

YOUTH ECO SOLUTIONS

2024-25 YES Season

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Change-Makers,

As Director of Youth Eco Solutions (YES), I'm honored to share with you the incredible work our youth are doing to create a more sustainable, resilient, and hopeful future.

This past year has been a powerful reminder of the role young people play in addressing our planet's greatest environmental challenges. From climate change to biodiversity loss, water conservation to clean energy, students in the YES program have stepped up—not only with passion, but with action. Whether they're planting pollinator gardens, launching recycling campaigns, or advocating for clean air policies, our students are showing that environmental leadership knows no age.

At YES, our mission is simple but urgent: empower the next generation of environmental stewards by giving them the tools, mentorship, and platform to design and lead real-world sustainability projects. We believe that youth are not just future leaders—they are leaders now.

Over the last year, we've expanded our programming, deepened partnerships with schools and communities, and provided hands-on opportunities for students to make measurable environmental impact. What's more, these projects don't just benefit the environment—they build confidence, leadership, and a sense of agency in every student involved.

I want to thank our educators, mentors, partners, and supporters who make this work possible. Most importantly, I want to thank the students whose courage and creativity continue to inspire us all.

Together, we're not only imagining a better world—we're building it.



With gratitude,
Kalley Pratt
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yesmn.org

Our Organization

Mission: Empowering youth to create solutions to today's ecological challenges through hands-on action projects

Vision: The YES program is a highly successful model for both youth engagement and social change, empowering youth to drive the vision for YES towards achieving sustainable best practices in their community.

Since its inception in 2007, YES has supported over **5,285 students** through partnerships with more than **7,372 local businesses, organizations, and experts**, resulting in an **additional 367,555 meaningful interactions with students and community members**.



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18th Season of YES

On Wednesday, October 9th, we officially launched the 2024-25 Youth Eco Solutions (YES) season with our annual Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center—and what an incredible day it was!

Over 120 middle and high school students and coaches from eight YES Teams across Minnesota came together to connect, learn, and spark ideas for a new year of action. The energy was contagious as students met like-minded peers who are just as passionate about creating a more sustainable future.

Throughout the day, teams took part in four hands-on workshops including “Butterfly Mapping” with GreenStep Schools, “Why Pollinators Matter” with Pheasants Forever, and “Connecting the Dots! Soil Health + Gut Health = Human Health” with the Minnesota Soil Coalition. These sessions dove into everything from pollinator protection to soil health—giving students practical tools and inspiration to take back to their communities.

Our keynote speaker, Duluth-based winter adventurer Emily Ford, took the stage with her powerful talk, “The Longest Way.” She shared stories and lessons from her epic outdoor journeys that touched on perseverance, community, and the magic of saying “yes” to the unknown. Her top 10 takeaways resonated deeply with our students, including gems like:

- Take a buddy with you
- Have a plan (but be ready to let it go!)
- Roadblocks are part of the journey
- Lean on your people (or your dog)
- Rest matters
- Your impact is real
- Go outside—you might find something magical

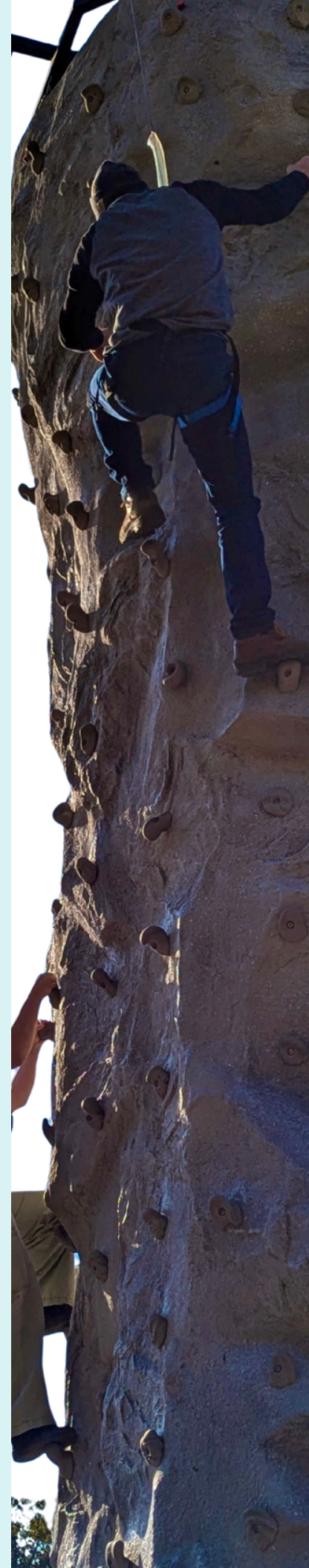
It was a talk we won't forget!

Following the Summit, YES Teams hit the ground running. Over the course of the season, 200 students across 10 teams completed 25 impactful eco-action projects—20 brand-new initiatives and five ongoing ones. Their work spanned a wide range of focus areas including: water conservation and quality, energy efficiency and renewable energy, climate change awareness, habitat restoration and wildlife advocacy, composting, soil health, and sustainable agriculture, reducing solid waste and tackling invasive species.

