

YOUTH ECO SOLUTIONS

2025-26 YES Season

Letter from the Director

Dear Friends, Supporters, and Change-Makers,

As we reflect on another year at Youth Eco Solutions (YES), I continue to be inspired by the passion, creativity, and leadership of the young people we serve.

Every day, YES students are proving that meaningful change starts with action. Through hands-on sustainability projects, they are improving their schools and communities while gaining the confidence and skills to become lifelong environmental leaders.

This work is only possible because of the incredible support of our educators, mentors, community partners, and donors. Your investment empowers students to turn ideas into impact and reminds them that their voices matter.

Thank you for believing in our mission and in the next generation of changemakers. Together, we are creating healthier communities and a more sustainable future.



With gratitude,
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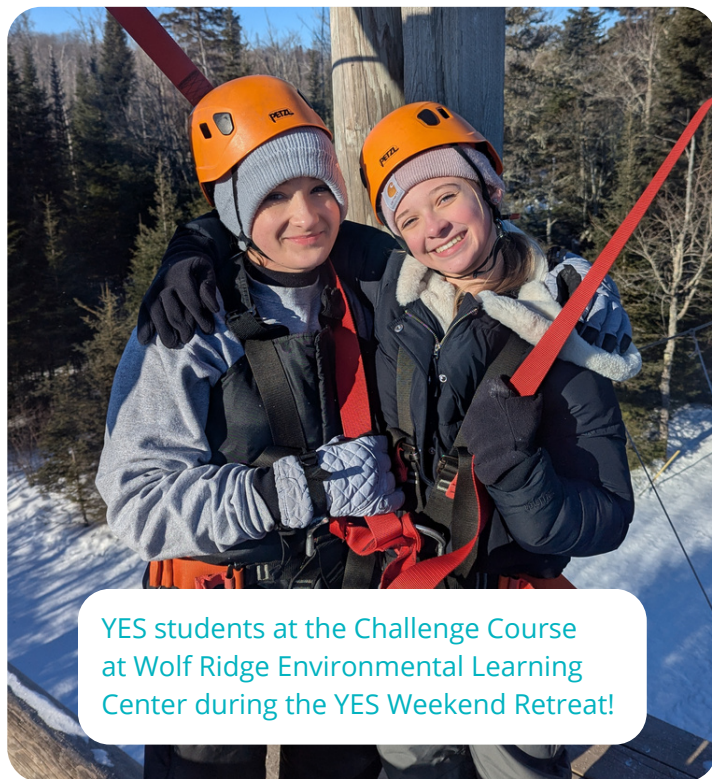


YES students at Chickadee Landing at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center during the YES Weekend Retreat!

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.



YES students at the Challenge Course at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center during the YES Weekend Retreat!

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**YOUTH ECO
SOLUTIONS**
yesmn.org

Celebrating 19 Seasons of Youth Leadership

As Youth Eco Solutions (YES) concludes its 19th season, we celebrate another year of student leadership, environmental action, and community impact across Minnesota. Throughout the year, YES Students demonstrated that young people can create meaningful change through hands-on learning and service.

More than 100 middle and high school students launched the season at the annual Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center. Through team-building activities, prairie restoration, carbon footprint investigations, macroinvertebrate studies, and outdoor challenges, students strengthened their leadership skills while building lasting connections with peers from across the state.

During the holiday season, six YES teams collected more than 1,150 pounds of holiday lights for recycling—surpassing the program goal by over 400 pounds and keeping valuable materials out of landfills.

In January, 40 students gathered at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center for the second annual YES Weekend Retreat. Students explored environmental careers through hands-on experiences while building friendships and expanding their leadership skills in an inspiring outdoor setting.

