

THE NEY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER AND NATURE PRESERVE

WORK PROGRAM FINAL REPORT

SUBMITTED TO

Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources
100 Constitution Avenue - Room 65
State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155-1201

by

Executive Board - Ney Environmental Center Foundation:
Joe Doherty, Arlys Graff, Sarah Johnson Malchow,
Donald Ney, and Dr. Harold K. Larson

706 Turril Street
Le Sueur, MN 56058

NOVEMBER 1, 1997

1995 6(r)

"A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT"

I. Project Title and Project Number:

Ney Environmental Learning Center and Nature Preserve

Web Site/Page: www.isd2397.k12.mn.us

Project Manager:

Executive Board of the Ney Environmental Learning Center:

Foundation: (Sarah Johnson Malchow, Arlys Graff, Joe Doherty,
Harold K. Larson, and Don Ney)

Agency Affiliation:

Le Sueur County (Joe Doherty-Commissioner holding Ney Project
portfolio)

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A. Legal Citation:

M.L. 95 Chapter 220, Section 19, Subdivision Chapter 6, as amended.

Total LCMR Appropriation:	<u>\$100,000</u>
Balance:	<u>\$100,000</u>

"This appropriation is from the Future Resources Fund to the Commissioner of Natural Resources for an agreement with Le Sueur County to develop an environmental learning center in the Minnesota River Valley near Henderson. The appropriation shall be used to add classroom and restroom facilities, improve access, and remove unneeded structures."

B. Status of Match Requirement: No match is required with this appropriation

II. Project Summary:

This project will provide for the first phase of the development of the Ney Residential Environmental Center and Nature Preserve on a 366 acre parcel of land given to Le Sueur County.

Development of this site will provide an environmental learning center facility in the Minnesota River Valley area. This location will strategically place a learning center within driving distance of more than fifty percent of Minnesota's population.

This population consists of K-12 students, college students, and interested adult residents. This center will provide the unique opportunity to study another sector of our State's environment not currently accessed by other existing centers in Minnesota.

This parcel of land is located on a site overlooking the Minnesota River Valley. It is a site that includes upland agricultural parcels, a large area of hardwood forests, areas containing a variety of other vegetation and prairie flowers. A scenic stream flows through a variety of environmental settings. Another public area owned by Le Sueur County provides access to the Minnesota River and its flood prone land area. This property is contiguous to the Ney Property and geographically connects the Environmental Learning Center to the Minnesota River. This center site is also in close proximity to three other publicly owned environmental study areas. Furthermore, the recent discovery of deformed frogs identified by the Minnesota New Country School students is at the Ney Pond on this environmental learning center property. Already a major environmental research project has commenced on this planned and already utilized learning center site.

Existing trails already provide opportunity for self-guided or instructional walks through the property for students and other visitors. The four main outcomes for this project are as follows:

1. to develop plans for and construction of the phase I facility;
2. to develop an interdisciplinary environmental education curriculum for pre-school through undergraduate level;
3. to develop and implement a marketing plan; and
4. to continue planning for completion of the phase II residential environmental learning center facility.

III. Final Work Program Update:

This final November 1, 1997 program update reflects the completion of the Phase I construction of the Environmental Center classroom and the update is as follows: there is increased interest in the development and imple-entation of the Ney Environmental Center project. The factors causing this significant interest is the project's prime location in the Minnesota River Basin Area, the attention being given to the serious environmental problems associated with the Minnesota River, and the formation of the Minnesota River Basin Joint Powers Board.

The Ney Environmental Center Foundation and its work group, in collaboration with Le Sueur County, are continuing to complete the necessary work relating to Site Management and Program Planning activities.

The Foundation's Executive Committee has provided a broader-based definition of the membership organization which is being described in the bylaws of the foundation. The second annual meeting of the foundation is scheduled for November 15, 1997 when the modified bylaws will be considered for approval.

Le Sueur County, under the leadership of commissioner Joe Doherty, has facilitated the completion of the LCMR Grant to construct the Ney Environmental Center classroom and that new classroom is complete and ready for use.

Donald Ney has transferred to Le Sueur County title/ownership to the land parcel which includes the "Three Legged Frog Pond" where the first deformed frogs were identified by Cindy Reinitz and her middle school students from the Minnesota New Country School. That parcel is now part of the Environmental Center properties.

