In the weeks preceding the experiential classes on the river, students will be introduced to the science and language arts concepts, as well as to the mapping and topography of the river they will be paddling. While in the outdoor educational setting, they will collect data and build on the information they've acquired in the classroom setting. Following the outdoor classes, students will synthesize what they learned from materials and what they experienced for themselves while on the river.

To help the students develop concrete ways of protecting the river and adjacent wetlands, the teachers and students will develop and execute a "service learning" project where the students will assess how the community interacts with the Mississippi River. They will identify a community need with regard to the river and subsequently, ways to address the need with a student-run initiative, i.e. educating residents about keeping pollutants out of storm water drains. The service learning project will enable the students to apply the skills they're learning in school, and thus reinforce the value of the science and writing knowledge they are gaining through the program.

### **Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 2:**

<b>ENRTF Budget:</b>	<b>\$ 387,000.00</b>
<b><u>Revised Budget:</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 409,475.00</u></b>
<b>Amount Spent:</b>	<b>\$ 409,475.00</b>
<b>Balance:</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>

<b>Deliverable/Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>1.</b> Implement UWYOE curricula in Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program.	June 30, 2011	\$ 21,833
<b>2.</b> Provide daylong canoe experiences on the	June 30, 2011	\$ 68,167

Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 3,000 youth. Cost per youth served: \$30.		
3. Implement UWYOE curricula in one additional school district (total of 2 districts).	June 30, 2012	\$ 21,833
4. Provide daylong canoe experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for 4,000 youth. Cost per youth served: \$30.	June 30, 2012	\$150,167
5. Implement UWYOE curricula in two additional school districts (total of 4 districts).	June 30, 2013	\$ 21,833
6. . Provide daylong canoe experiences on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed for <del>5,000</del> <u>8,000</u> youth. Cost per youth served: \$25.	June 30, 2013	<del>\$103,167</del> \$125,642

**Result Completion Date:** June 30, 2013

**Result Status as of January 15, 2011:**

We provided 72 environmental learning day trips serving 4,698 urban youth on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes and were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River.

We introduced an environmental education curriculum to the Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program, which students participated in prior to and after the day trip experience.

We also purchased two 24' Voyageur Canoe for the program.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Day Trips and began planning for 2011 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of December 15, 2011:**

We have provided a total of 143 environmental learning day trips serving 9,626 urban youth on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes and were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River.

We introduced an environmental education curriculum to the Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program and the St. Paul Public Schools AVID Program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), to engage students before and after the day trip experience. In the summer of 2011, the curricula was further integrated into the online curricula at the high school level for English, Social Studies, Science, Math, Health, and Physical Education courses. Additionally, we conducted two Minneapolis Public Schools teacher-training sessions on the river to provide information and support on using the curricula in the classroom

We have also purchased four 24' Voyageur Canoe for the program.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Day Trips and began planning for 2012 events including strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

### **Result Status as of July 6, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 171 environmental learning day trips serving 11,568 urban youth on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes and were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River.

We introduced an environmental education curriculum to the Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program and the St. Paul Public Schools AVID Program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), to engage students before and after the day trip experience. In the summer of 2012, the curricula was further integrated into the online curricula at the high school level for English, Social Studies, Science, Math, Health, and Physical Education courses. Additionally, we conducted two Minneapolis Public Schools teacher-training sessions on the river to provide information and support on using the curricula in the classroom

We have also purchased four 24' Voyageur Canoe for the program.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Day Trips and began planning for fall 2012 and 2013 events including strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

We also provided 27 in-classroom presentations for 800 students on educational and career opportunities in the outdoors through our speakers' bureau.

### **Result Status as of December 31, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 219 environmental learning day trips serving 14,615 urban youth on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes and were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River.

We introduced an environmental education curriculum to the Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program and the St. Paul Public Schools AVID Program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), to engage students before and after the day trip experience. In the summer of 2012, the curricula was further integrated into the online curricula at the high school level for English, Social Studies, Science, Math, Health, and Physical Education courses. Additionally, we conducted two Minneapolis Public Schools teacher-training sessions on the river to provide information and support on using the curricula in the classroom

We have also purchased four 24' Voyageur Canoe for the program.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Day Trips and are actively planning for fall 2013 events including strategic planning, meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

### **Final Report Summary:**

We have provided a total of 243 environmental learning day trips serving 15,734 urban youth on the Mississippi River in the Twin Cities metro area. Youth paddled in 24' Voyageur canoes and were introduced to the outdoors and environmental education lessons through hands-on exploration of the Mississippi River.

We introduced an environmental education curriculum to the Minneapolis Public Schools Summer School Program and the St. Paul Public Schools AVID Program (Advancement Via Individual Determination), to engage students before and after the day trip experience. In the summer of 2012, the curricula was further integrated into the online curricula at the high school level for English, Social Studies, Science, Math, Health, and Physical Education courses. Additionally, we conducted two Minneapolis Public Schools teacher-training sessions on the river to provide information and support on using the curricula in the classroom. We have also purchased four 24' Voyageur Canoe for the program.

