



MINNESOTA NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION

Organization Highlight: Staring Lake Outdoor Center

By Michelle Cook



One of the Twin City's best kept secret is the Staring Lake Outdoor Center in Eden Prairie. The Outdoor Center first opened its doors in 1989 in a historic log building that was originally built in 1935. The 150-acre site, located on the north shore of Staring Lake, also contains a secondary building which houses a classroom/lab. The grounds surrounding the Outdoor Center are home to a unique, nature-themed playground, a children's learning garden complete with greenhouse and rainwater harvesting system, a fishing dock, raptor mew for a Barred Owl, and telescopes housed in an astronomy-dedicated building (the roof can be pushed aside for viewing night skies from inside). Several trails wind along Staring Lake and Purgatory Creek, through the woods and nearby prairie. The trails are dotted with benches for resting, as well as sign-posted educational stops which teach visitors about Wood Ducks, Bald Eagles, forests, and invasive plant species.

The Outdoor Center's facilities are accessible to all visitors, and most school programs and camps include multicultural participants. Our staff members include native speakers from Peru and Poland, and several naturalists with decades of environmental education experience. Staring Lake Outdoor Center's Director, Stan Tekiela, is a long-time naturalist and wildlife photographer, as well as a prolific author.

Staring Lake Outdoor Center provides environmental education programs for about 2,200 school children from multiple local public and private schools each year. These learning opportunities include topics such as lake water quality, outdoor survival, apple cider and maple syrup making and history, to name a few. Many of the students attending these programs have very little exposure to the natural environment outside of their classrooms, which makes the programs vital to establishing each student's appreciation and understanding of nature.

Additionally, Staring Lake Outdoor Center offers summer camps which range from preschool programs to unique week-long camps focusing on topics such as raptors, fishing, gardening, wildlife rehabilitation, and nature photography. In addition, there are nature-based family and adult education programs that include birding trips, wildflower hikes, and more. Programs offered at the Outdoor Center strive to take advantage of the variety of natural resources surrounding the Center: the lake, creek, prairie, and woodlands - a wide variety of habitats which provide numerous wildlife sightings throughout the seasons.

Staring Lake Outdoor Center has a solid 30-year history of environmental education, which we strive to continually build upon... let's get the word out!

