ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SERVICES FOR WINNEBAGO COUNTY SCHOOLS

Provided by the Winnebago County Conservation Board
2026-2027 School Year



Classroom Programs
Field Trips
Items Available for Loan

Winnebago County Conservation Board
Lisa Ralls, Naturalist
Hanson Nature Center
41600 Highway 69
Leland, IA 50453
Phone/Fax: (641) 567-3390
lisa.ralls@winnebagocountyiowa.gov
Web Site: www.winnebagocountyiowa.gov/conservation

Winnebago County Conservation Board
Fall, 2026



Dear Educators:

Welcome back to a new school year! The Winnebago County Conservation Board promotes the conservation of our natural resources and provides outdoor recreational opportunities here in Winnebago County. In this booklet, you will find information concerning the free educational programs and services that the Board provides to schools within Winnebago County.

Here, each program we offer is listed along with the grade levels it is designed for. (If you'd like to know the specific science standards that a program meets, please let me know and I can provide you with that information.) But, even if a program is not designed for your grade level, that doesn't mean that your students can't still enjoy the program or that it can't add something to what your students are studying. Also, the programs that are designed for "All Grades," or for a wide range of grades, are programs that I can adapt to different ages. Finally, if you have an idea for a program that you'd like to see me bring to your class, please let me know that as well. I'm always looking for new ideas!

And don't forget about our Hanson Nature Center! It is two years old now and located along Highway 9/69 north of Leland. We have a variety of things on display that both kids and adults will enjoy. No doubt, it will help us provide you with even more opportunities to nurture your students' knowledge and appreciation of our environment. Contact me if you'd like to arrange a visit for your students!

In case you're new and wondering about me…I am originally from Omaha and received my Bachelor's Degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology from Iowa State University. Ten years later, I returned to school, this time to the University of Iowa, and earned my Master's Degree in Science Education. I live in Buffalo Center, and my late husband John and I have one son, Jack, who is currently living in New York City.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for more information about any of our services or to arrange a program or field trip. My office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM--4:30 PM and I check my e-mail often. Naturally, if you do not wish me to contact you this school year, just let me know and I will be glad to take your name off our mailing list.



I hope you have a wonderful school year! I look forward to collaborating with you as we work together to educate our youth about science and the world around them!

Sincerely,

Lisa Ralls

Naturalist
Winnebago County Conservation Board

CLASSROOM PROGRAMS

The following programs are available for presentation in your classroom, at a local park, or at the Hanson Nature Center, with most running 45-60 minutes. Please take a look at what we have to offer and contact me if you'd like to schedule a program. ***And don't forget…Programs on other topics of your choice can also be given upon request—please just ask!***

Animal Adaptations and Defenses (K-4)

By observing actual animal parts (such as feathers, furs, talons, and teeth), students will see how animals are able to survive in the wild.

Animal Tracks and Signs (K-4)

Students will see what signs animals leave behind and also how to identify common animal tracks. Optional activities include making animal track ink prints or plaster animal track casts.



Discovering Insects (K-4)

Students will discover what makes insects unique and will have the chance to see one of their peers turned into a bug right before their eyes!

Freshwater Animals (K-4)

By viewing some mounted animals, live animals, and other hands-on items, your class will learn about some of the unique adaptations that help aquatic animals spend much of their lives in the lakes, rivers, and streams of Iowa.

Iowa's Migrating Birds (K-4)

Students will learn which Iowa birds migrate, why they migrate, and where they go. They will also get to see examples of some migrating birds, and imagine what it's like to travel so far away from home!

Rocks and Fossils (K-4)

After a discussion of what rocks are and the rock cycle, the class will sort rocks by type. Each student will receive a rock to observe and study during class, then we will discuss what fossils are and how to identify them. Each student will also get a fossil to take home with them!

Tree Detectives (K-5)

After a discussion of the importance of trees, students will learn how trees work and how to "read" the history of a tree through its rings. Students will also learn the basics of tree identification, either using leaves (younger grades) or twigs (older students).



