

Discover Nature

News and Programs
from the ODC Network



Spring
2021





The ODC Network, a 501c3 education and conservation organization, is a collection of ten business divisions managing two interpretive centers, two greenways, two nature-based preschools, multiple conservation initiatives, and global travel programs. Our mission is to advance outdoor education and conservation in West Michigan.

Visit our website: outdoordiscovery.org

Visit one of our two interpretive centers—FREE ADMISSION!

DeGraaf
nature center



DeGraaf Nature Center

600 Graafschap Road • Holland, MI 49423
degraaf.org

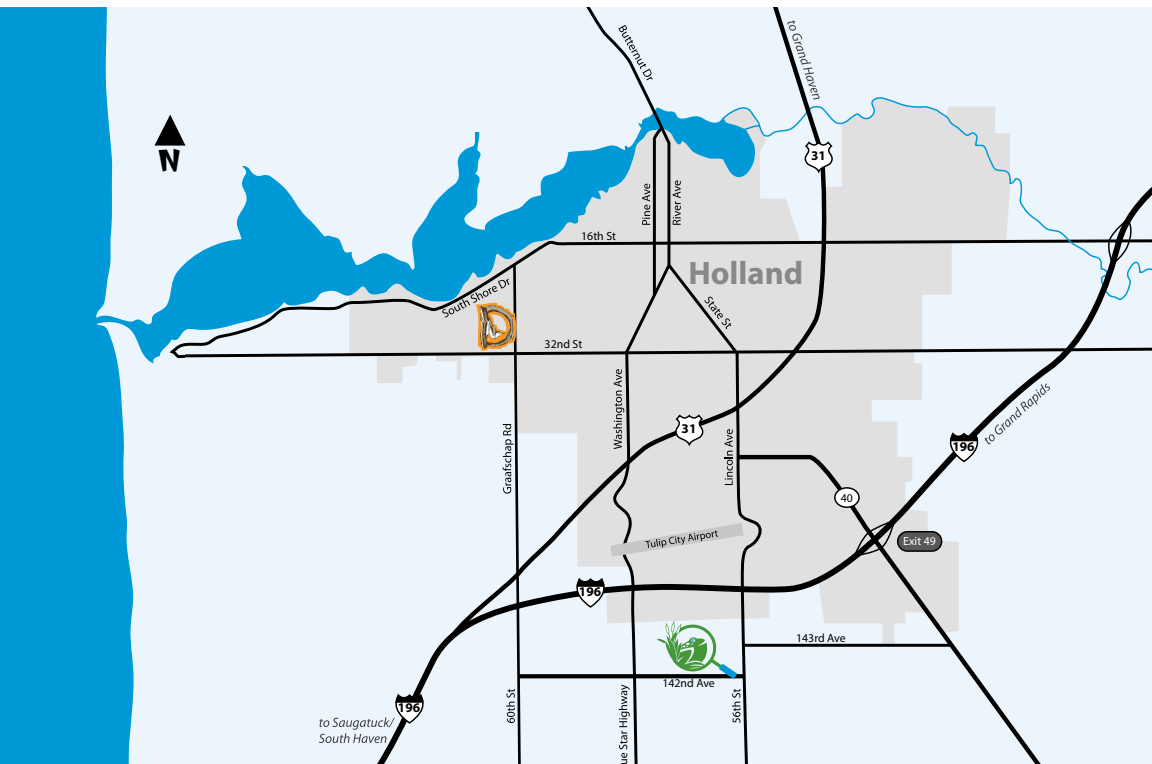


Outdoor Discovery Center

4214 56th Street • Holland, MI 49423
outdoordiscovery.org

DeGraaf Nature Center is 18 acres of forest and wetlands located within the City of Holland, just south of Lake Macatawa. Admission is free!

The Outdoor Discovery Center is 155 acres with about 3 miles of trails, located on the south side of Holland, just south of West Michigan Regional Airport. Admission is free!



Discover Nature • Descubrir la Naturaleza

The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children is celebrating *Week of the Young Child* April 10-17, 2021. At ODC Network we uplift our youngest children—from the smallest baby in our Hatchlings staff child care to the tallest preschooler in Little Hawks and Seedlings Discovery Preschools. We believe every child has a unique potential and nature should be accessible to all. Check out miaeyc.org for creative ways to incorporate diversity at home and in the classroom or try some ideas from MIAEYC below:

Cultural: Create a theme for different cultures. Combine cultural celebrations and outline the meanings behind the celebration. Develop cooking experiences with various foods from other cultures. Create arts and crafts projects with material from various cultures.

