



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Agenda Item

Item 7. E. – Education & Outreach - Award Educator Mini-Grant

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

The LMRWD offers mini-grants to educators under its Education and Outreach Program. Grants are solicited twice a year. The LMRWD has received four applications for the latest round of grants. One grant was approved at the April Board of Managers meeting, as it was time sensitive; the event was planned to occur before the May Board of Managers meeting.

The LMRWD Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) has reviewed all the grant applications and recommends approval of two of the remaining applications. Details from the CAC review and its recommendations can be found in the attached Technical Memorandum – Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations – Spring 2025 dated May 8, 2025.

One of the applications requests funds for students to tour the Mississippi River under a program called the “Big River Journey”. More information about this program can be found using the link below:

<https://parkconnection.org/education-programs/fieldtrips/big-river-journey>

The reimbursement request from Pilot Knob STEM School is a separate item on the Board’s May 21, 2025 agenda at Item 5.E.

Attachments

Technical Memorandum – Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations – Spring 2025 dated May 8, 2025

Recommended Action

Motion to approve Spring 2025 Education Mini-Grants to Poplar Bridge Elementary School for \$500 and to Integrated Arts Academy for \$340 and to authorize execution of individual grant agreements between the LMRWD and the schools

Technical Memorandum



To: Linda Loomis, Administrator
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

From: Suzy Lindberg, Communications Manager

Date: May 8, 2025

Re: Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations – Spring 2025

The Educator Mini-Grant program is a key component of the Education and Outreach (E&O) Program, focusing on educating school-aged students within and surrounding the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD). The program provides up to 10 grants per school year – with a maximum fund distribution of \$500 each– to help offset the costs associated with water and natural resource educational materials and/or programming.

On behalf of the LMRWD, Young Environmental Consulting Group, LLC (Young Environmental) announced a new round of educator mini-grants with an April 6 deadline and received **four applications**. Young Environmental prescreened the applications for compliance and funding eligibility. One of the applications was fast-tracked for approval at the April Board of Managers meeting given the May 2 event date. The Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was given additional time to review the remaining three applications and have provided the following recommendations for approval at the May Board meeting.

SUMMARY

Based on the review process, Young Environmental and the CAC recommend authorizing funding for two of the three remaining applications, noting their alignment with the LMRWD’s mission and goals for watershed-focused education. **This recommendation, if approved, would authorize \$1,340 in funding to three current applicants for spring 2025.** Note: \$500 of this total was already approved by the Board in April.

The application that is not recommended for funding was submitted by a student, rather than an educator. The decision was difficult for the CAC as they were enthusiastic about the initiative and vision; however, neither the school nor the planned activity fell within the LMRWD watershed boundary. For this reason the application fell just below the scoring criteria for recommendation to the Board. Because the activity was envisioned for the Lanesboro, MN, area, CAC Chair Lee Peterson recommended reaching out to the student to provide feedback and potentially helping them make a connection with other natural resources opportunities in that area. Reviewers hoped to continue fostering this student’s interest beyond this grant opportunity.

A detailed scoring matrix and comments are included below, followed by a compilation of the mini-grant applications received. Any application scored at 5 or higher is recommended for Board approval.

Mini-Grant	Summary	Total Average Score	Recommended Board Action
Mini-Grant for April Board Approval			
Mini-Grant 1: Hiawatha Academies	Funds will be used to visit Thomas Savage Visitor's Center at Fort Snelling State Trail, allowing 90 students to collect data about water pollution and research water ecosystems in partnership with River Watch. Funds will be used to pay for bus transportation.	7.3	Recommended approving the funding request for \$500 . The applicant has been notified and provided with a grant agreement.
Total Grant Amount Requested for Board Approval (April)			\$500
Additional Mini-Grants for May Board Meeting Approval			
Mini-Grant 2: Poplar Elementary	Funds would be used to transport 90 students to the Big River Journey, touring the Mississippi River on a boat ride. Funds would be used to lower the field trip costs per student. The event will take place in fall 2025. Note: the school is not technically within the LMRWD boundary, but just outside, which is acceptable. Funds requested: \$500.	5	Recommend approving funding request for \$500 .
Mini-Grant 3: Integrated Arts Academy	Funds would be used to teach students about soil classification and how to test physical properties of soil to understand the impacts of pollutants and runoff on our water resources. Project is planned for the spring 2026; this educator has received a grant in the past. Funds requested: \$340.	6.5	Recommend approving funding request for \$340 .
Total Grant Amount Requested for Board Approval (May)			\$840
Total Grant Amount Requested for Board Approval (Spring Educator Mini Grant Cycle)			\$1,340

Mini-Grant	Summary	Total Average Score	Recommended Board Action
Mini Grant Application not Recommended for Approval			
Mini-Grant 4: Great River School	Funds would be used for a student-led experience to spend four days fly fishing in southern Minnesota to access water testing equipment and rental vans to understand water quality in the Root River. Funds requested: \$500	4	No action requested at this time. The CAC will provide a follow-up to the applicant.

Updates from Previous Grant Recipients

As part of grant agreements, we request that previous grant recipients share updates on their project or activity when submitting their reimbursement. One of our previous grant awardees, Michele Link-Valenstein of Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School, sent the following photos showing the impact of their educator mini-grant! Students purchased handheld microscopes to explore nature in greater detail. We will share this update with the LMRWD audience to showcase grant impacts.



Attachments

- Attachment 1—Spring Educator Mini-Grant Applications
- Attachment 2— Educator Mini Grant Report from Pilot Know STEM Magnet School



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

Hiawatha Academies

First Name:

Jackson

Last Name:

Fuson

Email:

jfusion@hiawathaacademies.org

Phone:

650-388-2480

Describe your current role?