Winter Bird Feeding (K-5)

Your class will learn which birds stay around here in the winter, why they stick around, and what they eat. Each student will also get to construct a simple bird feeder to take home and will get a small bag of birdseed.

Winter Wildlife (K-5)

Where do animals go in the winter? With the help of various items such as nuts, furs, antlers, etc., students will learn where animals go and how they are able to survive our harsh winter weather.



Iowa Wetlands (3-12)

By viewing a power point program, as well as some wildlife mounts, furs, and other hands-on items, students will learn how our north Iowa wetlands were formed, why they are important, and how conservationists study and manage them.

Basic Canoeing (4-12)

Your students can learn some of the basics of canoeing, including safety, entering and exiting a canoe, and paddling techniques. Of course, this information would best be presented on a field trip where your students can then put that knowledge to work on Thorpe Park's quiet Lake Catherine.

Pollinators and Pollinator Gardens (4-12)



This program discusses the importance of pollinators (such as insects, birds, and bats) and how we can protect them. Depending upon the season, the program could also include some actual, living examples of pollinators, as well as some of the more common plants that they benefit, and benefit from.

Skullduggery (4-12)

After a discussion of carnivores, herbivores and omnivores, students will have a chance to key out actual mammal skulls, discovering the unique characteristics of each one!

Tree Ring Mysteries (4-12)

You can learn a lot more from tree rings than just the age of a tree! Students will discover some of the tales that tree rings can tell by looking at actual tree ring patterns and trying to solve some tree ring puzzles. This program is a good follow-up to the Tree Detectives program listed above!

Weathering and Erosion (4-12)

After a brief review of the rock cycle and the three types of rocks, students will learn about the different ways that rocks weather and erode. Small group, hands-on demonstrations will help the students actually see how these processes work!

Eggstraordinary Eggs (5-8)

Your students will learn about different types of eggs, which animals lay them, the different parts of an egg, and how offspring form inside them!

Orienteering (5-12)

Students will learn the basics of how to read a compass and use a map. Then, using a compass, they will find various locations in Iowa on a map. Finally, they will head outdoors to put their skills to use constructing a compass trail for others to follow!

Climate Change 101 (5-12)

This program will help your class learn about climate change, why it's happening, what effects we will continue to see as a result of the changing climate, and what we all can do to help slow it down.



Composting—Nature's Recycling (5-12)

Composting is an easy way to recycle many common kitchen scraps and yard wastes. Students will learn how composting helps out the environment, conserves our

natural resources, and even saves us money. They will also learn how easy it is to do and will see examples of what can be composted!

Conservation Careers (5-12)

Despite what many people think, not everyone in the conservation field is a park ranger! This power point presentation and discussion will introduce your students to the many varied career paths that are possible in the field of conservation.



Geocaching (5-12)

Geocaching is a popular outdoor activity! It combines GPS technology with hiking to create modern-day "treasure hunts." Kids will learn all about this activity and how to get started with it. And, if your students can get outdoors, they may be able to search for some virtual "treasures!"

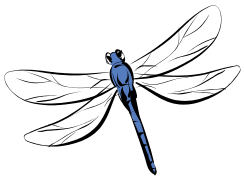
Journey to the Stars (5-12)

This DVD, followed by a short talk, is a wonderful way to introduce your students to the stars! The movie was produced by NASA and the American Museum of Natural History and was used by the Hayden Planetarium in New York City for their planetarium shows. It contains wonderful information, along with stunning visuals, all helping students to understand the birth, life, and death of stars.



The Navigation Stars of Lewis and Clark (5-12)

As Lewis and Clark traveled across the continent, they used the sun, moon, and stars to determine their exact locations. Students will learn just how they were able to do this. This program can also be combined with a trip to the Star Lab to "see" what Lewis and Clark saw!