The Foundation has received a \$25,000 grant and has purchased the necessary classroom equipment including tables, chairs, electronics, display cases, office equipment, classroom materials, snowshoes, etc. to allow fall use of the property to begin.

The Ney project stakeholders are excited about the prospect of continuous development and use of this site; the Phase I construction plan as outlined in the original work plan effective Wednesday, October 8, 1997 is complete with the inspection of the final product by Audrey Mulrie, Grants Manager for the Office of Planning.

IV. Statement of Objectives:

A. Education Program Development

The project will continue to develop and implement its environmental learning center programs and curriculum which will serve the large number of K-12 students, college students, and interested adults living in the Minnesota River Valley and all residents in the metropolitan area of Minneapolis - St. Paul and the suburbs. This site will be an easy commute and will allow these environmental stakeholders access to a diverse natural site to study the environment as well as programs and research on the use of the environment along with methodologies to protect the environment for future generations.

B. Market Study and Promotion

This project is completing a study and is creating a comprehensive profile of potential users. The project is developing materials and brochures to inform the target population of the opportunities available on this site. Furthermore, the project is developing a schedule for use of the site along with a fee schedule for use of this environmental learning center site.

C. Phase I: Facility Development and Operation Plan

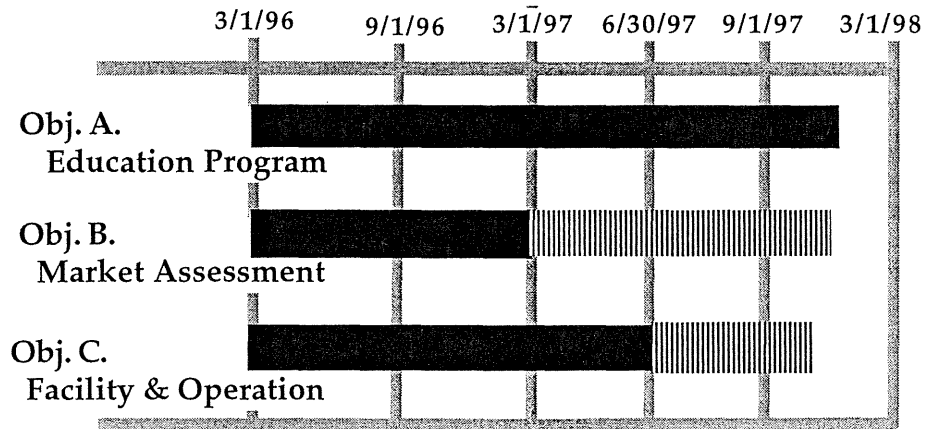
Preliminary study of the site by the Ney Project Development Committee members indicates the need for a multi-phase approach to site development.

Phase I will include the development of a start-up facility including restrooms and combination classroom / meeting room area. This space will be available for site research and planning for phase II (residential center).

Phase I site development and use will establish the cornerstones for planning and program development that will justify and demand the implementation of the phase II aspect of this project which involves the construction of a residential environmental learning center.

The longer term site plan calls for the phase I classroom facility to be converted to a museum housing artifacts and exhibits appropriate to the historical and other aspects of this particular site in the Minnesota River Valley.

Timeline for Completion of the Objective



All objectives will begin with approval of the initial work program and shall continue within the parameter of the two-year development phase.

V. Objectives / Outcome:

A. Title of Objective / Outcome.

Education Component

A.1. Curriculum Research.

A.1.a. Context Within Project. Development of a curriculum specific to the environment on the site and inclusive of the Minnesota River and the valley area which will lead to better understanding and sensitivity to its use.

A.1.b. Methodology. Documentation of a comprehensive inventory of the site and surrounding river valley area including but not limited to the following:

- tree cover types;
- other vegetation;
- birds, animals and all wildlife;
- site topography and soils; and
- existing buildings located on the project site.

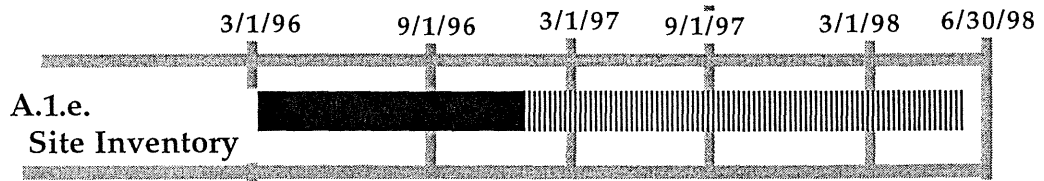
The inventory will be completed with the assistance of Ney Project Development Committee membership, Mankato State University, Gustavus Adolphus College-St. Peter, and the Department of Natural Resources.