Racial: Have dolls of different skin tones and provide art projects for the children that incorporate skin-colored crayons and paints.



Physical: Have doll-size wheelchairs and crutches in the classroom for the children. Read books about children with special needs.

Family Dynamics: Read books about different families and during small group or circle time talk with the children about their views of how families look and function. Try the “OurStory” resource at diversebooks.org to find book suggestions or ask your local librarian for ideas and titles.



Scan above to visit diversebooks.org and get book recommendations

Join us for a Program!

We have plenty of fun spring programs planned for you! In order to be ready to adapt as necessary to changing health regulations, we are publishing our calendar exclusively online. Please check for updates on our website, Facebook, and Instagram posts!



Check outdoorsdiscovery.org for updates and program details



Look for your
2021 Park Passport
Encuentra tu
Pasaporte de Parque
2021



Or scan above to print it at home!

Tu puedes escanear el código QR para imprimir en casa!

Why Grow Native?

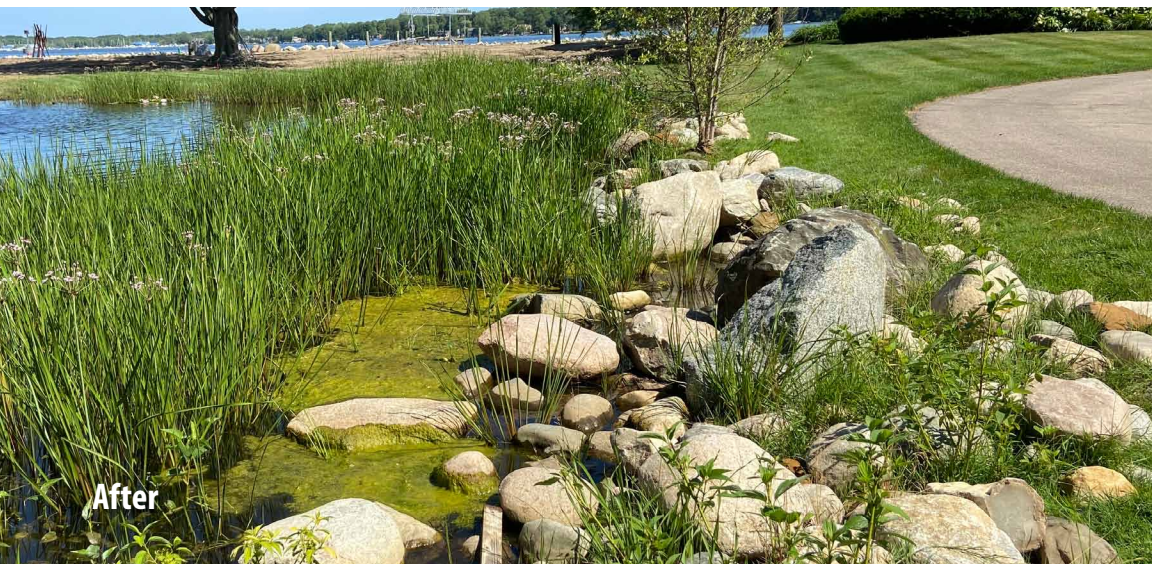


Have you ever asked yourself why you pour so much time and money into tediously manicuring your lawn? Many landowners get frustrated and never even question if there are more efficient landscaping options available. But what if I told you there are plants that are highly adapted to local conditions that provide countless benefits to wildlife, air, and water quality? The solution is simple; GROW NATIVE. Native plant landscapes are one of the most efficient alternatives to save money and make a positive impact on the environment. Once established, native plants do not need pesticides, fertilizers, watering, nor do they require any mowing or additional labor. Aside from the initial installation process, a periodic prescribed burn or seasonal mowing is all that is required to maintain a native landscape

and is much better for the environment than conventional methods.

Additionally, native landscapes attract diverse varieties of songbirds, butterflies, and small mammals. As if all these benefits weren't enough, native plants also increase our connection to nature, help educate our neighbors, and provide a beautiful scene to enjoy some relaxation at the end of the day.