Throughout the season, students participated in 25 YES-hosted workshops, where they engaged with 42 green career professionals from across Minnesota. These experts provided valuable mentorship, project guidance, and insights into sustainable career pathways. Program highlights included the first-ever, organization-wide YES Weekend Retreat at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center; “Water Protection and Indigenous Leadership with Waankam: People of the Estuary”; “Introduction to the Boundary Waters” with Friends of the Boundary Waters; and “Share Our Shoreline” with the National Loon Center. Together, these experiences offered students hands-on learning and meaningful connections to environmental stewardship and leadership.

As part of an optional competition, YES Teams submitted final project reports that were reviewed by five Minnesota-based green career judges. Congratulations to the Royalton YES Team and the Westbrook-Walnut Grove YES Team, who came out on top! To celebrate their hard work and leadership, both teams earned a fully funded trip to the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum, generously sponsored by Minnesota's LCCMR, the Bell Museum, and LP Building Solutions.

We couldn't do this without the support of our partners, educators, and student leaders who bring YES to life every year. Your energy, commitment, and creativity are making a real difference in Minnesota's communities—and our planet. Here's to another powerful year of learning, leading, and saying “YES” to the future!



YES Team Accomplishments

10 YES Teams from across
the state of Minnesota -
including 2 NEW YES Teams

200

Total YES
Students

25

Eco-Action
Projects



365 Students

Actively Participated in
YES Team Projects

120 Students

Attended YES Fall Summit

YES Students Spent

640 Hours

Volunteering

YES Coaches Spent

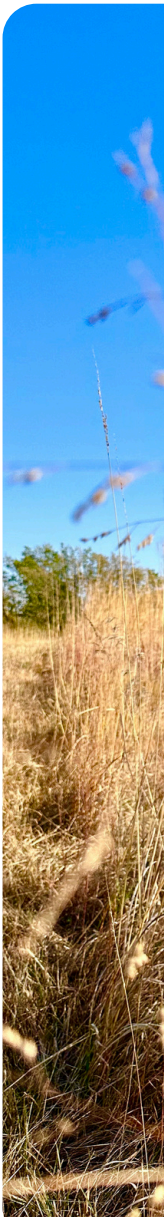
155 Hours

Volunteering

Community Members Spent

140 Hours

Volunteering



50 Students

Attended YES Weekend Rretreat
at Wolf Ridge Environmental
Learning Center



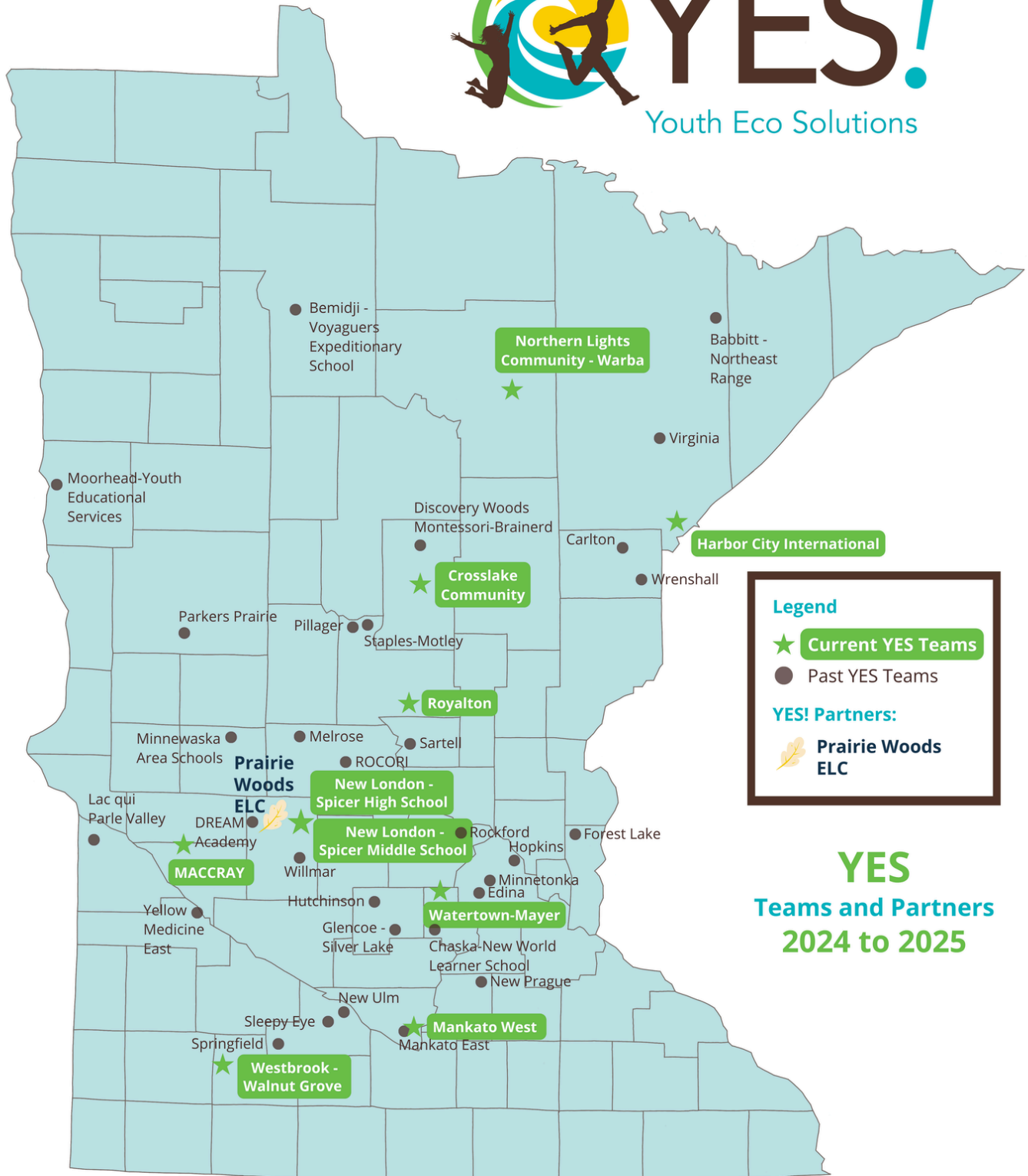
YES Teams partnered with
42
Minnesota-based
Green Career Professionals