Water Quality Critters (5-12)

One way that scientists can determine the general quality of stream water is to sample what kinds of invertebrates live there. By using some hypothetical water samples, students will learn how scientists are able to do this, and will have a chance to compare their "water" samples with those of their classmates!

Wildlife Populations (MS/HS)

Students will learn what factors affect wildlife populations and, through an interactive activity, will also see how biologists are able to estimate populations and population trends.

Rain Gardens (MS/HS)

A rain garden is a garden that is located where water tends to pool up (near a drain spout, for instance). It is designed to soak up excess water, thus reducing runoff and the pollution often associated with it. This program will introduce students to rain gardens, their benefits, where they should be located, and how to create them, including what types of plants should be used.

Bats! (All grades)

Bats can seem creepy. Through this program, though, students will see bats are not only fascinating creatures, but also quite beneficial. The program includes an entertaining video (based on grade level), a bat skeleton, a bat house, and a sampling of food pollinated by bats!





Bird Talk (All grades)

Often, we hear birds before we see them. In fact, we may hear a bird and never see it at all! This program will help kids realize that every bird has a unique song and that you can actually learn how to identify some common birds just by their calls or songs.

Birds of Prey (All grades)

Imagine a hawk or an owl in your classroom! Mounted birds will help demonstrate the unique adaptations of raptors, as will other items such as feathers, talons, and owl pellets.

Eagles of Iowa (All grades)

Iowa has become a prime location for overwintering eagles, and has increasingly become the home of nesting eagles, as well! This program will teach students about our national symbol, including its return from the brink of extinction, its habitat, and threats that it still faces.



Endangered! (All grades)

Students will learn the three main reasons why animals become endangered, will view a power point program of beautiful photos of endangered animals, and see some actual pelts and skins from endangered species. They will also learn how they can help these species survive.

Fishing Fun (All grades)

Students will learn the basics of fishing, including equipment and techniques, and will even have the opportunity to try their hand at casting! As with the canoeing presentation, this is best combined with a fun field trip!

Iowa Mammals (All grades)

By experiencing a variety of different furs, mounts, and skulls, students will have the chance to learn about many different Iowa mammals.

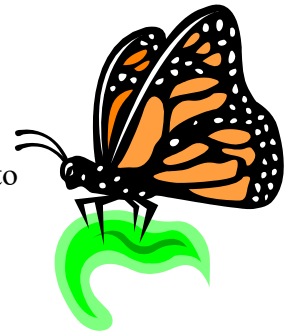


Iowa Wildflowers (All grades)

Have you ever wondered why plants have flowers? Your class will know after this program! Thanks to a colorful power point program, and possible live examples, your students will also learn about some of Iowa's more common wildflowers, including how to identify them and how many of them were used by Native Americans and pioneers.

Lewis and Clark's Discoveries (All grades)

Students will learn about the numerous animals that we take for granted today, but that Lewis and Clark were actually the first to record as they explored the western U.S.



Monarch Magic (All grades)

Students will learn about the Monarch butterfly and its amazing fall migration to Mexico. If the program is presented from mid-August through late September, the students may also have the unique opportunity to tag some migrating Monarchs for research!

My Side of the Mountain **(All grades)**

Many classes read *My Side of the Mountain* as part of their reading curriculum. This program presents information about some of the things that are mentioned in the book, all in an effort to enhance the students' reading experience. Items shown during the presentation include mounts, shells, nuts, pelts, and photos. Teachers are welcome to keep the items on loan in their classroom until the students are finished with the book.

Native Americans (All grades)

Long before settlers arrived in Iowa, Native Americans were living in harmony with the land. By observing some unique artifacts and items, students will see how some of the Native Americans lived. Older students can even try their hand at some archaeology role-playing as they try to reconstruct and interpret an "artifact!"

