

# Nature-Based Preschool National Conference

2016

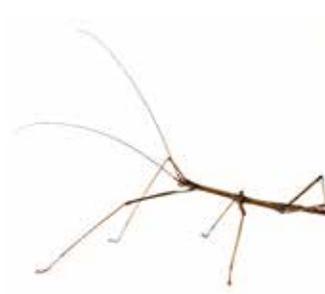
**August 15-17, 2016**

**Dodge Nature Center and Preschool**

West St. Paul, Minnesota



Program Guide



**DODGE**  
NATURE CENTER

**naturalstart**  
alliance

NaturalStart.org  
#NaturePreschool2016



# Welcome.

If you are reading this, it means you secured a coveted spot at the 2016 Nature-Based Preschool National Conference. Welcome! After steady growth of the conference for the past several years, this year saw an explosion of interest. What a wonderful indication of the increasing opportunities for nature-based education for young children.

We're thrilled to host the 2016 conference at the Dodge Nature Center and Preschool, a venerable name in both the nature-center and nature-preschool worlds. You are in for a treat as you explore all it has to offer adults and young children alike.

This conference would not be possible without the incredible dedication of our amazing volunteer conference planning team, the staff and volunteers of the Dodge Nature Center, and the heart and soul of the conference: the presenters who are here to share their experience and ideas to advance our field.

We look forward to all the discussions, inspirations, friendships, and fun that lie ahead of you at this year's conference. We wish you all the best while you are here, and in the year to come as you capitalize on your new knowledge and networks, until we meet again at next year's conference!



**Christy Merrick**  
Director  
Natural Start Alliance



I would like to welcome you to the Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center. Our environmental education organization has four nature destinations in the Twin Cities metro area. Founded in 1967 by Olivia Irvine Dodge, the organization was one of the first nature centers in the state of Minnesota. Dodge Nature Center and Preschool are also recognized nationally in the field of environmental education.

Dodge has 460+ acres of prairies, hardwood forest, lakes, wetland, miles of open hiking trails, a working farm, orchard, bee apiary, and a variety of animals to discover. It is the mission of the nature center to provide exceptional experiences in nature through environmental education. We do this by offering over 59,000 nature experiences annually: day visits, events, programs for all ages, camps, onsite preschool, school outreach, field trips and more.

We are excited to host you as you *Nourish Your Need For Nature* at this year's conference!



**Jason Sanders**  
Executive Director  
Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center



# Nature-Based Preschool National Conference



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## Welcome from Your Conference Planning Team

The planning team is happy to welcome you to West Saint Paul, MN for the 2016 Nature Based Preschool National Conference. For nearly 50 years, the Dodge Nature Center has provided amazing experiences connecting children and adults with the natural world. And since 2000, the Dodge Nature Preschool has been a model for high-quality, nature-based learning for children. We are so excited to hold our conference in this wonderful location this summer. Our planning team has worked over the past year to present this conference to you and we hope that you find new ideas, support, and inspiration for your professional development journey.



**Sheila Williams Ridge**  
Conference Chair

## Conference Planning Team:

Ann Halley, Betty Olivolo, Deborah Schein, Heather Parker, Jason Sanders, Ken Finch, Marty Watson, Megan Gessler, Patti Bailie, Patty Born Selly, Rachel Larimore, Sheila Williams Ridge



# Conference Overview

## Sunday, August 14

5 pm – 7 pm Registration and happy hour at the Country Inn & Suites  
3035 Holiday Lane, Eagan, MN 55121, Phone: 651-287-8800

## Monday, August 15

7:30 am – 8:30 am Shuttles from conference hotels to Garlough Elementary  
8:00 am – 9:00 am Registration at Garlough Elementary  
9:00 am – 10:30 am Opening Session and Keynote Presentation at Garlough Elementary  
10:30 am – 11:00 am Book Signing and Break with Refreshments at Garlough Elementary  
11:00 am – 5:00 pm Registration, Silent Auction, and Conference Office at Farm Education Building  
11:00 am – 12:00 pm Concurrent Sessions  
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm Lunch at Farm Education Building  
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm Concurrent Sessions  
2:15 pm – 3:00 pm Break with Refreshments at the Farm Education Building and Preschool  
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm Research Roundtables, Panel Discussions, and Facilitated Discussions  
5:00 pm – 8:00 pm Happy Hour and Dinner at Farm Education Building  
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm Shuttles from Garlough Elementary to Conference Hotels