If you are interested in pursuing a native plant restoration, please contact ODC Conservation Services for a free site assessment. We propagate over 40 species of native plants right here in our greenhouse and carefully select the right mix to thrive in any environment and meet your objectives!



Greenway Fun Run on April 17

New this year, the Greenway Fun Run will take place at Van Raalte Farm Park. This run is based around the importance of greenway systems and preserving the water in them. Participants will be able to choose if they would rather walk instead of run. Trails consist of boardwalks, gravel, grass, mulch, and uneven ground. Dogs are permitted on this run on a 6-foot leash. There will be post run snacks and beverages available as well.

A virtual option will be available. Depending on registration numbers, we will hold staggered start times to help alleviate the number of

people in one area at a specific time.

Participants will also receive a special gift for registering in advance and participating.

All funds raised go toward updating and replacing weathered trail maps at Van Raalte Farm Park.

Sign Up Now!



runsignup.com/Race/MI/Holland/GreenwayFunRun



Greenway Fun Run

Saturday, April 17 • 10 AM

Van Raalte Farm
1076 E 16th Street • Holland, MI

Thanks to our

Greenway Fun Run Sponsors:



Holland
MICHIGAN

New Rainscaping Training Program Seeks Volunteers

The Macatawa Rainscaping program is a new partnership designed to get more green, rain-soaking gardens around the Holland area. With an EPA grant awarded to the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, the MACC and local partners at the ODC, Hope College, and Holland BPW will be working to train volunteers and homeowners to design and install rain gardens around the Holland area. People will be coached on where to place rain gardens and other water-absorbing features, what kind of plants work best, and how to maintain them after they're installed. Even if your thumb is a very pale shade of green, we hope you consider joining us for this program!



Rainscaping Training

April 14 & 21, 9 AM–11 AM

Volunteers will learn about rainscaping practices, how to conduct site assessments and make recommendations for homeowners. The training is free and open to anyone ages 18 and up.

Visit the-macc.org/rainscaping to learn more and register, or scan the code below



Social Distance Cup June 2



Join us for the Social Distance Cup at the Ravines Golf Club in Saugatuck. This is an event to bring people together and support the programs of the ODC Network while practicing social distancing. During this event, golfers will have the opportunity to learn about all aspects of the ODC Network and see some of our captive animal ambassadors!

All funds raised will directly support the ODC Network's mission of advancing outdoor education and conservation in West Michigan.



Get more details and register your team at outdoordiscovery.org/golf



Thanks to our first-in Sponsors:



Interested in becoming a Sponsor?
Contact ashley@outdoordiscovery.org

Social Distance Cup
Wednesday, June 2
AM & PM Flights Available
Ravines Golf Club



Community Pizza at Hops During June

We have the privilege of being the recipient of the Community Pizza fundraiser from *Hops at 84 East* for the month of June! Hops will donate \$5 from each Community Pizza purchased to the ODC Network. Stop by 84 E 8th Street in Holland to enjoy the delicious community pizza, or order takeout and enjoy it at home or at a park!



Macatawa Water Festival on Saturday July 17

This year's Macatawa Water Festival will be held on Holland's Windmill Island. As an organization, we will follow guidelines and recommendations for a safe event for all volunteers, staff, and attendees. We are excited to celebrate the Macatawa Watershed and encourage you to continue to visit, explore and care for it.

For the event, local businesses and organizations are joining together to provide activities, suitable for all ages, that will be available in person. We will have some online activities as well.

Macatawa Water Festival
Saturday, July 17 • 9 AM–1 PM
Windmill Island
1 Lincoln Avenue, Holland MI 49423

For more information or to become a sponsor go to: outdoordiscovery.org/macatawa-water-festival

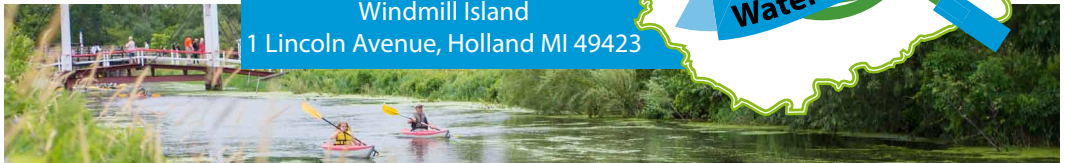
Thanks to our first-in Sponsors:

Boar's Head

MACATAWA BANK

VELO CITY
CYCLES

meijer



2021 Community Programs

The ODC Network has strived to continue offering safe educational opportunities for 2021. All of our community programs are taught outdoors where participants are in fresh air and have room to explore. Please visit our online calendar to see all of the fun opportunities we offer. We update it frequently and you can sign up for one of our many classes.

