

Meet Minnesota's Accredited Outdoor Schools

Deep Portage Learning Center

Location: Hackensack, MN

Founded: 1973

Acreage: 6,307

Annual K-12 Students Served: 4,200

Executive Director: Lindsay Bjorklund



Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center

Location: Lanesboro, MN

Founded: 1978

Acreage: 300

Annual K-12 Students Served: 10,000

Executive Director: Colleen Foehrenbacher



Long Lake Conservation Center

Location: Palisade, MN

Founded: 1963

Acreage: 720

Annual K-12 Students Served: 4,000

Executive Director: Dave McMillan



Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center

Location: Sandstone, MN

Founded: 1969

Acreage: 1,427

Annual K-12 Students Served: 3,000

Executive Director: Bryan Wood



Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center

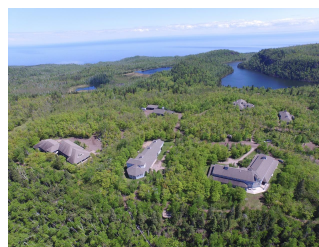
Location: Finland, MN

Founded: 1971

Acreage: 2,100

Annual K-12 Students Served: 13,000

Executive Director: Peter Smerud



Deep Portage's Story

In 1949, a local forester named Fay Harrington was taking an inventory of tax-forfeited land in Cass County and came through the area that would eventually become Deep Portage. Harrington recognized the land's unique qualities and became convinced that it had "greater potential and more significance than ordinary forest land." In the following two decades, Harrington and others with an interest in conservation began to discuss how the land could be used. In 1973, 6,307 acres of Cass County land was officially set aside for public use, education, and responsible forestry. Today, the campus includes a 54,000 sq ft residential dorm building, Interpretive Center, observation tower, bog boardwalk, and much more.



Eagle Bluff's Story

Following his forestry studies at the University of Minnesota, Eagle Bluff founder Joe Deden spent time in Germany studying how students in that country learned about the environment and nature. He found that it was simple: they learned how to care about the environment by being in nature. Joe returned to Minnesota in 1978 and within two years the nonprofit Root River Hardwood Forest Interpretive Center was created. In the mid-1990s the name was changed to Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center and the center started overnight trips for schools.



Long Lake's Story

Long Lake Conservation Center became one of the country's first overnight outdoor schools when it opened its doors in 1963. The center was the brainchild of James Marcum, a DNR officer, who believed that educating the population, particularly the youth, was a better way to preserve our precious natural resources than writing tickets. He joined forces with Bob Burwell from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and others, to acquire the land from the Minneapolis Kiwanis Club, and construct the center's first classrooms. Marcum's mission to promote wise-use of natural resources, inspire a deep appreciation of nature and encourage lifelong stewardship of the environment is still at the core of Long Lake's curriculum.



Osprey Wilds' Story

When Marguerite Schwyzer bequeathed an abandoned farm in rural Pine County to the National Audubon Society in 1968, no one could have predicted that 55 years later, Osprey Wilds would have become an accredited, nonprofit environmental learning center that would grow from 535 to 1,427 acres, annually hosting approx. 3,000 K-12 students through its outdoor school program, and annually educating thousands more each year through its youth and family camps, post-secondary courses, community and adult programs, as well as oversee an additional 10,000 students through its network of 40 authorized Minnesota charter schools.



Wolf Ridge's Story

During the week of the first Earth Day in 1970, the idea was crafted by a school teacher in Cloquet, Jack Pichotta, to build the first center designed specifically for school children to spend a week of outdoor learning. The Environmental Learning Center opened in 1971 and in 1980 was the first in the nation to be accredited as a school. A move from Isabella to Finland, MN occurred in 1988 and a change of name, the Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, which has grown to be the largest accredited center in the nation, and a model for development of programs and facilities throughout the world.