### **RESULT/ACTIVITY 3: Environmental Learning Overnight Trips**

**Description:** Provide overnight environmental learning experiences for 1,000 urban youth on the Mississippi River and surrounding watershed. These experiences provide an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

In addition to canoeing and camping, students will study the ecosystems of the flood plain forest and the history of human efforts to live in the floodplain. Students will understand the many connections between the local river and the world including relationships to commodity agriculture and shipping. Students will define and commit to a vision for a healthy future river while also considering the implications of global climate change for the river environment.

#### **Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 3:**

<b>ENRTF Budget:</b>	<b>\$ 75,000.00</b>
<b>Amount Spent:</b>	<b>\$ 75,000.00</b>
<b>Balance:</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>

<b>Deliverable/Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>1.</b> Provide overnight canoe trips on the Mississippi River and surrounding metro area watersheds for 250 youth. Cost per youth served: \$75.	June 30, 2011	\$ 18,750
<b>2.</b> Provide overnight canoe trips on the Mississippi	June 30, 2012	\$ 26,250

River and surrounding metro area watersheds for 350 youth. Cost per youth served: \$75.		
3. Provide overnight canoe trips on the Mississippi River and surrounding metro area watersheds for 400 youth. Cost per youth served: \$75.	June 30, 2013	\$ 30,000

**Result Completion Date:** June 30, 2013

**Result Status as of January 15, 2011:**

We provided 12 overnight environmental learning experiences for 356 urban youth on the Mississippi River. These experiences provided an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Overnight Trips and began planning for 2011 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of December 15, 2011:**

We have provided a total of 19 overnight environmental learning experiences for 623 urban youth on the Mississippi River. These experiences provided an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Overnight Trips and began planning for 2012 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of July 6, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 24 overnight environmental learning experiences for 737 urban youth on the Mississippi River. These experiences provided an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Overnight Trips and began planning for fall 2012 and 2013 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

**Result Status as of December 31, 2012:**

We have provided a total of 40 overnight environmental learning experiences for 1,099 urban youth on the Mississippi River. These experiences provided an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

We also conducted 6 follow-up activities with schools after their day trip to continue student learning. We served 543 youth through these programs.

Staff reviewed evaluations of the Environmental Learning Overnight Trips and began planning for 2013 events including meeting with partners, scheduling events, preparing curricula, updating the website, and preparing promotional material.

### **Final Report Summary:**

We provided a total of 46 overnight environmental learning experiences for 1,197 urban youth on the Mississippi River. These experiences provided an opportunity for students to deepen and expand on the work they have done on the environmental learning day trips.

We also conducted 26 follow-up activities with schools after their day trip to continue student learning. We served 841 youth through these programs.

### **RESULT/ACTIVITY 4: Evaluate Success of the Program and Develop Plan for Replication**

**Description:** Oversee and evaluate the success of the UWYOE experiences and curricula in connecting urban youth with the natural world and creating a conservation ethic.

We will work with researchers from the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to develop evaluation strategies to measure the effectiveness of the curricula in achieving environmental education outcomes as well as school performance outcomes in science and English language arts.

The evaluation will measure our success in achieving stewardship objectives, such as:

- Students will be able to identify many ways in which they are connected to the water of the river.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of how human behavior affects the health of the river ecosystem.
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of conservation issues from numerous cultural perspectives, and be able to compare and contrast those perspectives (i.e. Euro-American and Dakota relationships to the river and other aspects of nature).
- Students will understand the many connections between the local river and the world including relationships to commodity agriculture and shipping.
- Students will define and commit to a vision for a healthy future river while also considering the implications of global climate change for the river environment

During its first year, we will implement the program into Minneapolis Public Schools' 5th through 8th grade classes. We are developing a model that can easily be replicated in other grades within other schools. In years two and three of the grant, Wilderness Inquiry will work with St. Paul and Anoka-Hennepin School Districts to implement the program in their schools. During this same period, Wilderness Inquiry and Minneapolis Public Schools will evaluate ways to expand and extend the program to serve more 9th through 12th grade students throughout the calendar year.

**Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 4:**

<b>ENRTF Budget:</b>	<b>\$ 45,000.00</b>
<b>Amount Spent:</b>	<b>\$ 45,000.00</b>
<b>Balance:</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>

<b>Deliverable/Outcome</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Budget</b>
1. Work with researchers at the U of M to develop and implement an evaluation process to measure the success of the program for students in terms of environmental education outcomes.	December 30, 2010	\$ 1,500
2. Collect data and report on year 1 activities.	Oct. 1, 2011	\$14,000
3. Collect data and report on year 2 activities.	Oct. 1, 2012	\$14,000
4. Collect data and report on year 3 activities.	June 30, 2013	\$14,000
5. Disseminate findings to appropriate organizations and journals.	June 30, 2013	\$ 0
6. Develop a written model of the program that can be used to replicate the program in other areas around the state.	June, 30 2013	\$ 1,500

**Result Completion Date:** June 30, 2013

**Result Status as of January 15, 2011:**

We contracted the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to design and conduct an evaluation of the program. A draft of the evaluation of this summer's program has been completed. We established a research and evaluation committee to guide the evaluation and research process. Dr. Martha Ferrell Erickson heads this committee.