A.1.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

A.1.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$500
Match Balance.	\$500

A.1.e. Timelines.



A.1.f. Program Update: The Ney Center Foundation work group is continuing with the site inventory and will complete that work on or before June 1, 1998

A.2. Curriculum Development.

A.2.a. Context Within Project. An interdisciplinary curriculum is being developed using information from the site inventory along with curriculum information from other appropriate sources. This curriculum is being designed to provide stakeholders with the opportunity to evaluate and study all environmental and historical aspects of this unique site which includes the river, valley area, and the river flood plains.

The environmental and historical curriculum will include information on the historical significance of this area, the economic impact, and evidence of environmental abuse along with improved management and stewardship of the environment. The curriculum will also include lessons which will provide insights into all aspects of a myriad of environmental issues represented at this site and reflected across all of southwestern and southeastern Minnesota within which the Minnesota River intertwines itself with people, cities, and agriculture.

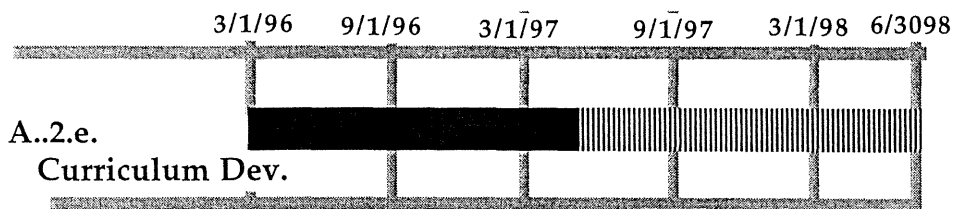
A.2.b. Methodology. The curriculum development continues to be accomplished with the assistance of representative departments at Mankato State University, Gustavus Adolphus College - St. Peter, teaching staff at Le Sueur-Henderson Community Schools, including the Minnesota New Country School, both of which have been deeply involved in programs at the site. The nationally recognized Deformed Frog Research Project is currently in progress on the site and will continue to bring a sustained research focus to this unique and diverse environmental setting.

A.2.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

A.2.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$4,400
Match Balance.	\$4,400

A.2.e. Timelines.



A.2.f. Work Program Update The Ney Environmental Center Foundation Curriculum Committee and work group continue to work and develop the curriculum to be used on site. In addition to the curriculum grant from the district, the Ney foundation received a \$3,000 Roundup Grant which will provide \$1,000 each year over the next three years. This grant will provide the financial support to help fund the continued preparation and modification of the new curriculum. The basic curriculum should be ready for use by the Ney Center and its day programming activities.

A.3. Plan Outdoor Demonstration Areas.

A.3.a. Context Within Project. Many of the aspects of learning at the center site will be enhanced by hands-on on site demonstration activities and experiences.

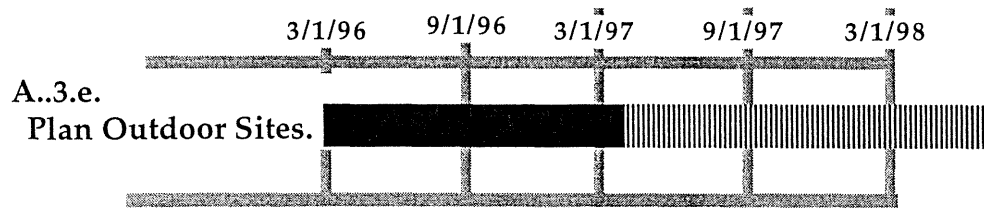
A3.b. Methodology. Following curriculum development, display and demonstration areas, including trails, water retention demonstration areas, erosion control, and other such areas will be used to convey to students better understanding of specific environmental concerns and possible solutions.

A.3.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

A.3.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$1,600
Match Balance.	\$1,600

A.3.e. Timelines.



A.3.f. Work Program Update. Activities continue to take place on the property. The Ney Environmental Center Work Group members are working to complete the planned outdoor sites for year-round activities to be delivered to learners of all ages. It is important to recognize that the new classroom facility will enhance the use of this site as the work group identifies critical areas on property where hands on experiences will be available to the users of the site.

B. Title of Objective / Outcome. Market Study and Promotion

B.1. Profile of User Groups.