We continue to teach some favorite programs such as Knee-high Naturalists, Explore a Story, and Nature for Tykes. In addition, we have a monthly homeschool program, many naturalist-led hikes, bird of prey programs, and more. We look forward to having you and your family visit us!

Calendar & Registration



outdoordiscovery.org/calendar



Cultural History Trail Progresses

In 2019, we set out to make our cultural education programs even better with a large-scale expansion of our Indigenous Peoples program. After months of work behind the scenes, there will be some great new additions to our cultural programs this spring. The initial hardscaping for the Cultural History Trail was done in early 2020 and connects to our Wintergreen Trail. This year we will have several structures installed along it, which will allow participants to visit several stops as they progress through the experience.

The biggest addition to the program experience will be in replica structures. One of the challenges we have always faced is maintaining our traditionally built structures since they were made of natural materials that break down over time. Fortunately, we found a local company who specializes in exhibit development. Xibitz, a global company with home offices and production facility in Grand Rapids, worked with us to design and build structures out of modern and more durable materials but inspired by traditional architecture. They helped us with the design

and fabrication of four new structures to explore including two summer houses, one double winter house, and one cook house (kitchen).

Another stop along the trail will represent the fur trade era. We have modified a log cabin to be a fur trade outpost and acquired a number of artifacts to help share the story of the French Fur trade that happened in the Great Lakes region between the 1650's and 1850's. The fur trade connects directly to our interpretation of the Eastern Woodland era and Michigan's Indigenous People since these groups of people interacted in our region for several generations.

Changes are also being made to the Kuipers Archery Range, including a shade structure to provide additional outdoor learning space. The next time you visit the ODC, consider taking a walk along the Cultural History Trail to explore the new features. Interpretive panels and signs will continue to be added as we complete our plans to create a more full experience learning about Michigan's living history.



The new Cultural History Trail connects to our existing Wintergreen Trail just west of the Kuipers Archery Range.

A Waginogan like this would have been a summer dwelling for Michigan residents during pre-European contact times. It would be made of bent maple saplings and covered in birch, cedar, or elm bark.



A Winter House would traditionally be made from cedar poles and hand-sewn cattail leaf mats. This replica currently in production is framed in metal and sided with weather-proof cattail facsimiles.





Observing Spring

Though the cold of winter can still chill us to the bone, there is hope! Look for grass shooting up through the snow and for new life emerging. To help instill this hope, below is a list of many sightings readers can look forward to in the coming months, whether you are naturalists, birdwatchers, or simply tired of frostbite.

March is the long-awaited beginning, the first heartbeat of spring that reminds us how alive our planet is. Look for birds such as sandhill cranes, killdeer, eastern bluebirds, and American woodcocks coming to western Michigan. Cardinals, with their bright color against the melting snow, should be easy to spot, and should be nesting by March. Cottontail rabbits are born in March, as well as raccoons and groundhogs. There is also the possibility of seeing foxes, red in meadows and gray in woodland. And, if readers find themselves in beech and maple forests this month, be on the lookout for Spring Beauty, distinct for its purple paintbrush strokes on white petals.

In April, keep looking to the sky, and you may see and hear the familiar sounds of chimney swifts returning to roost. Spring turkeys may also be spotted, as April is prime turkey-hunting season. Bloodroot will also begin to spring up out of the ground in deciduous forests, and as April turns to May readers have increasing chances of seeing wildlife.



Spring Beauty

Young mammals, such as fawns and baby rabbits, may appear to be 'abandoned'. Most of the time, however, these animals are intentionally left alone by their parents while they are away foraging. Once people move away, or dusk approaches, a parent animal will likely return to care for their young and relocate them if necessary.



Birds such as red-tailed hawks and American kestrels will be seen more frequently, as their prey begin to become more active. Various turtle species will begin nesting, and this comes with a reminder that no one should pick up a baby turtle they find in the woods and bring it home. The common trillium will make itself known in deciduous forests, and so will the Jack-in-the-pulpit and wild geranium.