## Tuesday, August 16

7:30 am – 8:30 am Shuttles from conference hotels to Garlough Elementary  
8:00 am – 9:00 am Registration at Garlough Elementary  
9:00 am – 10:30 am Plenary Session at Garlough Elementary  
10:30 am – 10:45 am Break with Refreshments at Garlough Elementary  
10:45 am – 5:00 pm Registration, Silent Auction, and Conference Office at Farm Education Building  
10:45 am – 12:00 pm Concurrent Sessions  
12:00 am – 1:00 pm Lunch at Farm Education Building  
12:30 pm Silent Auction Ends  
1:00 pm – 2:15 pm Concurrent Sessions  
2:15 pm – 3:00 pm Break with Refreshments at the Farm Education Building and Preschool  
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm Plenary Session at Garlough Elementary  
5:00 pm – 6:00 pm Happy Hour at Farm Education Building  
6:00 pm – 7:00 pm Closing BBQ Dinner at Farm Education Building  
7:00 pm – 8:00 pm Optional Evening Session on Self-Care at the Preschool Building  
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm Shuttles from Garlough Elementary to Conference Hotels

## Wednesday Field Trip

9:00 am Buses depart conference hotels  
10:00 am – 12:00 pm Stop One (All Seasons Preschool or Children’s Country Day School)  
12:00 – 2:00 pm Lunch and Tours of Tamarack Nature Center and Preschool  
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm Stop Two (All Seasons Preschool or Children’s Country Day School)  
5:00 pm Buses return to conference hotels

**Note:** The field trip is full and we cannot accept additional participants, including participants driving their own cars.



## Conference Tracks



**Nature Preschool 101**—Sessions in this strand are most appropriate for those who are interested in starting a nature-based preschool program or learning more about the field.



**Teachers**—Sessions in this strand are most appropriate for educators who are interested in refining their practice as educators in nature-based programs.



**Administration**—Sessions in this strand are most appropriate for administrators who are running nature-based programs.

## Wi Fi

Free Wi-Fi is available at Dodge Nature Center, but the volume is limited. Please use the network sparingly to accommodate all the users.  
Network Name: DNC-guest  
Password: Internet1

## Conference Office

Most participants will register at the Sunday evening happy hour or Monday morning at Garlough Elementary. To register outside of those times, and for any other questions, billing concerns, etc., visit the conference office at the Farm Education Building.

## Silent Auction

Please visit the silent auction at the Farm Education Building. Items are available for bidding on Monday and Tuesday until 12:30 pm. Check back at the conference office in the Farm Education Building after 12:30 pm to see if you won your items. Items can be claimed until 6:00 pm on Tuesday.

## Questions? Text us!

If you have questions, please find volunteers in red Dodge Nature Center t-shirts. If you can’t find volunteers, you can text questions to 612-269-7331. This number is for text messages only.

## Share the Conference!

Use #NaturePreschool2016 to talk about the Nature-Based Preschool National Conference on social media.

# Monday Schedule



7:30 am – 8:30 am

Shuttles from conference hotels to Garlough Elementary

8:00 am – 9:00 am

## Registration

Location: Garlough Elementary

9:00 – 10:30 am

## Opening Session and Keynote Address: Dr. Ruth Wilson

Location: Garlough Elementary

We've come a long way in integrating the best of early childhood education with nature education. We have reasons to congratulate ourselves and celebrate work well done. But Dr. Ruth Wilson, a pioneer of early childhood environmental education, asks, "Where do we go from here?" Can we further define the role of early childhood environmental education to include the promotion of peace and social justice in a troubled world? We'll discuss how we prepare for the next step in our remarkable journey dedicated to the well-being of children, society, and the world of all living things.

