WOLF RIDGE[SM]
ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

TO: Minnesota Legislators

FROM: Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center

RE: Legislation: SF 2921,(Bakk; Stumpf; Cohen; Ingebrigtsen); HF 2856, (Ecklund; McNamara)

Summary

This legislation will enable Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center ("Wolf Ridge") to complete a badly needed $8 million construction project. The legislation provides a one-time appropriation of $3.5 million which can only be disbursed when the Commissioner of Management and Budget determines that an amount sufficient to complete the project is available from non-state sources. This public private partnership project will help make Minnesota a national leader in sustainable construction methods and help Wolf Ridge continue its 46 year history of teaching kids from throughout Minnesota about the environment. As noted below, Wolf Ridge has raised approximately $3.9 million for the project from private sources.

Background

Wolf Ridge, a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation located in Finland, MN, is an accredited school, and is the largest accredited residential environmental learning center in the nation. Wolf Ridge began at an old forest service job corps. camp in Isabella, Minnesota in 1971 and moved to its present 2,000 acre facility in Finland, Minnesota in 1988. Wolf Ridge educates over 11,000 school children per year who come from over 100 communities throughout Minnesota for three or five day stays. In addition, over 2,000 other adults and children participate in camps and a variety of Wolf Ridge programs in and around the Wolf Ridge campus. Since inception, over 500,000 children and adults have come to Wolf Ridge to learn.

Wolf Ridge employs approximately 100 people per year, including 16 or so graduate students who live on campus for a school year as they get a teaching certificate and/or graduate school credits as they teach the majority of classes at Wolf Ridge. These student naturalists now live in the same dormitory as many of the elementary and secondary school children who attend Wolf Ridge. The same dormitory also houses space for the maintenance workers who maintain all the buildings at the 2,000 acre campus. Many of the graduate students go on to complete their Master's or Ph.D degrees and have moved on to key positions around the globe. Attachment 1 describes statistics and rankings to help explain Wolf Ridge and its impact.

Thanks to a generous landowner, Wolf Ridge recently obtained a presence directly on Lake Superior. This will significantly enhance teaching opportunities in one of the world's greatest outdoor classrooms. A small classroom building and limited access facilities on the Lake Superior property are a part of the project for which funding is sought.

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The Project: A Living Building Challenge

After intensive study and review funded by a grant from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation, the architects and engineers recommended that the oldest dormitory where the student naturalists, maintenance workers, and children all coexist undergo a major rehabilitation. The design of the dormitory was found to limit capacity, insufficiently meet current demands for housing children, and adversely impact programming. In addition, heat loss through windows and doors was found to be huge, air quality, lighting, circulation patterns, storage space, temperature control, access to daylight, and acoustics were all found to be very inadequate. As a result, the review team recommended that the most cost effective solution was gutting and redesigning the dormitory, moving graduate students to a new building, and constructing a separate small maintenance building.

Consistent with the Wolf Ridge mission and the importance of energy conservation and other environmental policies, the renovated dormitory will conform to the highest international standard for a sustainable building, a standard known as the Living Building Challenge (LBC). This involves meeting rigid requirements in various areas such as energy and materials sourcing. As of 2014 there were only 230 LBC building projects in the world, and only two of these are in Minnesota. The plan is to aim for full LBC certification to meet the highest possible number of requirements. The building will be a model and help keep Minnesota a leader in developing practical environmental policies. Design plans for the rehabilitated dormitory, a new building housing the student naturalists, a small maintenance building, and for a small class room building and limited access facilities on the Lake Superior property have been completed and approved by the Wolf Ridge Board of Trustees.

Costs and Economic Impact

The approximate breakdown of the $8M projected cost is $3.2 Million for the dormitory renovations/addition, $2.2 Million for the student naturalist housing, $1.0 Million for the infrastructure on the Lake Superior property, and $1.6 Million for site infrastructure and improvements for the maintenance building and contingencies.

In addition to the major impact on educational opportunities, the project will provide significant positive economic impact. Wolf Ridge employs nearly 100 people and the direct economic impact to the area in wages and services from vendors over the last four years is more than $7,800,000. Approximately 518 construction workers are expected to be employed on this project.

The State of Minnesota helped with financial assistance when Wolf Ridge expanded to its present site in 1986 ($1.85M) and for construction of an energy center (heating plant) in 1988 ($280K). These investments turned out to be a wise investment for the state. Wolf Ridge will continue to work hard to assure the same outcome for the additional state support in 2016.

Private Fundraising

Wolf Ridge has been proceeding with fundraising and design build construction drawings for the last several months. Because of the short construction season in northern Minnesota and the difficulties of continuing to serve school districts while construction is underway, the project is

being staged over two years. If Wolf Ridge can assure appropriate funding, construction is scheduled to begin in June of this year. Wolf Ridge has raised approximately $3.9 Million to date, with a large lead gift (over $2.5 million) from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation and significant donations from other foundations, individuals, and Board members.

Wolf Ridge would be pleased to provide additional information about this exciting project. For further information, please contact:

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Wolf Ridge thanks you for your consideration of this very important legislation.

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Statistics and Rankings

Site and Facility

- 2,000 acre campus with18 miles of trails.
- Located 70 miles northeast of Duluth, MN
- 100,000 square feet of campus buildings
- 380 overnight person capacity
- Organic farm and garden on site, providing vegetables to the center's cafeteria
- Renewable energy installations on campus include: 10 kW wind turbine, 18.5 kW photovoltaic array, solar thermal domestic hot water heating, and biomass space heating. 85% of the facility is heated with biomass renewable energy.

Attendance

- Over 13,000 people each year in educational programs.
- Over 10,000 youth, students, or campers each year in educational programs.
- Over 500,000 people in educational programming since 1971.
- Over 800 alumni of the Naturalist Training Program since its inception in 1974.

Curriculum

- 53 different classes ranging from 1-3 hours in length.
- Multi-disciplinary approach to environmental education including science, art, cultural history, personal growth and team building.
- 30 years' experience in partnering with industry to educate about natural resource use. Partners include: MN Power, MN Corn Growers Association, Potlatch, and Cleveland Cliffs.
- Professional training offered in bird banding.
- Scientific research partner; actively collaborating with National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration, University of Minnesota Duluth's Natural Resources Research Institute, MN Office of Climatology, MN Pollution Control Agency, and the National Weather Service.

Financial

- $2.8 million annual operating budget
- $400,000 Endowment
- Over $9 million in assets
- No long-term debt

National and State Position

- Largest accredited residential environmental education center in the country.
- First Environmental Learning Center of its kind to be accredited as a school.
- Largest summer camp in MN focused on environmental education.
- Wolf Ridge sponsored the first environmental education focused charter school in MN. The school was one of the national winners of the US Dept. of Ed Green Ribbon Award in 2013.
- The Wolf Ridge Naturalist Training Program was the first program of its type in the country.
- The only Student Teacher Practicum program to place licensed teachers who are professional environmental educators in elementary and secondary schools.

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