B.1.a. Context Within Project. This is a critical step in the development of the overall project and will determine the potential target populations who will constitute the users of this site. Accurate data is necessary as this information will be utilized for facility planning and in creating the operating budgets including the fee schedules for site use.

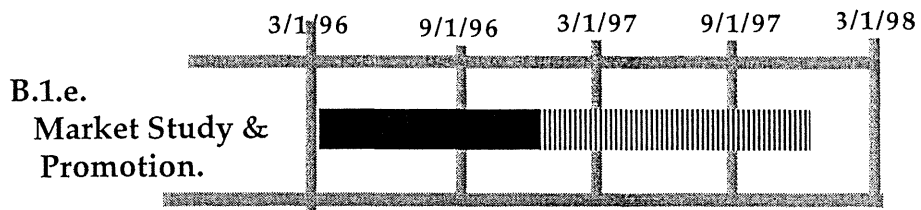
B.1.b. Methodology. The profiles of potential users will include a survey of K-12 systems and regional colleges and universities within a 2 to 3 hour commute to the site. Consideration will also be given to other potential users, i.e., Minnesota River Study Groups, Department of Natural Resources, the Pollution Control Agency, and other groups interested and engaged in environmental studies.

B.1.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

B.1.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$1,500
Match Balance.	\$1,500

B.1.e. Timelines.



B.1.f. Work Program Update. Work continues on how the site can be used to serve the needs of environmental education in general and also serve the special and unique needs that seem to be developing as a result of River Basin needs. Initial studies seem to indicate a large potential market as a result of site location which places these environmental education learning opportunities within easy reach of 50% of the residents of Minnesota according to a recent study. The Foundation members will continue to work on data and marketing information that will correlate with placement of staff members at the site.

B.2. Design Program Market Materials.

B.2.a. Context Within Project. The development of a marketing program will be necessary to connect with the potential users and convey to them the viability and environmental diversity of the Ney Environmental Learning Center and Nature Preserve. The materials must, at a minimum, outline what environmental study opportunities are available at this site.

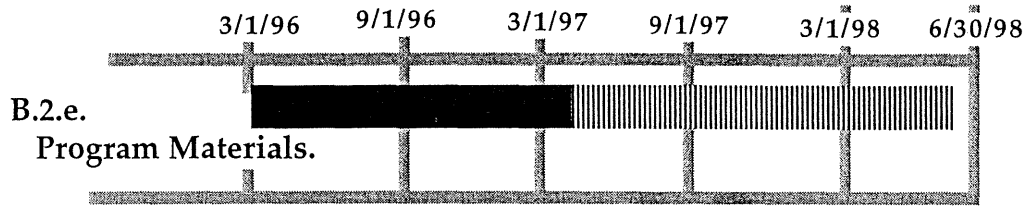
B.2.b. Methodology. The marketing program will use brochures which will contain pictures, printed materials outlining in some detail more site specific information. Video tapes marketing the site will be available. Media departments at Mankato State University and Gustavus Adolphus College - St. Peter, will assist along with local printing and publishing firms who are supporting this project.

B.2.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity. Needed materials will be provided by the contracting entity.

B.2.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$5,000
Match Balance.	\$5,000

B.2.e. Timelines.



B.2.f. Work Program Update. The Foundation work group is continuing to work on materials to be available after the opening the facility. A marketing video is almost complete to be used to demonstrate the potential of this environmentally viable site.

C. Title of Objective / Outcome. Phase I. - Facility and Operation

C.1. Site Assessment.

C.1.a. Context Within Project. The site will be evaluated and the most appropriate location on the 366 acre site has identified for the Phase I facility.

This site required consideration of the Phase II site location of the residential facility to allow for long term site development planning.

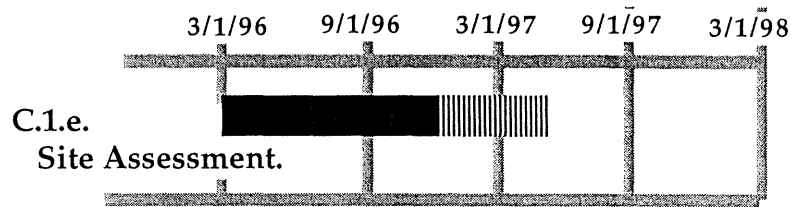
C.1.b. Methodology. The site is being evaluated premised upon access, relationship to demonstration areas, legal descriptions of properties if any, zoning, and / or soil conditions. The Department of Natural Resources input is being considered based upon prior site experiences.