10:30 – 11:00 am

## Dr. Wilson Book Signing and Break

Location: Garlough Elementary

11:00 am – 5:00 pm

## Registration, Silent Auction, and Conference Office Open

Location: Farm Education Building

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

## Concurrent Sessions

### 5 Key Elements to a 100% Outdoor Preschool

Let us show you through video and outdoor experience what you can learn from a 100% outdoors preschool in the Pacific Northwest. Class begins indoors then moves outside to practice safety on the trail, mindfulness to kindness, loose parts, Bungee Hiking © and Giving a Leg Up ©.

Ann Glaser, Tiny Treks Outdoor Preschool; Roo Naylor, Tiny Treks NW

Track: 101

Location: Farm Education Building—Aerie

### Building a Sense of Community at Your School

This session will give ideas and inspiration for developing relationships with families that help build a sense of community in your school. Including: how to bring new families to your program and make a great first impression, how to share the mission and philosophy of your program with parents and visitors, how to create a 'buzz' in the community surrounding your program, tips for smooth and successful enrollments, creating traditions in your school that keep families coming back year after year.

Heather Parker, Kalamazoo Nature Center, Nature's Way Preschool

Track: Admin

Location: Preschool--Willow



11:00 am – 12:00 pm

## Beyond the Classroom Walls: Engaging the Community and Increasing the Impact of a Nature Preschool

Gather great ideas for expanding the reach and message of your nature preschool program beyond your classroom walls and into your community. Participants will walk away with ideas for engaging university students, fellow care providers, and local foundations in the work of nature preschools.

Kaitlin Erpestad, Hartley Nature Preschool

Track: Admin

Location: Preschool—Movement Room

## Powerful Interactions - a Tool to Extend Learning for Children and Strengthen Communication with Parents

Join us for this interactive session where participants will gain an understanding of what a Powerful Interaction is, learn how to apply this technique in nature-based settings, explore how to document interactions, and discuss how to communicate the benefits of these unique interactions to parents, administration, and the public.

Megan Gessler, Kendall County Forest Preserve District; Marilyn Brink, Chicago Zoological Society

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Spruce



## Still-Life Drawing to Learn about Nature

Join us to learn how drawing can be used to foster children's observational skills and understandings of the natural world. Discover how to facilitate drawing to learn about nature through the use of field site visits and sketching. Participants will have the opportunity to practice the process themselves.

Jenny Leeper Miller, Erin Hamel, Eric Unrau, Mollie von Kampen, Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Oak



## Creating Spaces for Exploration

Get out and explore the outdoor learning and exploration spaces at Dodge Nature Center and nearby Garlough Environmental Magnet School with an emphasis on idea generation for creating outdoor adventure places at your site. Balancing safety with acceptable risk, material needs and maintenance will all be discussed.

Pete Cleary, Dodge Nature Center

Track: Teachers

Location: Rookery

11:00 am – 12:00 pm

**Early Childhood Social and Emotional Learning: Competencies, Skills, and Best Practices**

In this workshop we will become familiar with the core competencies of social and emotional learning (SEL), the skills it involves and promotes, as well as the outcomes associated with them. Working together, we will share best practices for SEL in the unique environment of a nature-based preschool and design action strategies to implement these practices in our programs.

Lauryn Smith Demyanovich, NatureBridge

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower East

**Supporting Executive Function Skills in an Outdoor Environment**

Learn about the latest research on the importance of executive functioning skill development during early childhood, and the role executive functioning plays in children’s success in Kindergarten and beyond. This session will provide examples on how the development of executive functioning can be naturally fostered through outdoor learning experiences.

Marie Lister, Shirley G. Moore Laboratory School; Anna Dutke,

Prior Lake Savage Area Schools

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

**Lunch and Brownbag Sessions: Council of Nature and Forest Preschools**

Join a conversation on the Council of Nature and Forest Preschools.

Signs will be posted to help you find committees.