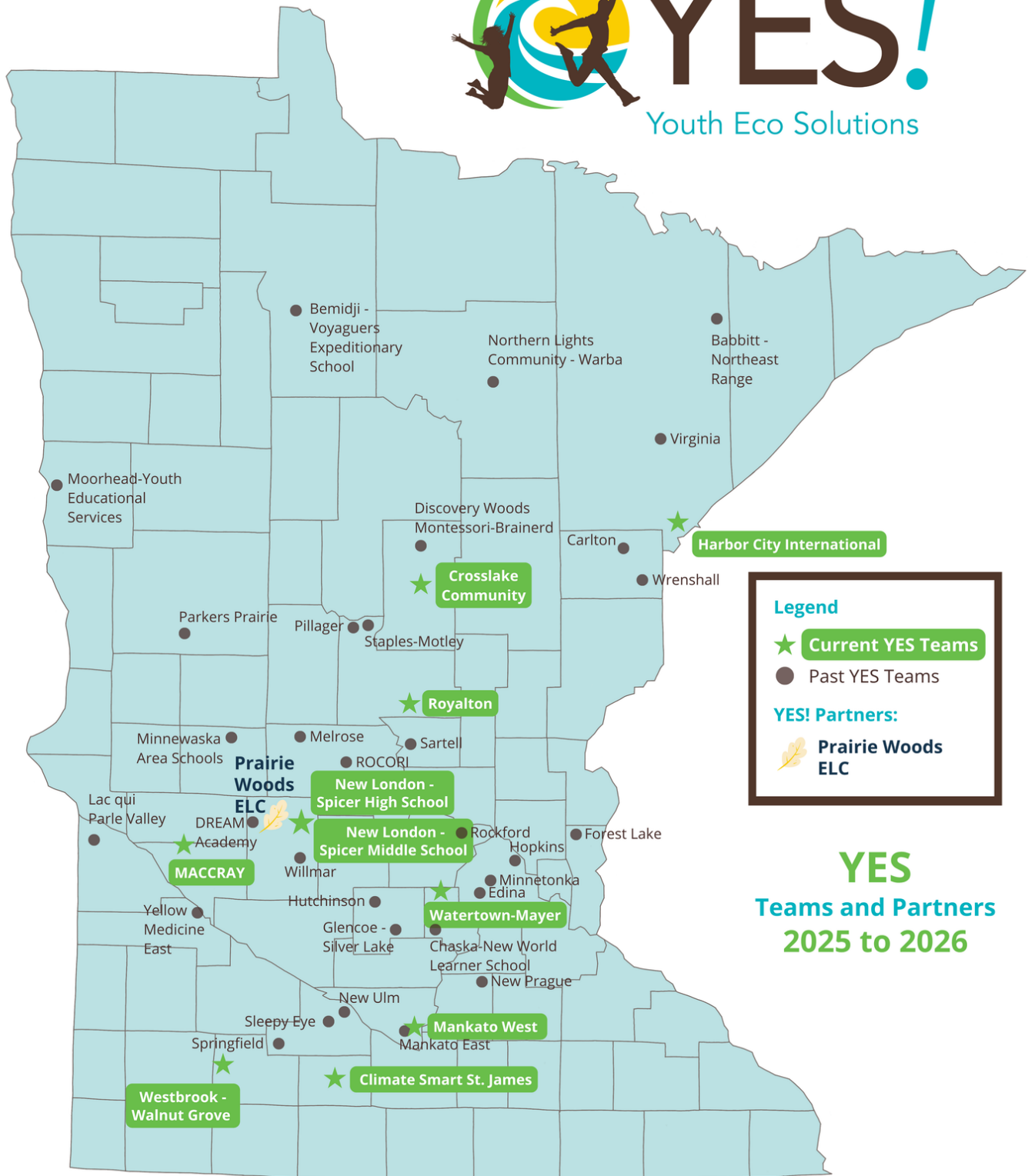
This spring, YES Teams completed projects focused on recycling, water quality, conservation, habitat restoration, pollinator gardens, and environmental education. Their work was reviewed and evaluated by professionals in Minnesota's green career sector, with Royalton YES and Westbrook-Walnut Grove YES earning educational field trips in recognition of their outstanding efforts.

As the season concludes and we prepare for our 20th season, YES continues to empower students to become environmental leaders, strengthen their communities, and inspire sustainable change. We are grateful to our students, advisors, schools, partners, and supporters who make this work possible and continue to invest in the next generation of changemakers.



YES students, chaperones, and staff say goodbye after an adventurous and educational weekend at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center during the YES Weekend Retreat!

2025-26 YES Teams



Climate Smart St. James

1st Year Team

The Climate Smart St. James YES Team focused on community education and sustainability action throughout the season. Students completed the CERTs Community Ambassador Training and developed a plan to share their knowledge and resources with the local community.

The team also launched their first-ever holiday light recycling initiative, collecting 161 pounds of lights and successfully engaging community members in reducing waste and promoting sustainable practices.

Crosslake Community

3rd Year Team

In January 2026, Crosslake Community YES Team members attended the YES Weekend Retreat at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. Students explored environmental topics and green career pathways through outdoor recreation, environmental education workshops, and team-building experiences while connecting with YES students from across Minnesota.

Harbor City International

5th Year Team

Harbor City International YES students continue to combine education, service, and community leadership to make a meaningful impact. This season, students taught peers and staff about the importance of bats and raised funds for Bat Conservation International to support the preservation of Brandon Hill Cave in Honduras.

The team also organized a holiday food drive, collecting 300 pounds of food for the Duluth community. In addition, students planned and hosted a Sustainability Summit at The Depot in Duluth on April 10, bringing people together to learn, connect, and take action around sustainability efforts; at this event, they were presented with the GreenStep School award - officially making them a GreenStep School in Minnesota.