Just before summer, white-tailed deer will give birth to fawns, and the small white flowers of the distinctive mayapple will be visible. Other wildlife to look out for include indigo buntings, common grackles, opossums, fox and grey squirrels, yellow trout lily, the endangered celandine poppy, and the trouser-shaped blooms of Dutchman's Breeches.

Wildlife act as our reminder that life is still here, and vibrant in its abundance. They bring hope to our lives, and it's our wish they bring hope to yours. As winter comes to an

end, allow some or many of these plants and animals to help you see the light at the end of the long, cold tunnel.

Looking for an Outdoor Experience? Use Our Stuff!

We have a number of resources available to the public for rent!

Archery Range and Equipment

Where: Outdoor Discovery Center—Kuipers Archery Range

Season: Appropriate weather

Price: Included with Membership

Ideal for anyone over the age of 10 with adult supervision; all participants must complete a safety course with our staff prior to use.

Available while the Visitors Center is open, and equipment must be returned at least 30 minutes before the building closes. We recommend calling ahead to ensure range is not in use for a program.



Cane Fishing Poles

Where: Outdoor Discovery Center—Compagner Memorial Pond

Season: Appropriate weather

Price: \$5 per pole (some bait included, additional available for \$1)

Ideal for anyone looking to explore our ponds in a new way! Adult supervision required.

No fishing license required—catch and release ONLY.

Available while the Visitors Center is open, and equipment must be returned at least 30 minutes before the building closes.



Guided Group Kayaking

Where: Various waterways in Holland

Season: Appropriate weather (up to 2 hour time limit)

Price: \$25 per boat

Ideal for families or small groups; includes either single or double occupancy kayaks, paddles, and personal flotation devices (life-jackets). No previous experience necessary!



Site Rentals

The Discovery Pavilion and Visitors Center are also available to rent. Check the rentals page on our website for the latest information including amenities, rental applications, fees, and policies.

outdoordiscovery.org/programs/rentals



Annual Lake Macatawa Update



PROJECT clarity

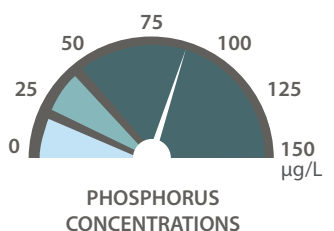
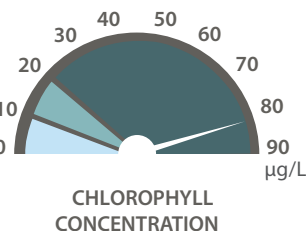
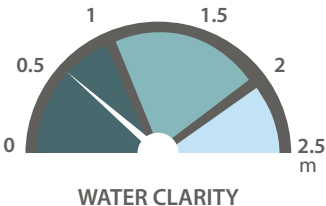
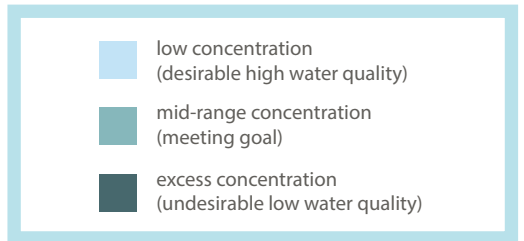
Grand Valley's Annis Water Resources Institute is one of the leading institutions when it comes to research in the Great Lakes Basin. We are grateful that we have their expertise and collaboration when it comes to keeping an eye on our watershed. They recently published the latest data for Lake Macatawa in the annual dashboard, showing that while our goals have not yet been met, we are still trending in the right direction. There was a slight improvement in phosphorus levels and clarity, while there was a slight increase in algae. These numbers are still well below the historic averages, which have been sampled by various agencies dating back to the 1970's.

The AWRI team, led by Dr. Al Steinman, works to provide data on long-term trends in Lake Macatawa, as well as monitoring other Project Clarity sites and giving feedback on our project planning. Their dashboard and monitoring report closely mirror work that they perform in Muskegon Lake, a similar drowned river mouth that mirrors Lake Macatawa in several key ways.