Location: Lunch served at Farm Education Building

1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

*Concurrent Sessions*

**Movement and Meditation Experiences in Nature - Bringing Mindful Activities to Early Childhood Classrooms**

Nature, movement and meditation come together in this interactive presentation. Developmentally appropriate games, songs, and activities will prepare participants to bring movement and meditation to outdoor classrooms and experiences. Specific benefits and objectives discussed.

Lauren Maples, BIJA

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Movement Room

1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

**Experiencing Nature with Children from Baltimore City**

Join founding director of The Nature Preschool at Irvine as she shares the profound impact nature has on children from urban settings. Specifically, we will discuss Irvine’s partnership with The Ark, a licensed preschool for children in homeless situations. We will explore findings of the four-year partnership including key skill development and ways that nature feeds the souls of everyone involved.

Monica Wiedel-Lubinsk, Irvine Nature Center

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Spruce

**Importance of Peace and Mindfulness in Early Childhood Education**

Taking a moment to be still, watch rain make star shapes in a puddle and wonder is a powerful exercise to cultivate in a child’s life. This session is about creating those silent, meaningful moments in your day and how it aids in developing the whole child.

Jenn Leibham, Schlitz Audubon Nature Preschool

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Willow

**Slow Down You Move Too Fast: The Gift of the Teachable Moment**

In a world that is fast paced and goal oriented it is hard to remember to follow the lead and interest of the children. Time schedules and “to-do lists” often take priority over the slug wandering slowly or the discovery of what lives under the log! Nature gives us a host of discoverable moments no matter where you are. Come and explore how to follow the children’s wonder and discovering nature-based curriculum that grabs their interest.

Johanna Booth-Miner, David Miner, Live & Learn Early Learning Center

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

**Sounds through the Seasons: Exploring Sound Through Interactive Outdoor Inquiry**

Crunch, chirp, buzzzzzz... Each season provides a wonderfully distinct “nature orchestra!” Come on a guided listening walk to “tune in” to the sounds of our natural environment. Explore fun hands-on activities for preK-2 learners around the topics of Sound and Seasons using Project Learning Tree’s “Sounds Around” activities and extensions.

Karen M. Christenson, St. Paul Public Schools; Laura Duffey, MN Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Oak



1:00 pm – 2:15 pm



**Show Me the Money!**

Do you need to raise funds for your nature preschool? Identifying potential leads and securing funds may seem like a daunting task, however, it does not have to be. Join us as we explore effective grant writing, establishing strategic partnerships, and creative fundraising within the context of your nature preschool.

Maria Zoretic-Goodwin, Indiana University  
Track: Admin  
Location: Farm Education Building—Aerie

**Supporting Children with Challenging Behaviors in a Nature Preschool Setting**

Nature preschools and forest kindergartens attract a diverse group of children! As educators, we strive to understand our students' individual needs while working to meet the needs of the whole learning community. Discover ways to connect with allied health providers, build relationships with families, and create tools to support children with challenging behaviors.

Liza Lowe, Wild Roots Nature School at Stonewall Farm  
Track: Teachers  
Location: Farm Education Building—Lower East

2:15 pm – 3:00 pm

**Break**

Refreshments Served at Farm Education Building and Preschool

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

**Research Roundtables**

Location: Farm Education Building—Aerie  
Feel free to move around the tables as researchers present and discuss their research.

**Table 1: A Collective Impact Model for Implementation and Evaluation of a Nature-Based Science Enrichment Program for Preschoolers**

An exploration of the efficacy of a collective impact framework for implementing and evaluating nature-based preschool education. Educators from Outdoor Discovery Center Macatawa Greenway and researchers from Hope College partnered with area preschools, employing a faculty-student collaborative model to evaluate the impact of a nature-based enrichment curriculum.

Sonja Trent-Brown, Amanda Gibson, Kara Lurvey, Trechaun Gonzalez, Hope College

**Table 2: A Window into a Nature-Based Preschool through the Eyes of Children**

See how cameras can be used as a research tool with young children as data gatherers. Using photovoice methodology, this research project describes and documents the experiences of children ages 3 to 5 attending a nature-based preschool located on a private nature preserve in the U.S.