MACCRAY

5th Year Team

The MACCRAY YES Team focused on environmental stewardship, hands-on learning, and statewide collaboration throughout the season. In fall 2025, students visited Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center where they helped plant prairie violets as part of local habitat restoration efforts and learned about the importance of native plants and pollinator ecosystems.

In January 2026, team members attended the YES Weekend Retreat at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center. Students explored environmental topics and green career pathways through outdoor recreation, environmental education workshops, and team-building experiences while connecting with YES students from across Minnesota.

The team also participated in the Prairie Woods Earth Day Celebration on April 18, where students helped community members plant flowers using recycled egg cartons and soil while promoting sustainability and environmental education.

Mankato West

15th Year Team

The Mankato West YES Team hit the highway for a successful community cleanup day. Students worked together to remove litter, protect local wildlife, and help keep their community clean. Their teamwork and dedication continue to make a positive difference.

New London-Spicer High School

7th Year Team

The NLS High School YES Team focused on education, environmental stewardship, and community action throughout the season. Students developed and taught a lesson to third graders on behavioral adaptations in nature, highlighting how living things use natural "engineering" to meet their needs.

The team also partnered with the middle school YES Team to lead a buckthorn removal day in their school's oak savanna, clearing a 50-by-50-yard area to improve ecosystem health. In addition, students organized a holiday light recycling effort, collecting more than 250 pounds of lights to help reduce waste in the community.



YES student taking on the Flying Squirrel at the annual Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center!

New London-Spicer Middle School

19th Year Team

The NLS Middle School YES Team continues to focus on education, collaboration, and environmental stewardship. Each spring, students support a 4th grade field trip by leading an interactive learning station where younger students explore environmental topics through hands-on activities and games.

The team also partnered with the high school YES Team to organize a holiday light recycling initiative, collecting 239 pounds of lights from the community.

In addition, YES students work closely with 5th grade science classes to maintain the school's native prairie. They teach younger students about the importance of prairie ecosystems while collecting, preparing, and planting seeds and caring for the space throughout the year.

Royalton High School

State Champion

14th year team

The Royalton YES Team focused on hands-on learning, environmental stewardship, and community engagement this season. Students taught 2nd graders about plants and pollinators while guiding them in creating seed bombs to plant at home. Team members also explored future career opportunities through an interactive activity led by a CERTs educator.

Students strengthened their environmental knowledge and teamwork during a visit to Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center. They also completed a prairie cleanup project where 26 students removed 20 pounds of trash to improve habitat conditions.

Additionally, the team planted three apple trees in their native prairie to support pollinators and promote healthy, sustainable growth around their school.

Royalton YES Team



Watertown-Mayer Middle School

3rd year team

The Watertown-Mayer YES Team focused on waste reduction and sustainability within their school community. Students developed a composting initiative by collaborating with local officials and creating educational posters to raise awareness about composting practices.

The team also helped build a bench made from recycled plastic, demonstrating creative reuse of materials. In addition, students organized a marker recycling effort to reduce waste and encourage environmentally responsible habits throughout their school.



Westbrook-Walnut Grove

Runner-Up State Champion

14th year team

The WWG Earth YES Team focused on sustainability, community engagement, and environmental education this season. Students harvested apples from trees planted five years ago and served fresh apple juice to students and staff while teaching others about the process from fruit to juice.

The team also led a school-wide community cleanup to reduce litter and raise awareness about its environmental impact. During Earth Month, students launched themed initiatives such as "Black-Out Day" and "No Cars Day" to encourage waste reduction and sustainable habits.

In addition, the team organized a holiday light recycling drive, collecting 12 pounds of lights, and showed appreciation for community supporters by hosting a thank-you meal and creating gift baskets for families who helped maintain local gardens.

Since its inception in 2007, YES has supported over **5,640 students** in working with more than **7,372 local businesses, organizations and experts** to impact an **additional 367,018 students and community members**.

YES Team Accomplishments

2025-26 YES Season

- More than **175 YES Students** from **10 YES Teams** participated in the program
- **100 YES Students** attended YES Fall Summit hosted at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center
- YES Students completed **35 Eco-Action Projects**
- YES Students spent **440 hours** volunteering in their local communities
- YES Coaches spent **125 hours** volunteering in their local communities
- **565 community members** participated in YES events
- Community members spent **135 hours** volunteering in their local communities
- **40 YES Students** attended the YES Weekend Retreat hosted at Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center
- YES Students **reduced their carbon footprint by 21,065 pounds**

Invest In
Youth Eco Solutions



YES students working together at the Flying Squirrel at the annual Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center!



MACCRA YES students giving back to the prairie at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center by planting prairie violets and helping restore native habitat.



Mankato West YES students collecting and recycling holiday lights.



YES students getting their hands dirty and creating seed bombs at the Fall Summit at Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center!

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 2025-26 YES Season was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF), Minnesota Commerce Department and LP Building Solutions. Thank you!



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