This year's report includes updates on our iron-slag filter project, which are designed to remove phosphorus before it reaches local waterways, and an update on the annual fish

monitoring project. The slag filter monitoring is part of a multi-year project to evaluate their effectiveness and insure that they have no adverse environmental impact, as well as fine tuning the types of locations where these will be most effective. Using both nets and electric shocking to record fish populations, the team recorded large numbers of native fish. While there were a number of invasive species that were recorded, there were also a number of sport fish and species that would be found in a healthy warm-water fishery.

If you want to read either the Lake Macatawa dashboard or the full Project Clarity Monitoring report, visit: outdoordiscovery.org/project-clarity



The ODC Trail System

Our nature preserve is a small parcel of land within the greater southwest Michigan area, but it contains a surprising variety of micro-habitats. Because of this, many different animals and plants are supported based on their various needs. Our trail system gives us an insight to the types of habitats spread out over our 155 acres.

Learn more about these habitats and how the trails got their names here!

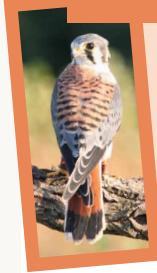


Sensory Trail

This accessible trail loops through a meadow habitat. With the expertise of our Conservation team, we periodically burn or mow the area to keep trees from taking over, and maintain it as a meadow. This allows for native grasses such as big bluestem, Indiangrass, and little bluestem to thrive, and curtails species

that try to invade like non-native autumn olive shrubs.

We encourage you to use all of your senses while you walk along this trail. Without any trees to block your view, you can see much farther. The grasses and wildflowers that grow in the abundant sunlight attract birds and insect pollinators, and provide a wonderful hiding place for small rodents to scurry unseen through the tall grasses. You can feel the warm sunlight and cool breeze on your skin. You can listen to the grasses swish in the wind. After they've been pollinated, blackcap raspberries and blackberries grow here and taste sweet when warmed by the sun (though we want to make sure to leave some for the animals that rely on these for their food).



Kestrel Trail

Along this trail you will walk an edge between a narrow strip of forest and a wet meadow. This trail is named after the bird, the American kestrel. A small falcon and full-time resident in this part of Michigan, kestrels prefer open habitats where they can perch to hunt. When they aren't perched, they utilize their amazing ability to hover precisely in place to scan an open field for prey.



Tupelo Trail

Along this trail you will find wetlands and forests. The Tupelo, also known as the Black-gum Tree, prefers to grow in wet woods and near swamps, though it can tolerate a wide range of soils.

Its flowers are an important food source for bees, and the sour, deep-purple berries produced are essential food for migratory birds in the fall.





Ironweed Trail

Along this trail you will find wet meadows which are prime habitats for these flowering herbaceous plants belonging to the Aster family. The intensely purple flowers give it away in meadows, acting like a beacon for butterflies and moths that rely on it for food. It is named after the rust color of the remainder of its flowers in the winter.



Sumac Trail

This short connecting trail will bring you past ponds, young forest and wet meadows. This trail is named for staghorn sumac, a tall shrub that thrives in bright areas with plenty of sunlight. They can spread by rhizomes or seeds, so you will find them in large patches together, often colonizing places where the soil has been disturbed. Despite their shared name, staghorn sumac is different from the poison sumac plant which is mostly found in bogs. Staghorn sumac is a native plant that produces a fruit that is important for animals in the area, especially our birds that winter here. These fruits are mostly seed but are edible by humans and have a sticky, fuzzy texture and a sour, lemon flavor.

A particularly unique facet of these plants is their tiny hairs that cover the bark of the ends of branches, making them soft like puppy fur. This texture, in combination with its branching pattern, prompted the plant's name to allude to its similarity to the texture of deer antlers in velvet.



Sassafras Trail

This trail brings you past forested wetlands, meadows, and a small prairie. Sassafras trees enjoy sandy soils, especially with the addition of loam that comes from remnants of wetlands.

These trees stay smaller than other trees in our area and can spread by root to form stands of clones. Their leaves and twigs have a lemon or fruity smell, which is thought to be a chemical protectant against insect invaders. Their leaves are also unique because they have 3 leaf variations; some leaves have no lobes, some have one lobe, making them look like the shape of our state, and some have two lobes, resembling a dinosaur footprint.



Wintergreen Trail

Along this trail you will find forest and ponds. Belonging to the same family as blueberries, Wintergreen is a tiny plant with a very waxy leaf and berry that are edible and are the namesake of the flavor 'wintergreen'.