**Result Status as of December 15, 2011:**

We contracted the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to design and conduct a formal program evaluation. An evaluation of the first year of the program (2010) was completed and presented to supporters at a funders briefing held on April 5, 2011 at the Minneapolis Foundation. A draft of the 2011 summer program evaluation was also completed; the findings from this evaluation suggest that the program has the desired effect of increasing youth interest in environmental protection and pursuing internships or jobs in the outdoor industry. Currently, evaluators are refining instruments and conducting a literature review that will allow us to better measure the program impact on youth. We also hope to follow participants over multiple years, as they gain deeper outdoor experiences and the impact those experiences have on other spheres of their lives and learning.

We established a research and evaluation committee to guide the evaluation and research process. Dr. Martha Ferrell Erickson heads this committee.

### **Result Status as of July 6, 2012:**

We contracted the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to design and conduct a formal program evaluation. An evaluation of the first year of the program (2010) was completed and presented to supporters at a funders briefing held on April 5, 2011 at the Minneapolis Foundation. A final report of the 2011 summer program evaluation was also completed; the findings from this evaluation suggest that the program has the desired effect of increasing youth interest in environmental protection and pursuing internships or jobs in the outdoor industry. In year two of the grant, evaluators refined instruments and conducted a literature review that will allow us to better measure the program impact on youth. Data from the 2012 program is currently being reviewed and a report being assembled.

### **Result Status as of December 31, 2012:**

We continued work with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to design and conduct an evaluation of the program. During this period, we compiled data collected from Minneapolis Public School and Saint Paul Public School participants and created a final draft of the evaluation report for this year's program activities. A copy of this report is attached.

### **Final Report Summary:**

Evaluation of the program was conducted by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Major outcomes include:

- 77% of participants reported an increased interest in science and the environment
- 87% of teachers agreed that students learned about environmental issues
- 100% of students said they would like to participate in an outdoor activity like this again

This program has gained national attention as a model for engaging urban youth with the environment and building skills to grow future stewards and managers of our public lands. In the summer of 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Governor Mark Dayton recognized the program as a leader in America's Great Outdoors initiative.

### **V. TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET:**

#### **Personnel:**

**TOTAL \$344,885**

- UWYOE Program Coordinators- \$185,300
- WI Trail Guides, TBA (2.5 FTE) - \$121,661

Responsible for conducting safe and enjoyable environmental educational canoe trips.

- Benefits and taxes - \$37,924

#### **Contracts:**

**TOTAL \$ 20,500**



To work with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to develop and implement a coordinated assessment and evaluation of the program (more detail provided on pp. 4-6)

**Transportation:** **TOTAL \$ 48,000**

Rental of two vehicles for four months each year to transport staff, equipment, and participants to and from program events. Also includes gas and maintenance for these vehicles.

**Equipment/Tools/Supplies:** **TOTAL \$ 43,000**

All program supplies and equipment for participants and program volunteers. A detailed listing of all equipment and supplies is provided in Attachment A.

**Food:** **TOTAL \$ 11,915**

All meals and snacks for participants, staff and volunteers. Ave cost of 83 cents per person served.

**Insurance:** **TOTAL \$ 32,200**

Students in this program will engage in canoeing, hiking, and other outdoor activities that have inherent risk. While Wilderness Inquiry has an excellent safety record, we must carry liability insurance for this program. We use a standard cost per service day (one person served for one day) to allocate insurance costs. The UWYOE program represents 20% of our overall service days. The total dollar amount for this line represents 20% of our insurance cost.

**Permits and Fees:** **TOTAL \$ 4,500**

For overnight camping fees at Fort Snelling State Park.

**Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500:** **TOTAL \$ 52,000**

Four 24' Voyageur canoes.

**TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET: \$557,000**

**Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500:** As in all programs we do, safety will be our first priority in conducting UWYOE activities. While our greatest safety precaution on Mississippi River trips is trained, professional staff, another key to safe and successful UWYOE trips is the use of the 24' Voyageur canoes made by Northwest Canoe Company located in downtown St. Paul, MN These boats offer:

- Stability – These canoes are very stable and they can take very large waves—built for Lake Superior.
- Power – Can accommodate up to ten people per boat, providing opportunities to participate for inexperienced or weak paddlers who simply would not be able to safely

handle a tandem canoe.

- Efficient staff to student ratios – Because one staff member can paddle eight students, we are able to safely staff these outings with a ratio of 1 staff to 8 students.

In order to expand our capacity to serve an increasing number of youth in the program each year of the grant, we need to purchase four of these specially crafted boats. We will continue to use these boats for environmental education purposes for the life of the boats.