Laura Dell, University of Cincinnati

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm



**Table 3: Early Childhood Action in Nature: Promoting Outdoor Play to Families and Educators Outside of the Nature Preschool Community**

Learn how an established nature preschool is spreading the good news of Nature Play through a two-year grant project. The Hudson Highlands Nature Museum will present findings to date and lead a discussion on the role nature-based preschools can play in advocating for Nature Play to EC educators and families.

Kerrilee Hunter, Hudson Highlands Nature Museum

**Table 4: Implications of a Nature-Based Science Enrichment Program for Biosocial and Psychosocial Developmental Outcomes**

The biosocial and psychosocial developmental outcomes of a nature-based enrichment program for preschoolers. The research investigates the effectiveness of varying frequencies of nature enrichment and has implications for the design of preschool curricula, particularly for comparing the benefits of nature-based preschools with the integration of nature-programming elements within traditional preschools.

Sonja Trent-Brown, Amanda Gibson, Kara Lurvey, Trechaun Gonzalez, Hope College

**Table 5: Implications of a Nature-Based Science Enrichment Program for Early Literacy and Cognitive Development Outcomes**

The early literacy and cognitive developmental outcomes of a nature-based enrichment program for preschoolers. The research investigates the effectiveness of varying frequencies of nature enrichment and has implications for the design of preschool curricula, particularly for comparing the benefits of nature-based preschools with the integration of nature-programming elements within traditional preschools.

Sonja Trent-Brown, Amanda Gibson, Kara Lurvey, Trechaun Gonzalez, Hope College

**Table 6: Preschoolers' Scientific Inquiry Practices: A Mixed Methods Study**

Are you interested in learning more about preschoolers' scientific inquiry practices and strategies teachers can use to support them? Are you looking for an assessment tool to evaluate preschoolers' scientific inquiry practices? If so, this session will explore research based on a case study at a nature-based preschool examining each of these questions.

Peggy Novak, University of Northwestern, St. Paul & Concordia University

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

**Panel Discussion: Working with School Districts to Start a Nature-Based Preschool Program**

Track: 101

Location: Garlough Elementary Gym

Two programs will share their pathway to nature preschool & kindergarten one, part of an E-Stem School district in Minnesota and a second nature-based four-year-old kindergarten program at a wildlife sanctuary in Green Bay, Wisconsin that is the first in the state connected with a public school district, the city of Green Bay, and a local university. Come away with strategies to gain pivotal support from district administration, classroom teachers, school personnel and the community.

Anna Dutke, Rebecca Richardson, Leah Bulver, ISD 719 Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools

Scott Ashmann, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay; Michael Reed, Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary, Green Bay, WI

3:00 pm – 3:50 pm



**Facilitated Discussions**

Facilitated discussions are sessions featuring conversations on a focused topic. The presenters provide an overview of the topic and help guide discussion.

**Mapping Your Journey: Shared Voices and Visions with Story Mapping**

Storytelling creates a shared experience and common language that transforms communities and invigorates future pursuits while honoring the past. Explore the story of children in Missouri’s only reggio-inspired forest school through story mapping and learn how this dynamic documentation enhances community building at every level – in just one click!

Brandi Cartwright, Raintree School

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

**Putting the Pieces Together to Create a Nature Preschool: Juggling the Many Roles of the Preschool Director**

Gain knowledge from a seasoned nature preschool director who has had a long history in the field of early childhood education. Topics that will be highlighted and can then lead to discussion and questions include budgeting, hiring and staffing, professional development, indoor and outdoor environment planning, curriculum development, class scheduling and marketing. Understanding the importance of being part of a larger organization and the impact of state licensing of early childhood will be integrated into these various topics. Come with your questions.

Marty Watson, Dodge Nature Preschool

Track: Admin

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower East

4:00 pm – 4:50 pm

**Facilitated Discussions**

Facilitated discussions are sessions featuring conversations on a focused topic. The presenters provide an overview of the topic and help guide discussion.