Wintergreen is a perfect companion for coniferous trees such as Red and White Pine. They like the same sandy soil and the wintergreen is tolerant of the low-light conditions in the understory as well as the acidic soils created by the presence and decomposition of pine needles.



Dragonfly Trail

This trail circumnavigates a small hill and features docks on one of our catch-and-release fishing ponds. The docks are also a great place to observe dragonflies over the water.

Dragonflies actually live most of their lives in ponds as aquatic young, called nymphs. Nymphs are predators that eat mosquito larva, other insects, and even tiny fish. After many stages of growth, a nymph will climb a plant stalk into the air and metamorphose into an adult dragonfly. As adults, dragonflies are acrobatic hunters with acute vision capable of catching other insects to eat right out of the air.



Naturalists Bring Nature Experiences to Schools

With fewer schools allowing field trips, our staff have done the opposite—visiting schools and bringing animals and other nature experiences with them. For the 2020-2021 school year, four of our staff members have worked with students at Walden Green Montessori school in Ferrysburg to provide some Outdoor Education in their school day! Students meet with our educators two or three times each week, exploring the meadow, forest, and wetland habitats on the school's campus. What started as a two-month, grant-funded contract was extended as the school enjoyed the programs so much!



Kindergarten–First Grade: Ms. Lisa

The youngest Walden Green students were fascinated with animals! Whether they were holding live snakes, or designing habitats, they learned a lot about how to care for Michigan's native animals!

Second–Third Grade: Mr. Mike

These students learned about our responsibility of protecting the environment. One way they did that on school grounds was by picking up trash from their forest.



Fourth– Fifth Grade: Ms. Andrea

Outdoor Education helped foster a greater enthusiasm and appreciation for nature especially at their school. Students are shown (*above*) exploring the swamp ecosystem, and checking over and under the logs for insects and amphibians.

Sixth–Eighth Grade: Ms. Sarah

These middle-school students were voracious in their removal of invasive bittersweet vines that were choking out different areas of their school grounds. Before the class had ended they were already teaching younger students in the forest for recess about the importance of removing these plants.



Hamilton Middle School

Our naturalist team had similar contracts with Hamilton Middle School and the Hamilton Flex program. While the natural environment at Hamilton Middle School started as a good place for outdoor learning, our naturalists, along with middle schoolers, had the unique opportunity to begin modifying the natural space in a way that could eventually lead to more outdoor education spaces. Learning about managing environments while trimming new trails was an empowering way for these students to invest in their community.

When they weren't actively trimming trails, middle school students were busy learning about our birds of prey, practicing orienteering skills and many other topics. They are shown learning about Voyageurs while practicing throwing hawks.



Hamilton Flex & iCademy Global

The Hamilton Flex and iCademy Global students, ages ranging from Kindergarten to 8th grade, were some of our only students to visit the nature preserve this year. As the school year progressed, students that were originally accustomed to more individual learning experiences and were very shy developed into caring and helpful classmates. They learned to work better together as a group, and the various ages allow for opportunities for older students to mentor younger students, reminding them of safety protocols and other rules. The most exciting change was that their time outside made them more excited to spend more time outdoors!

These students explored all sorts of topics, including cultural topics such as Indigenous Peoples of Michigan, Voyageurs, and Pioneers, as well as animal classification and husbandry, among others.

Helping Schools Put The “Spring” Back in Students’ Steps!

This spring we are sharing three ways to help teachers provide cool learning experiences for their kids amongst COVID-19 restrictions.

If you would like to schedule one of these opportunities, please contact Joy Funk at joy@outdoordiscovery.org.

Return of Field Trips: The ODC is safely welcoming back schools that feel comfortable and are able to have kids join us at our property for a traditional field trip experience. We are using outdoor programs and our COVID-19 safety protocols to ensure a safe and fun learning experience.

Reverse Field Trips: This spring our team will begin bringing our reverse field trip program to your school site. If bussing is a cost or safety

issue during the pandemic, our team will provide you with an on-site outdoor program right at your school. Choose from many of our options that you have come to know and love!

Virtual Classroom Visits: We know some schools may benefit from a virtual visit with our naturalist team. Let our staff provide a fun way to connect nature interactions with your content during these interactive sessions. Many of them involve some of our most loved animals and birds as special guests.



We look forward to seeing you or visiting you soon this spring!

outdoordiscovery.org/programs/school-programs



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