## **VI. PROJECT STRATEGY:**

**A. Project Partners:** Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (National Park Service) and Mississippi River Fund. Neither partner is receiving any monies from the appropriation.

**The National Park Service** role in the partnership will focus primarily on environmental education and interpretation and coordination with other partners, including facilitating land use agreements and developing water trail facilities and interpretation. The NPS will also provide education content to the UWYOE and Park Rangers on all day and overnight trips. Additionally, the NPS will develop a special Jr. Ranger component to the canoe route enabling participants to earn their Jr. Ranger Badge.

Because the NPS staff are closely involved in the preservation and interpretation of the many natural and cultural resources, they are able to enrich the experiences with information customized to the needs of school groups. As part of the the program, the NPS will provide enducational materials such as laminated historic photos, maps, learning activities on shore, and stewardship programs that provide tangible environmental education learning opportunities and the building blocks for a stewardship ethic. Staff at the NPS have already developed a rich trove of educational and interpretive materials to educate youth on the natural, cultural, and environmental aspects of the Mississippi. The NPS and other partners will continue to develop these materials and make them available and accessible to teachers and students.

**The Mississippi River Fund's** primary role is to champion this program in the community and be the chief fundraising entity to start up and sustain the UWYOE, as well as assist with promotion and public relations. MRF will also coordinate program evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the UWYOE.

**B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy:** Our goal is to build public awareness, commitment, and enthusiasm for the UWYOE so that it will be sustained long after the initial investment of the LCCMR. We will seek to establish long-term funding options from foundations, corporations, individuals, events, and the Federal Government (National Park Service). By serving 10,000 to 15,000 youth per year, we aim to create a new generation of outdoor enthusiasts who understand and use canoe and boating routes and waterways throughout the State of MN.

## **C. Other Funds Proposed to be spent during the Project Period:**

Wilderness Inquiry: \$246,674

For Executive staff time, program administration, web and internet development, and insurance.

National Park Service: \$88,021

For curricula development and materials and Park Ranger salaries to provide environmental education curricula and interpretation on environmental education trips.

Mississippi River Fund: \$51,000

Additional grants to support the program.

**D. Spending History:**

2009 Spending

Wilderness Inquiry: \$183,522

National Park Service: \$45,983

Mississippi River Fund: \$86,391

**VII. DISSEMINATION:**

We will work with our partners at the University of Minnesota and the public schools to identify venues for disseminating information and findings about this project. Information will also be posted at <http://www.wildernessinquiry.org/UWYOE>

**January 15, 2011:** To date we have not disseminated information about program outcomes, but we plan to as soon as the program evaluation is finalized.

**December 15, 2011:** We held a funders briefing on program outcomes and evaluation on April 5, 2011. Hosted by the Minneapolis Foundation, more than 50 funders, school representatives, and interested community members were in attendance.

**December 31, 2012:** This program has gained national attention as a model for engaging urban youth with the environment and building skills to grow future stewards and managers of our public lands. In the summer of 2012, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Governor Mark Dayton recognized the program as a leader in America's Great Outdoors initiative. Many other communities have asked for our help and assistance in replicating this program in their communities. In 2012, our Canoemobile project served more than 3,000 urban youth in Chicago, Milwaukee, Michigan City, Cincinnati, Louisville, New York City, and Washington DC.

**Final Report Summary:**

The Environmental Trust Fund's investment in UWYOE has resulted in the establishment of a model program for engaging youth in the outdoors, which we now call Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures (UWCA). The UWCA has been recognized by the EPA, the Department of Interior, and Gov. Mark Dayton, among others, as a leader in America's Great Outdoors Initiative. Within the National Park Service and National

Forest Service, the UWCA is being held up as an example of how these agencies need to engage in urban communities across the country.

In 2010, Wilderness Inquiry and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area unit of the National Park Service piloted the UWCA concept developed in the Twin Cities to Washington DC, with support from the National Park Service, US Forest Service, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and several DC based nonprofit organizations. Serving 1,000 DC area school kids on the Anacostia River, this effort helping bring together 20 DC area organizations focused on though and/or the Anacostia River. To build on this success, we launched the “Canoemobile” to introduce youth to urban waters in multiple cities, and to help build local coalitions dedicated to providing outdoor opportunities to disadvantaged youth. In 2013, the Canoemobile will serve youth in Milwaukee, Michigan City, Chicago, Louisville, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York City, and Washington DC. Nature Valley has signed on as a sponsor of the Canoemobile.

We held two outcomes briefings (one in 2011 and one in 2013) to present the University of Minnesota’s Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) evaluation results. The first was hosted by the Minneapolis Foundation and the second by Mayor Chris Coleman and the Saint Paul Foundation. Each had more than 35 community leaders, funders, and educators present. Information about the project has also been disseminated through the project website.

The UWCA has received coverage on Kare 11 News, the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, and Mpls/St. Paul Magazine.