C.1.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

C.1.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$1,000
Match Balance.	\$1,000

C.1.e. Timelines.



C.1.f. Work Program Update. Staff personnel from Mankato State University and Gustavus Adolphus College analyzed the entire Ney project topography and prepared a written report on suggested locations for both Phase I and Phase II facilities. The Ney Foundation membership approved the committee suggestions and plans we developed and construction of the facility completed.

C.2. Phase I - Facility Structure Development

C.2.a. Context Within Project. The development of a Phase I structure is providing a facility to house meeting room and classroom space along with restroom facilities.

This facility will serve the initial student learning space and site needs during inclement weather and for pre-site activities and follow-up experiences for the learners who utilize the environmental learning center property. It will also serve as a research planning site for Phase II development and implementation.

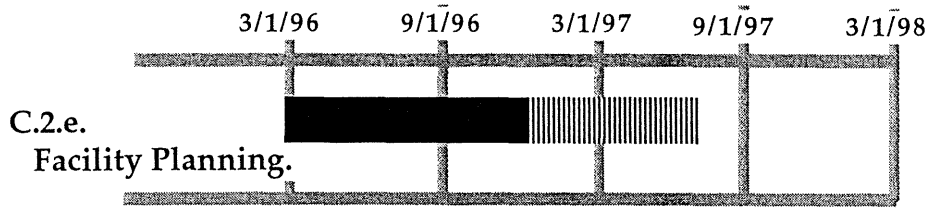
C.2.b. Methodology. The initial work will include the construction study and drawings for the restroom and combination classroom and meeting rooms. A local architectural firm will provide assistance on the project.

C.2.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

C.2.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$2,500
Match Balance.	\$2,500

C.2.e. Timelines.



C.2.f. Work Program Update. Preliminary designs for Phase one were prepared for bidding. The Le Sueur County Commissioner, Joe Doherty, facilitated the bid process and provided the necessary oversight in the design, bidding, and construction of the facility during the summer of 1997.

C.3. Preparation of the Business Plan.

C.3.a. Context Within Project. Based upon the information generated in the market study which will provide student and visitor use potential, operational costs and budget will be developed.

C.3.b. Methodology. Market studies and facility plan studies will provide the necessary information on which the operational plan will be developed.

With this information, cost of operation will be balanced against initial use projections; a fee schedule will be developed to assist with funding operations.

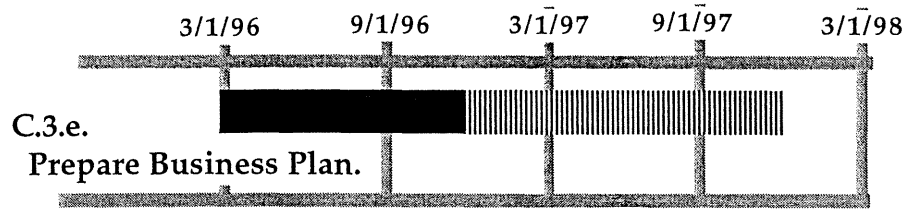
The schedule will also take into consideration fees at other sites to assist in development of need for other funding sources.

C.3.c. Materials. No special materials or tools are anticipated for this activity.

C.3.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	N / A
LCMR Balance.	N / A
Match	\$1,500
Match Balance.	\$1,500

C.3.e. Timelines.



C.3.f. Work Program Update. The work continues on the business plan including evaluation, planning, and funding for the facility operations, staffing, and related costs for the day activities scheduled to begin in th. The initial plan is being designed by utilizing resources generated with initial user fee schedules and other potential income. Meetings with adjoining Counties have been held for generating financial support for this project with some success. The Foundation work group will continue its efforts to design the project planning.

C.4. Phase I - Building Construction.

C.4.a. Context Within Project. The construction of the Phase I classroom / meeting rooms / restroom facilities accommodated the site use and prepared the site for Phase II development and implementation.

C.4.b. Methodology. Upon completion of the architectural design and construction drawings, bids were obtained on construction of the classroom / meeting rooms / restroom facilities including the structure and necessary mechanical equipment; i.e., water, sewer, electrical, heating, etc.