9th Grade Earth Science Teacher at Hiawatha Collegiate high school

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

3500 E 28th St

Address line 2:

City:

Minneapolis

State:

MN

Zip Code:

55406

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

Thomas Savage Visitors Center Fort Snelling State T

Address line 2:

City:

St Paul

State:

MN

Zip Code:

55111

What age(s) are the participants?

K-5th grade

6-12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

90

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

Students will take a field trip to Fort Snelling state park to collect data about water pollution and research water ecosystems in partnership with River Watch. The field trip will be coordinated with Tom Crawford with the Friends of the Minnesota Valley to schedule activities with these students. This will coincide with our water unit, in which we talk about the effects of pollution in the local watershed. The ability to apply this information to the work that people are doing aligns with Hiawatha's goal to assist students in graduating college and assisting the common good.

Learning goals would include:

Students will collect and analyze water samples to assess pollution levels using real-world scientific methods.

Students will interpret data on water quality indicators used by water scientists.

Students will examine how human activities affect local water pollutions.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

Friday May 2nd.

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$500

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

Funds would be allocated to transporting our students by bus to Fort Snelling. Any extra would go to lunch for the students.

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:



Date:

3/31/2025



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

Poplar Bridge Elementary School

First Name:

Jennifer

Last Name:

Steffes

Email:

jsteffes@isd271.org

Phone:

507-271-5688

Describe your current role?

4th grade teacher

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

8401 Palmer Ave.

Address line 2:

City:

Bloomington

State:

MN

Zip Code:

55437

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

49 Harriet Island Road

Address line 2:

City:

St. Paul

State:

MN

Zip Code:

55107

What age(s) are the participants?

K-5th grade

6-12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants: **90 students**

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

I want to take my students on the Big River Journey field trip this fall. The trip takes the students on a river boat ride down the Mississippi River while they move through stations where they learn about mapping locations on the river, geology, river birds, using binoculars, examining mussels, and learning about the flood plain habitat of the river otters. This program is put on by the National Park Service and River educators.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

There are various dates to choose from in September & October of 2025.

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

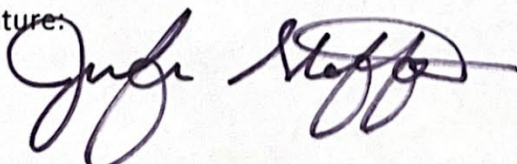
\$ **500.00**

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

We will use the funds to lower the \$12.00 field trip cost for our students and their families

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:



Date:

March 21, 2025



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

Describe your current role?

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

What age(s) are the participants?

K–5th grade

6–12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:

Date:



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

Great River School

First Name:

Zander

Last Name:

Cummins

Email:

zcummins@greatriverschool.org

Phone:

763-286-4200

Describe your current role?

I am an 11th grade student

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Ethan Huelett at ehuelett@greatriverschool.org

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

1326 Energy Park Dr.

Address line 2:

City:

Saint Paul

State:

Minnesota

Zip Code:

55108

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

28097 Goodview Dr.

Address line 2:

City:

Lanesboro

State:

Minnesota

Zip Code:

55949

What age(s) are the participants?

K-5th grade

6-12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

12-15

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

Each spring my school has student led experiences that are up to four days in length. This year I am trying to plan one around fly fishing and how water quality can impact fish habitat. I led one similar to this two years ago and we visited the Lanesboro Fish Hatchery which was a super fun experience and I would like to do that again. The goal of this trip would be to educate students interested in outdoor recreation on how development and climate change can impact the natural resources used for recreation. Some activities that would be fun and educational other than the fish hatchery is the monitoring and logging of water quality data at different locations, a lesson from the nature educators at the Eagle Bluff Environmental Center, and identification of microinvertebrates in the rivers we would be fishing in order to better 'match the hatch'.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

The first week of June

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$500

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

Funds would allow us access to water testing equipment along with money for rental vans. Some money would also be used to fund a lesson from Eagle Bluff about water quality and the different influences on it in the Root River.

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature: 

Date:

02/24/2025



Educator Mini-Grant Program Reimbursement and Reporting Request Form

Name of School/Organization: **Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School**

First Name: **Michele**

Last Name: **Link-Valenstein**

Email: michele.linkvalenstein@isd197.org

Phone: 651-403-7933

Address of School/Organization

Street Address: **1436 Lone Oak Rd**

City: **Eagan**

State: **MN**

Zip Code: **55121**

When and where did the activity/project take place? **The microscopes were used in STEM class with students in Kindergarten-4th grade in April 2025. They will continue to be used in STEM class.**

Describe how your activity or project engaged participants? **This has been the most fun week! The addition of handheld microscopes to our Wondering Walks proved to be a transformative element in student engagement. This initiative, designed to encourage intentional seeking of awe and wonder in nature, was powerfully amplified by the ability of students to explore the micro-world. The microscopes unlocked hidden details, sparking a level of curiosity that far exceeded our previous experiences. The remarkable excitement witnessed as students examined everything from the inside of a blade of grass to the textures of bark and soil underscores the success of this approach in capturing their interest in the natural world.**

Total number of participants: **381**

List your relevant expenses: **\$380.64**

Refund amount (cannot be more than the original award amount): **\$380.64**

Please provide information for the check recipient:

Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School

1436 Lone Oak Rd

Eagan, MN 55121

Please submit photos of your activity or project in action. Include the photographer's name in the photo file name and email to admin@lowermnrivewd.org.