**VIII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted not later than December 15, 2011, September 15, 2012, January 15, 2013. A final work program report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 1, 2013 as requested by the LCCMR.**

Final Attachment A: Budget Detail for 2010 Projects															
Project Title: Urban Wilderness Youth Outdoor Education (LCCMR ID: 165-F)															
Project Manager Name: Greg Lais															
Trust Fund Appropriation: \$ 557,000															
Updated -July 2, 2013															
2010 Trust Fund Budget	<u>Result 1 Budget:</u>	Amount Spent 6/30/2013	Balance 6/30/2013	<u>Result 2 Budget:</u>	Amount Spent 6/30/2013	Balance 6/30/2013	<u>Result 3 Budget:</u>	Amount Spent 6/30/2013	Balance 6/30/2013	<u>Result 4 Budget:</u>	Amount Spent 6/30/2013	Balance 6/30/2013	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL AMOUNT SPENT 6/30/2013	TOTAL BALANCE 6/30/2013
	Introductory Outdoor Education Experiences (5,500			Environmental Learning Day Trips (15,000 youth served)			Enviornmental Learning Overnight Trips (1,000 youth			Data Collection and Evaluation					
BUDGET ITEM															
PERSONNEL: wages and benefits															
- UWCA Program Coordinators (1.5 FTE)				124,300.00	124,300.00	0.00	39,000.00	39,000.00	0.00	22,000.00	22,000.00	0.00	185,300.00	185,300.00	0.00
- WI Trail Guides (2.5 FTE)	22,000.00	22,000.00	0.00	80,000.00	80,000.00	0.00	19,661.00	19,661.00	0.00	-	0.00	0.00	121,661.00	121,661.00	0.00
- Benefits and Taxes (15% of wages)	3,300.00	3,300.00	0.00	29,175.00	29,175.00	0.00	2,949.00	2,949.00	0.00	2,500.00	2,500.00	0.00	37,924.00	37,924.00	0.00
Contracts															
Professional/technical University of MN for Evaluation										20,500	20,500	0	20,500.00	20,500.00	0.00
Other direct operating costs:														0.00	
Transportation (vehicle rental to transport staff and equipment to and from program events, gas, and maintenance.)				48,000.00	48,000.00	0.00				-	0	0	48,000.00	48,000.00	0.00
Equipment/Tools/Supplies: (All Examples of program supplies and equipment for participants and program volunteers are listed below. Please note that the items below are estimates of program supplies and equipment needed. We will bill for actual costs): • \$4,000 for life jackets (80 @ \$50 ea.) • \$8,400 for VHF radios (30 @\$280 ea.) • \$2,500 for paddles (80 @ \$31.25 ea.) • \$ 500 for coolers (20 @ 25 ea.) • \$ 500 for action packers (15 @ \$33 ea.) • \$15,000 for boat and equip. maintenance • \$ 200 for megaphones • \$ 3,500 for staff and volunteer vests (uniform) • \$ 5,125 for t-shirts • \$ 500 for port-a-potty rental • \$2,775 for fishing supplies (i.e. tackle, lures,				43,000.00	43,000.00	0.00				-	0	0	43,000.00	43,000.00	0.00
Food (all meals and snacks for participants and staff)	25.00	25.00	0.00	8,000.00	8,000.00	0.00	3,890.00	3,890.00	0.00	-	0	0	11,915.00	11,915.00	0.00
Insurance (for liability insurance; we use a standard cost per service day, our unit of measure, to allocate insurance costs. The UWCA program represents 20% of our overall service	2,200	2,200.00	0.00	25,000.00	25,000.00	0.00	5,000.00	5,000.00	0.00	-	0	0	32,200.00	32,200.00	0.00
Permits and Fees (camping fees at Ft. Snelling)							4,500.00	4,500.00	0.00	-	0	0	4,500.00	4,500.00	0.00
Capital equipment over \$3,500 Four 24' Voyaguer Canoes @ \$13,000 each				52,000.00	52,000.00	0.00		0.00	0.00	-	0	0	52,000.00	52,000.00	0.00
COLUMN TOTAL	27,525.00	27,525.00	0.00	409,475.00	409,475.00	0.00	75,000.00	75,000.00	0.00	\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00	\$0.00	557,000.00	557,000.00	0.00

# NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE



Wilderness programs in local public schools unplug city kids from their devices and plug them into the joys of nature. BY BETH DOOLEY • PHOTOS BY KATHERINE HARRIS

**ONE HOT MORNING LAST JULY,** I found myself sitting in a yellow school bus with a small army of bleary-eyed high-school students, rumbling toward Cleary Lake Regional Park for an overnight “urban wilderness adventure.” We hadn’t gotten to the adventure part yet, so the students were wearing the sort of jaded expressions that D. H. Lawrence once called the “know-it-all state of mind,” that half-awake teenage leer that suggests a mood somewhere between contempt and disdain.

