



MINNESOTA NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION

Organization Highlight: Lee & Rose Warner Nature Center

By Julie Grecian



For 51 years, Lee & Rose Warner Nature Center has provided natural history education to over 500,000 children in the St. Croix River Valley and Twin Cities east metro. Located 30 miles northeast of Saint Paul near Marine on St. Croix, Warner is the oldest private nature center in Minnesota and features over 900 acres of woodland, marsh, lake, bog, and grassland habitats. With the majority of our operating budget funded by a private family foundation, we offer school programs at no cost to schools. Program participants at Warner have a unique opportunity to explore in undisturbed natural environments and feel completely immersed in nature.

Our mission of *building lasting relationships between people and the natural world* is evident in our diversity of program offerings for all ages. During 2018-2019, Warner naturalist staff taught natural history programs for 62 school groups for students in K-6th grades. Some of our most popular classes are Fall & Spring Birds, Aquatic Ecology, Wetland Ecology, Weather, Insects, Winter Animal Signs, Woodpeckers, and Owls.

During 2018, naturalist staff taught 33 summer camps for youth ages 3-14, including camps such as Ultimate Survival, Wildlife Espionage, Fishing for Beginners, Canoe & Kayak Challenge, Beginner Nature Photography, and Nature Play for Beginners. Warner also led 138 specialty programs for all ages throughout the year both on-site and off-site.

We love our volunteers! Since 1965, Warner Nature Center has supported volunteers to assist in programs, site work, research, and animal care. During the 2018-2019 fiscal year, 127 volunteers provided a variety of support for over 9,000 hours in 20 different roles. Many of these volunteers put in hundreds of hours each year and have been volunteering at Warner for 1-51 years. Warner currently supports 9 volunteers who have been active volunteers from 35-51 years.

Warner Nature Center's main building, the Trailside Museum, houses thousands of items in our biological collection, mounted wildlife displays, live animal displays, a natural history library, and three classrooms. Visitors love to explore in the Hidden Wonders of Warner, our interactive, hands-on exhibits.

Lee and Rose Warner Nature Center is a private educational institution. Our Trailside Museum, classes, and events are open to the public. For safety and conservation reasons, self-guided hiking is not permitted on the trails. The annual Fall Color Blast (the first Sunday in October) offers an excellent opportunity to hike on the property with one of our trained trail guide volunteers, see the pristine lakes on the property, and enjoy the fall colors.

Looking to the future, Warner is excited to embark on a strategic planning process which we hope will evolve into the development and execution of a site management plan, new program development, and increased fundraising efforts. We recently had a new accessible bog boardwalk installed and are hoping to complete the accessible ramp to the boardwalk this year!

To learn more about Lee and Rose Warner Nature Center, check out our website at: www.warnernaturecenter.org