**Place-Based Curriculum Writing**

How do we ensure that curriculum is truly place-based? Have you found that bought curriculum does not quite “work” to honor who you are as a preschool and as a teacher? Together let’s talk about best curriculum practices and the steps required in creating your own place-based curriculum.

Linda Charlton, Cibolo Nature Center & Herff Farm

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower East

**Tales from Scotland’s Nature Kindergarten and Our American Journey**

This interactive presentation will share the journey of a Midwestern outdoor space inspired by Nature Explore and involving the work of Claire Warden in Scotland. Participants will view detailed photographs of Scotland’s Nature Kindergartens, define nature pedagogy and discuss strengths and challenges of working in an outdoor world as well as children, families, and staff that may have a nature phobia.

Sara Garner, Southeast MO State University; Barb Meraz, University Child Development Center Southeast MO State University

Track: Admin

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

5:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**Happy Hour and Dinner Sponsored by Dodge Nature Center**

Tour the Dodge Nature Center Preschool during this casual walking dinner. Dodge Nature Preschool staff and board will be on hand to show you their outdoor and indoor spaces.

Location: Preschool

6:30 pm – 8:00 pm

Shuttles available to return to conference hotels



# Tuesday Schedule

7:30 am – 8:30 am

Shuttles from conference hotels to Garlough Elementary

8:00 am – 9:00 am

**Registration**

Location: Garlough Elementary

9:00 am – 10:30 am

**Plenary Session: Managing Safety and Risk in Nature Preschools**

While nature-based preschools embrace children’s appropriate risk taking, safety is the central concern of every program. Outdoor programs bring a unique set of concerns when providing safe and secure settings for young children. Our experienced panel will discuss issues of safety, appropriate risk taking, managing hazards, and more. Panelists include Natasha Frost from Public Health Law Center at Mitchell Hamline Law School; Rachel Larimore, education consultant and former Director of Education for the Chippewa Nature Center; and Joey Schoen from Dodge Nature Preschool. Facilitated by Christy Merrick from Natural Start Alliance.

Location: Garlough Elementary

10:30 am – 10:45 am

**Break**

Location: Refreshments at Garlough Elementary

10:45 am – 5:00 pm

**Registration, Silent Auction, and Conference Office Open**

Location: Farm Education Building

10:45 am – 12:00 pm

*Concurrent Sessions*

**Panel on Starting a New Nature Preschool**

Join us as we explore areas pertaining to the administrative and development aspects of a nature program. Participants will be actively engaged in brainstorming and learning ideas for networking with local businesses, partnering with others in the community, marketing the idea of a nature school, and sharing the value of nature based programs with families and the community. We will also explore how to help families develop the trust necessary to enroll their children in a program that doesn’t exist yet and share tools for building positive relationships with parents during the process of opening a new nature preschool.

Elizabeth Bangert, Here We Grow Early Childhood Center and Karen First, Mass Audubon’s Ipswich River Nature Preschool

Track: 101

Location: Farm Education Building–Aerie



10:45 am – 12:00 pm

**The View From Below: Examining Children’s Selection of Materials in the Outdoor Space**

Interested in seeing the outdoor classroom from a child’s perspective? Learn what materials children choose to play with in the natural environment. Using GoPro cameras, we have captured children’s selection and use of materials in the outdoors. Find out what items were most used and how children played with them.

Erin Hamel, Mollie von Kampen, Keting Chen, Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool–Movement Room

**Looking at the Relationship Between Spiritual Development and Nature**

Participants will learn about the relationship between nature and the spiritual development of young children. We will explore the hundred languages of children using nature. I will share findings from my research on spiritual development. Everyone will make a Nattle – a nature rattle to take home.

Deb Schein, Champlain College/Growing Wonder

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool–Oak

**Integrating STEM into Your Curriculum Through a Gardening Project: Outdoor and Nature Based Learning**

Learn about the influence of STEM, science, technology, engineering, and math, in current educational practices. Discover how to integrate STEM activities into your curriculum and be on the cutting edge of early childhood education knowledge. Discover how STEM activities can make learning very exciting for the early year’s children.