YES Teams Collected & Recycled
550 lbs. of Holiday Lights



2024-25 YES Teams



Harbor City International

4th Year Team

Completed the second year of their snow leopard awareness and fundraising initiative, including a sticker design contest to support the Irbis Mongolia Center. They also launched new projects, such as installing wildlife trail cameras at the Lake Superior Zoo, participating in a CERTs meeting, and organizing a Sustainability Summit for like-minded peers, demonstrating their continued commitment to environmental action.

Crosslake Community

1st Year Team

Planned a school and community garden for the spring, seeking support from school administration. They also explored adding a pollinator habitat to support future garden projects.

MACCRAY

4th Year Team

Continued working toward completing their outdoor classroom project, aiming to expand outdoor learning opportunities for students. They also participated in an environmental education outreach event this spring called "Healthy Earth, Healthy Kids."

Mankato West

14th Year Team

Organized multiple campus clean-ups throughout the season in collaboration with other clubs and student organizations to broaden their impact and promote the goals of the YES Program. This longstanding tradition exemplified how YES Teams can actively engage their peers in environmental stewardship.

New London-Spicer High School

6th Year Team

Completed several new projects, including buckthorn removal and a school forest cleanup. They also carried out a door draft stopper initiative and organized a holiday light recycling project.

Northern Lights - Warba

1st Year Team

Participated in a program-wide holiday light recycling initiative, engaging both peers and the broader community in their collection efforts.

New London-Spicer Middle School

18th Year Team

Completed several projects, including a new holiday light recycling initiative. They also advanced the seeds in nature area component of a multi-year project, engaging 120 fifth-grade students in collecting and spreading seeds. Additionally, during YES Week, the team organized their annual toy drive, resulting in the donation of 200 gently used toys to Prairie Meadows Preschool.

Royalton

State Champion

13th year team

Last season, the team completed a large-scale prairie restoration project. While the site required ongoing maintenance, its future needs were continually assessed throughout the season. Additional efforts included team-building activities, a new holiday light recycling initiative, and an educational outreach event that introduced kindergarten students to the school's prairie. The team also continued work on their oil recycling station, which processes an average of 30 gallons of oil per week—helping to protect hundreds of native species, prevent contamination of up to 30 million gallons of water, and keep harmful toxins and heavy metals out of the environment.

Watertown-Mayer Middle School

2nd year team

Concentrated on recycling projects this year including gathering recyclables within their school, collecting and recycling broken and worn out holiday lights, visiting the local recycling center and implementing a school pen, marker and crayon recycling program.

Westbrook-Walnut Grove

Runner-Up State Champion

13th year team

Focused on the importance of pollinators and their critical role in sustaining wildlife habitats and food systems. They began gathering resources to develop educational sessions for elementary students in their district and planned a "seed bomb" project to complement the lessons with hands-on environmental engagement. This presentation contributed to the creation of approximately 22.5 square feet of pollinator habitat. Additional projects included an experiment to reduce paper usage in school, a plastic bag collection initiative for a bench project, and a creation of "The Whale Mural" by saving up to 7,000 bottle caps, placing around 1,000 on the mural board, and collecting up to 100 pop tabs. Ongoing recycling efforts further supported their commitment to sustainability.



Partners & Supporters

Youth Eco Solutions is an environmental program hosted by Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center located in Spicer, Minnesota. Their mission is to promote awareness of the importance of our natural environment through education and outdoor recreation.



Major funding for the 2024-25 YES Season was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), the University of Minnesota's Institute on the Environment through a National Science Foundation Grant 2147839 and LP Building Solutions. Thank you!



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For more information about
Youth Eco Solutions visit yesmn.org.



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