The kids were from South, Southwest, Roosevelt, Washburn, and North high schools, and were part of a summer “Credit Recovery Program” (what we used to call summer school) sponsored by Wilderness Inquiry, the Mississippi River Fund, and the Minneapolis Public Schools. Credits aside, the purpose of these trips is to give urban youth a chance to experience nature and, with any luck, whet their appetite for activities that don’t require an Xbox and a speedy Internet connection. When the bus huffed to a stop in the

\*As seen in the  
July issue of  
*Mpls.St.Paul  
Magazine!*





Swimming and studying: Kids earn credits while discovering the joys and lessons of the great outdoors through the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program.





park, the students stood, yawned, and stretched, then spilled out across the verdant green campsite, swinging their backpacks or dragging enormous duffels and roller bags. They dumped their luggage in a heap, simultaneously shedding their droopy attitudes. A football arced through the thick air, and the students began to shout, giggle, tumble, and goof around as they pawed through piles of sleeping bags and mats. Four Wilderness Inquiry guides sorted the students into groups of three, allowing friends to cluster, then sent them off to assemble their tents. “Boys on this side of the campfire ring, girls over there.” The guides let the students fumble with tent poles and zippers, and stepped in only when asked. Soon, nylon shelters were popping up across the green, forming a small village of colorful domes.

### MORE THAN A FIELD TRIP

Under the direction of Sarah Oppelt, the trip leader, we all gathered to hold hands in an introductory game that involved catching our neighbor’s middle finger. We each went around shouting our names and our favorite band. Rihanna, Adam Lambert, Big Sean, and Kid Cudi reigned; the Rolling Stones did not. Then came the rules. Respect preceded every instruction: Respect oneself, respect the environment, respect each other.

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In only its fourth year, Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures has led day trips down the Mississippi River for **MORE THAN 22,000 YOUTHS**.

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Within minutes the students were swimming in Cleary Lake. Their hard stares had vanished, and the clumps of friends that had first huddled together, reluctant to mingle, now gleefully dispersed across the beach. The subsequent learning activities, meals,



reflections, and s’mores were carefully calibrated to provide a blend of action and downtime. Prior to the trip, the staff discussed preparatory concerns—everything from meals, drug-abuse issues, and medical emergencies—and had created a plan to address them all.

These overnight camping excursions are much more than a field trip or “fresh air” experience. The students also earn credits for classes in math, science, English, social studies, and health. It is technically “school,” after all, so there are expectations that the students will do more than simply have fun.

### NATURE DEFICIT DISORDER

Beyond academics, the program also seeks to bridge the enormous gap between urban youth and the great outdoors. As child-advocacy expert Richard Louv writes in his ground-breaking work, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, many of the seemingly unrelated maladies of the younger generation—obesity, depression, behavioral disorders—may be linked in part to a highly wired environment that is detached from nature. Whereas every generation before them has spent a substantial portion of their free time outside (because there wasn’t much to do inside), the younger generation’s fascination with video games, television, computers, laptops, and smartphones has lured them indoors, where they now spend the majority of their time. Louv

**THE STUDENTS EARN CREDITS FOR CLASSES** in math, science, English, social studies, and health. It is technically “school,” after all, so there are expectations that the students will do more than simply have fun.

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calls this lack of exposure to natural beauty and the sensory experience of being outdoors “nature deficit disorder.” Drawing on extensive research, Louv makes a compelling case that regularly interacting with nature is essential to healthy physical and emotional development. The Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program is specifically designed to expose urban youths to outdoor activities they might otherwise never experience, and it deliberately takes place in parks near the city in







## CHANGING ATTITUDES

The UWCA summer-school program has introduced the Mississippi River to more than 5,000 ethnically diverse students, many of them students of color living in high levels of poverty.

**77** percent of the participating students report that the experience changed their attitude about the environment and science.

**70** percent of their teachers say they witnessed far deeper engagement in the students' work after completing the program.

order to impress upon kids that in the Twin Cities, beautiful natural habitats are never far away.

In only its fourth year, Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures has led day trips down the Mississippi River for more than 22,000 youths. Older students are offered longer excursions that include an overnight at Fort Snelling. Those who have completed both day and overnight trips have an opportunity to apply for a much grander trip to Glacier National Park.

The program is being studied by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement. According to last year's U of M report, the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program significantly improved students' classroom attendance, increased their interest in the natural world, and heightened their commitment to take care of the city's natural resources.

"Something happens to city kids

when they get into nature," says Mike Hastert, an educational associate who accompanied his students on the trip, along with his colleague Maria Vallejo. Hastert has a scruffy blond beard, wears his baseball cap backwards, and is just beefy enough to look tough. He considers these outings to be a big job perk, even though he is giving up part of his own summer to do them. At one point I remarked that the kids seemed more engaged and lively than they were on the bus, and he nodded in agreement.

"The walls come down," Hastert says. "They don't have to cling to whatever identity they have at school, athlete or hipster. They don't have to stick in a clique. And they see me as a regular guy, tossing the football and telling jokes—not the one nagging them about schedules and homework."