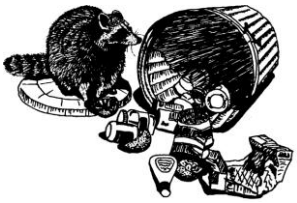


Owls—Hunters of the Night (All grades)

Owls are unique and efficient predators that are able to find and capture their prey in almost total darkness. How do they do it? By viewing mounted owls and actual owl parts (talons, feathers, wings, etc.), your students will learn the owls' secret techniques! We'll also dissect some actual owl pellets to learn just what owls eat!

Prairie Life (All grades)

Students will get to see firsthand some of the animals and grasses that make up a tallgrass prairie. Older students will also learn a little about prairie ecology and could watch the wonderful DVD America's Lost Landscape (provided) as a nice follow-up!



Rascal **(All grades)**

This presentation is similar to the *My Side of the Mountain* program. If your class reads the book *Rascal*, you may be interested in this program that highlights some of the natural things that are portrayed in the book. Students will see mounts, photos, pelts, shells, and nuts, and hear frog calls, all to enhance the students' reading of the book. Teachers are welcome to keep the items on loan in their classroom until the students are finished with the book.

Recycling and Waste Reduction (All grades)

With the help of some "trash," students will learn how reducing and recycling their garbage can help our environment. They will also see what can be made from recycled materials. This program makes an excellent Earth Day program!



Snowshoeing (All grades)

Students will get to see different types of snowshoes and learn about each one, as well as basic snowshoeing techniques. Snow permitting, the class can even try out this fun outdoor activity!

The Star Lab (All grades)

This portable, inflatable planetarium provides a unique way for students to learn about earth science and astronomy without leaving the school building! Star Lab topics that are available include *Greek Constellations, The Solar System and Milky Way Galaxy, Native American Constellations, Plate Tectonics,* and *The Navigation Stars of Lewis and Clark (*which requires the *Navigation Stars of Lewis and Clark* classroom program first).

Turkey Talk (All grades)

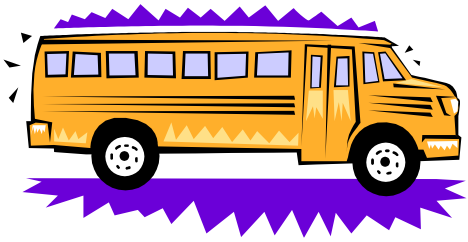
The turkey is a truly unique bird that is becoming more common here in north Iowa. Students will learn interesting facts about the wild turkey and the remarkable comeback it has made. This program could add a nice touch to your Thanksgiving celebrations!

A Virtual Tour Through the Solar System (All grades)



This visually stunning power point program will give your students a unique tour from the sun, out through the solar system, and beyond! Students will learn about planets, moons, and galaxies using amazing NASA photographs. This program would be a nice addition to a Star Lab program, or a wonderful substitute, if you don't have the space for a Star Lab program!

Other programs may be offered during the school year. Be sure to watch for them!



FIELD TRIPS

The following WCCB-sponsored field trips provide fun and educational learning experiences for your students. The activities for each trip will be customized for the size and grade level of your class, and the length of time involved.

The Hanson Nature Center, Leland (Fall, Winter, Spring)

Our new nature center is centrally located between Forest City, Lake Mills, and Thompson, and is less than 15 minutes from each of those towns. The center contains various exhibits, some live animals, and trails that wind through the prairie and wetland complex. A classroom also allows students to investigate things they find outdoors.

The Lime Creek Nature Center, Mason City (Fall, Winter, Spring)

Wooded trails, a prairie, the Winnebago River, a couple of ponds, and a wonderful nature center all provide countless opportunities for your students to explore and discover the natural world of north Iowa!

Thorpe Park, west of Forest City (Fall, Winter, Spring)



At this all-inclusive park, students can enjoy fishing or canoeing on Lake Catherine, or they can enjoy hiking along several different trails.

Pilot Knob State Park, east of Forest City (Fall, Winter, Spring)

During the fall and spring, the park offers excellent wooded trails, a shelterhouse, and a pond for various outdoor activities. Although the park isn't as accessible during the winter, there are still areas available for students to enjoy.