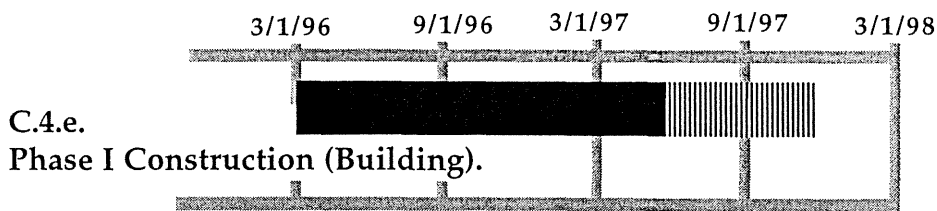
Endorsement of the Department of Natural Resources pursuant to and in compliance with the written agreement was obtained.

C.4.c. Materials. Estimated cost of building materials, labor, and mechanical contracts to serve the structure are: \$125,000.

C.4.d. Budget.

Total LCMR Budget	\$100,000
LCMR Balance.	\$ 00
Match	\$ 35,000
Match Balance.	\$ 00

C.4.e. Timelines.



C.4.f. Work Program Update. The Phase I construction was completed on October 1, 1997. Audrey Mulrie, Grants Manager, Office of Planning, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155, visited the site for an official inspection on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, the LCMR, and other related State agencies.

Ms. Mulrie inspected the completed project, and indicated that the project had met and/or exceeded all of the criteria as outlined in the work plan along with meeting the expectations of the state agencies involved in this project.

Ms. Mulrie indicated that she would so notify the appropriate agencies of the completion of this construction project according to all criteria.

As part of the completion of the construction project, the Foundation submitted a grant request for \$25,000 to the Schmidt Foundation to provide resources for equipment for the facility. The grant was approved in early September and the equipment for the classroom was ordered and is currently arriving at the site.

VI. Project Evaluation.

1. Professional educators; personnel from the Department of Natural Resources; personnel from the Department of Education - Mankato State University / Gustavus Adolphus College - St. Peter; and faculty from Le Sueur-Henderson Community Schools and the Minnesota New Country School will be involved and will review all aspects of the project development.
2. Students currently utilizing the project site for environmental education and learning along with teaching staff will evaluate the site viability.
3. The Le Sueur-Henderson Community Education Department and staff from the Minnesota New Country School will continue to assist learners and others to continue the research on the nationally recognized deformed frog project recently funded by the Minnesota Legislature.

4. The Ney Project Development Committee (long range planning committee) involved in the project will continue to be an active part of the overall evaluation and development of this site.
5. Details of Phase II of the Ney Environment Learning Center Project are found in the attachment entitled: "F.Y. 1996-2001 Capital Budget Brief, Le Sueur County - Ney Residential Environment Center." Once the day center is operational, the plans involve the development of a Residential Environmental Learning Center on the site. This center will be designed to deliver services to approximately 150 consumers.

This attached document does demonstrate the potential and viability of this environment learning site which is within easy driving distance of 50% of our citizenry.

VII. Context Within the Field.

The Foundation in partnership with Le Sueur County will be continuing to facilitate the short-term and long-term planning to assure effective use and development of this dynamic site.

These efforts will prove valuable in working with educators and environmental planning professionals. Furthermore, the Foundation's work group includes considerable experience and expertise in budget preparation, implementation, and management.

VIII. Budget Context.

The Le Sueur County Ney Project Development Committee membership has a budget of \$40,000 consisting of cash and "in-kind" services / materials which will easily serve as a "match" to the LCMR funding if it should be required. "In-kind" service will include all cost of project management, secretarial services, copying, mailing costs, and office support services to manage application development and data flow.

These services are being provided and will continue to be provided collaboratively by Le Sueur County, the Le Sueur-Henderson Community Schools, the Ney Environment Learning Center Foundation, Le Sueur Publishing, and Henderson Publishing.

The staff and personnel from Mankato State University and Gustavus Adolphus College - St. Peter will continue to contribute time, materials, and expertise to the project.

The Ney Foundation work group will be functioning as a standing committee to work in all of the areas of project development including, but not limited to fundraising from area business, industry and prominent individuals.

IX. **Dissemination.**

The plans developed in this project, including studies being done will be available to others who have a need for such data for only the cost of materials and duplication.

X. **Time.**

The complete development of all Phase I components of this project are targeted for June 30, 1998. Work on Phase II of this project will continue into the future as the project continues to evolve.

Note: It should be noted that with the completion of Phase I, the project will be providing a comprehensive curriculum of environmental education to area K-12 learners, college students, and interested adults in year-round day programming environments.