### RESPECT AND S'MORES

Back on the lake, a group of students

shouted "Whoa!" as an egret floated to a graceful landing on the opposite bank. Michael, a sophomore who wouldn't let go of his girlfriend Diniqua's hand all morning, bobbed in the water playing a game of Marco Polo, while Diniqua played tag on the shore. Only Renuke, a girl from Nepal who wore a pink knee-length top and ankle-length pants, sat apart under a tree, engrossed in a paperback book. "It's not common for us to undress," she told me.

After lunch, the students split into groups. Under the direction of national park ranger Mary Blitzer, some wandered off with a Wilderness Inquiry guide to study Fort Snelling's voyageurs and traders. Another group headed to the lakeshore to test the water for nitrogen levels and turbidity, as well as plant and aquatic life. They scooped up freshwater mussels, clams, and crayfish in tiny nets, and even found a baby catfish. For a math assignment, they measured trees and calculated their height using

# OTHER NATURE PROGRAMS

The UWCA, offered through Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Schools, is one of many nature-oriented programs available to local young people. Following are several education-oriented programs that offer similar experiences:

## AUDUBON CENTER OF THE NORTH WOODS

Located in Sandstone, the Audubon Center offers a variety of programs for students K-12. [audubon-center.com](http://audubon-center.com)

**WILDERNESS INQUIRY** Youth, teens, and families can have a range of experiences—on the Mississippi River, in the Boundary Waters, and in the Apostle Islands. [wildernessinquiry.org](http://wildernessinquiry.org)

## WOLF RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

The center provides a number of experiences and camps along the North Shore for students K-12. [wolf-ridge.org](http://wolf-ridge.org)

**YMCA TWIN CITIES CAMPS** The YMCA offers nature experiences for both younger children (including Outdoor Living Skills Camp, Canoe Camp) and for teens (Leaders in Training, Canoeing Camp). [ymcatwincities.org](http://ymcatwincities.org)

**CAMP MENOGYN** Located outside Grand Marais on West Bearskin Lake in the Boundary Waters, Camp Menogyn offers a range of eight- to 50-day wilderness experiences. [ymcatwincities.org](http://ymcatwincities.org)

**CAMP WIDJIWAGAN** Located outside Ely, the camp offers a variety of 10- to 50-day wilderness experiences similar to Camp Menogyn. [ymcatwincities.org](http://ymcatwincities.org)

## YOUTH FARM AND MARKET PROJECT

Aimed at youth ages 9–24, this project provides year-round youth-development programming including experiential education, urban agriculture, gardening, and greenhouses. Farm stays are optional. [youthfarm.net](http://youthfarm.net)



geometry and ratios. The groups that correctly answered all the questions got to splash the guide; those who didn't got doused themselves.

Come evening, the students were divided into cooking and cleanup crews. I listened as three girls—Clarisse, Anna, and Renuke—shredded cheese and chopped tomatoes. They talked about what they cook at home—Nepalese soups, Swedish meatballs, pot roast, fajitas—sketching between them a sort of international culinary map. Before we ate, we gathered again in a circle to hold hands through announcements for the evening's schedule, then observed a moment of silence. The "chow circle" was broken after we "passed the pulse," squeezing the palm of our neighbor to

the left. There was plenty of food—burritos with spiced chicken, guacamole, salsa, cheese, refried beans, lettuce, chopped tomatoes, sour cream—and we ate a lot. I complimented Diniqua on her rings, one on each finger, and she had a story for each. "This one my boyfriend Michael just gave me. This one is from my mom's boyfriend. This I found on the ground," she told me. "This is the one my dad was wearing when he was shot. My mom took it off his finger before he went to the morgue, so it never got washed," she explained. "It's like his skin is still right next to mine. I keep it on all the time." The table went silent; I didn't know what to say. "It was bad," she added. "But he's in a better place." "When do we get s'mores?"

## 3 MAIN REASONS KIDS STAY INDOORS



**Parental fear—**especially perceived "stranger danger."



**Addiction to technology:** The average child between the ages of 8 and 18 spends 53 hours per week engaged with media (computer, TV, phone, etc.).



**Real or perceived** lack of access to natural places.

Clarissa chimed in.

Kyle, a lean and lanky junior with an afro that added five inches to his height, hopped up on his table to announce that it was time for the cleaning crew to gather. He told us all to wipe the food off our plates into the trash before dunking them in the wash water. “Respect me, please,” he shouted. After cleanup, the students broke into five groups and were prompted by the Wilderness Inquiry guides to reflect on their day. Swimming was a highlight, they agreed. So was meeting new people. Several admitted that they wanted to be more patient and more accepting of their peers. Some even claimed they wanted to be better listeners.