The Rockford Fossil and Prairie Park (Fall, Spring)

For a fun, fossil-hunting experience, you can't beat this Floyd County park! It also contains scenic prairie areas with trails that wind through them. And, the visitor center contains many excellent exhibits that demonstrate how Iowa's

landscape has changed over the years.

The Landfill of North Iowa, Clear Lake (Fall, Spring) (Available to Forest City students only. Transportation assistance is also available.)

You might not think that going to a landfill would be an educational field trip, much less a fun one. Well, think again! This landfill is much more than just a place where people dump their garbage. It is a shining example of what and how much can be recycled. The center itself is a marvel of construction, with almost the whole building being constructed out of recycled materials! The Landfill even has its own Education Coordinator to lead tours and activities.



The Water's Edge Nature Center, north of Algona (Fall, Winter, Spring)

This nature center has many wonderful displays and the adjoining lake, trails, and park provide many opportunities for a variety of outdoor activities!

Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge, east of Bancroft (Fall, Spring)

This area provides some wonderful wildlife viewing opportunities, allowing students to see what northern Iowa was like before settlement! A bus tour through or around the refuge can give your entire class the chance to view many of north Iowa's native and migrating species, and displays in the visitor center will enhance your visit with some wonderful information.

ITEMS AVAILABLE FOR LOAN

Bulletin Board Packets—These include materials like posters, pictures, and other items that will spice up your science-related bulletin boards. Just give us a topic and we'll put together a packet of colorful and interesting items for your display!

The Star Lab—If you'd like to borrow the Star Lab for an extended period of time and use it yourself, you are welcome to! We do require, though, that you either have past experience using it or have a brief (1/2 hour) introduction to setting it up and using it.

Recycling Education Kit—This kit comes with a teacher's guide and everything you need to conduct a whole unit on waste reduction and recycling!



Canoes—We have a set of canoes that are available for schools and other youth groups to borrow. (We do not rent them out to families or individuals, though.) The canoes come with a trailer, life jackets, and paddles, and are usually used at Thorpe Park, but they can be taken other places, as well.

Snowshoes—If your students get "cabin fever" during the winter, you may want to borrow some snowshoes! We have 10 pairs, but can also usually find additional snowshoes, if you need more. They can be taken to a nearby recreation area or can be used at the school, as long as there is enough snow. These work out great for PE classes!

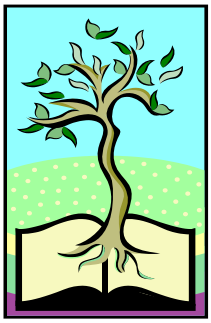
Fishing Poles—We have 16 fishing poles that we use for field trips, but we'd be more than happy to let you borrow them! We also have a set of ice-fishing poles you can borrow, as well, if you feel a little more adventurous!

GPS Units—These are used for our geocaching programs, but can also be used for other activities.

DVDs—We have a small collection of DVDs covering a variety of nature and environmental topics. Just let me know what topic you're interested in and I'll see if we have an accompanying DVD. If we do, you are more than welcome to borrow any of them!

Natural Materials—If you need to borrow furs, feathers, fossils, bird nests, skulls, Native American artifacts, or any other materials, we may have just what you need. We can also put together a collection of items based on a theme (birds, wetland animals, animal tracks and signs, etc.) Just call to ask what we've got!

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SCIENCE INFORMATION



We are also here to provide you with any kind of environmental and/or science information that you may need. If you need information, facts, or figures to teach a particular environmental or science topic, please call and we'll try to help you out. In addition, if you would like information on upcoming events, environmental education workshops, etc., please let me know.

Or, perhaps you would like to improve the area around your school to make it more attractive to wildlife and more conducive to outdoor lessons. Again, we can help you out by providing information on how to improve your school grounds, including plans for nesting boxes, technical assistance planting native vegetation, and even some cost-share opportunities. So, just give us a call—we'd love to work with you!