We gathered around the campfire, roasting marshmallows and chomping on s’mores, telling jokes and a ghost story. Fireflies danced through the gathering darkness, and Renuke remarked that “they look like a celebration.” By 10 PM, the students were in their tents, and

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“These are gateway experiences. We don’t expect one trip will change someone’s life, but **IT WILL PROVIDE ACCESS.** Sure, the Boundary Waters are great. Yellowstone is amazing. But we have tremendous opportunities to be in nature right in our own city.”

GREG LAIS, FOUNDER OF  
WILDERNESS INQUIRY

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there was some quiet chattering late into the night.

The 7 AM wake-up came early. Several students hugged their guides; three boys who were strangers before the trip hopped up on one of the tables to sing and dance. Mike Hastert gathered us all for a photo, and he sent it out to everyone within an hour of our return.

## GATEWAY EXPERIENCES

Precisely how this trip will affect

these kids and their choices in the future is uncertain, but the value of the trip, however intangible, is hard to overstate. “These are gateway experiences,” says Greg Lais, founder of Wilderness Inquiry. “We don’t expect one trip will change someone’s life, but it will provide access. Sure, the Boundary Waters are great. Yellowstone is amazing. But we have tremendous opportunities to be in nature right in our own city.”

Paul Labovitz, superintendent for the Mississippi National Park and Recreation Area (MNPR), points out the untapped potential that the Mississippi River offers all of us in the Twin Cities. “Most people don’t appreciate that there’s a national park—the MNPR—in their own backyard,” he says. “The UWCA is a wonderful way for us to get these kids on the river. Out there, it can feel truly wild. In some stretches, there’s not a car or person in sight. That’s the first step to getting them to care about this magnificent place.”

For some students, their Wilderness Inquiry experience not only gives them an appreciation of the natural world, it gives them a job. “One thing that never gets talked about when we consider outdoor education is the opportunity for careers, especially for ‘non-traditional users.’” Lais says. “This is a seven- or eight-billion-dollar industry screaming for diversity.”

Staff member Josh Garabunda, who is African American and organized the Cleary Lake trip, first experienced these adventures as a public high-school student. He then became a volunteer and eventually worked his way into a career as an outdoor guide.

The collaborative nature of the program has also allowed each partner to reach out to a broader group of funding sources. A recent fundraiser sponsored by Wilderness Inquiry and Mississippi River Fund, hosted by Garrison Keillor and Mayors Coleman and Rybak, drew a standing-room-only crowd. The EPA, the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and a range of corporate foundations, government, and nonprofit organizations are continuing their support as well.

Because the program has had some success, it’s now on the radar of other public schools looking for innovative ways to get their kids outdoors. “Barriers come down in the wilderness,” Lais says. “This is not just about conservation, it’s about the kids. And people from all sides of the table

are emboldened by our success. The schools, park officials, politicians, parents, [and] volunteers are all stepping up and saying that they’d like to get involved. These kinds of experiences are crucial for everyone.” He pauses for a moment. “But stewardship isn’t the entire point—being a complete human being is.” ■

*Beth Dooley is a frequent contributor to Mpls.St.Paul Magazine.*

## SCIENCE SAYS TO GO PLAY OUTSIDE

**Spending time outdoors isn’t just fun for kids—it’s important.**

**“A growing body of research documents the costs to children, teenagers, and society when youth are not engaged in active play and exploration outdoors,” says Marti Erickson, co-founder with Richard Louv of the Children and Nature Network. A developmental psychologist and retired University of Minnesota professor, Erickson says the costs are reflected in many ways:**

- Skyrocketing childhood obesity rates
- Difficulty concentrating and learning in the classroom (especially for those with ADHD)
- Overmedication of children for behavioral “disorders”
- A marked statistical increase in childhood depression
- Missed learning opportunities that build on natural curiosity and encourage creativity
- Lower test scores in the natural sciences
- Lack of confidence and poor body image, especially in teenagers
- A new generation of adults—and voters—who may be less inclined to care about, or inform themselves about, the environment and environmental issues



THANK  
YOU WITH GRASS  
INQUIRY ~

FOR THE GREAT  
EXPERIENCE.

WE HAD THE CHANCE  
RIP!

SEWARD  
SUMMER  
SCHOOL  
6-8



## **Photos, Videos and Graphics**

Below are links to a number of videos, photos, and other material about the program.

**Program Website:** <http://www.urbanwildernesscanoeadventures.org>

### **Internal Video Links:**

Overview Video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miOPqe9QPvg>

Overnight Prep Video - <http://youtu.be/XCl06IHndtg>

### **External Video Links:**

**Kare 11:** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zu\\_eW75svpQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zu_eW75svpQ)

**Ron Schera:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tInE8dhsfFk>

**Travelers/AVID:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORk0eSRhQNY>

### **Photo link:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knIA5c08JIA>



MISSISSIPPI  
River Fund



Mississippi  
River

## Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures Pyramid of Engagement

- Desire to “give back” begins.
- Interest in outdoor jobs and volunteering



- Reduced fear of unknown
- Increased independence
- 70% developed strong bonds with peers, community & environment