Corinne Greenberg, Consultant

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool–Spruce

**Come Fly Away**

Birds: the colors, the sounds, the behaviors. Come learn a wide variety of activities that will help preschool-age students discover the exciting world of birds. Experience hands-on activities that will encourage children to learn how to enjoy and respect these wonderful organisms that can be found throughout all habitats and seasons.

Monica Rauchwarter, Three Rivers Park District; Pam Welisevich, Dodge Nature Center

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building–Lower East



10:45 am – 12:00 pm

**Location, Location, Location: How to Maximize Your Program’s Potential within Your Venue**

What’s in a venue? Connect with others in your field as you discuss the benefits and challenges with colleagues who have similar program venues. Brainstorm with those who have already walked a mile in your shoes as you discover together the best possible way to utilize your site.

Megan Gessler, Natural Beginnings Early Childhood Program; Ann Halley, Early Childhood Programs, Chicago Botanic Garden; Kit Harrington, Fiddleheads Forest School; Marge Trocki, Downers Grove Park District

Track: Admin

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

**Stepping into the Circle of Life with Young Children**

Encounters with death are inevitable when out exploring nature with young children. In these moments many of us are uncomfortable and uncertain how to proceed. Through sharing stories from our teaching practice, we aim to de-stigmatize the topic and find ways to see that death is not just an end of life, but also a beginning.

Kari Ryg, Joey Shoen, Dodge Nature Preschool

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool--Willow

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm

**Lunch and Brownbag Sessions: Regional Networking**

Join a conversation with professionals in your region. Signs will be posted to help you find your region.

Location: Lunch served at Farm Education Building

12:30 pm

**Silent Auction Closes**

Location: Farm Education Building

1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

*Concurrent Sessions*

**Starting a Center or Family-Based Nature Preschool in MN**

Have you ever thought about starting your own nature-based preschool program in your home or childcare center? Four nature preschool teachers will share their stories, methods, and tips for starting nature preschool programs in Minnesota in this interactive session with lots of time for questions and dreaming.

Duluth Nature Play Collaborative: Laura Whittaker, Wind Ridge Schoolhouse; Kaitlin Erpestad, Hartley Nature Preschool

Track: 101

Location: Preschool—Spruce

1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

**Playing With a Purpose - Connecting Nature to Today’s Changing Classroom**

With the pressures of academia trickling down into early education, it is imperative to step back and play with a purpose. That step can and should be taken outside! Learn simple, straightforward, and successful methods of integrating outdoor educational experiences to support and surpass the rising expectations of today’s classroom.

Peter Dargatz, Hamilton School District

Track: Teachers

Location: Farm Education Building—Aerie

**Dramatic Representation, Movement and Music Promote Self-Regulation in Nature**

Use dramatic representation, movement, and music to support self-regulation, guide children’s behavior in natural settings, and learning about nature.

Julia Torquati, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Patti Bailie, University of Maine at Farmington

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Movement Room

**Project-Based Learning: The Garden**

Are you curious about what project-based learning can look like in an environmental preschool? Come and explore a school’s journey through their seasonal experiences in the garden. We will play in this workshop! A hands-on nature activity you can do in the classroom or outside in a garden.

Jennifer Johnson, Tami Hodgkins, Willow & Sprout

Track: Teachers

Location: Preschool—Oak

**Tools of the Trade: Tools, Tips and Tricks to Plan and Evaluate Your Nature School Program**

Why start a nature preschool? How do you define your goals and plan a successful program? How do you know your program is working? We will show you how to use logic models to roadmap your program and share a tool for evaluating the impact of your program on students.

Jennifer Torpie-Sweterlitsch, University of Texas at San Antonio

Track: Admin

Location: Farm Education Building—Lower East



1:00 pm – 2:15 pm

**Inside, Outside, Upside Down. Designing Successful Outdoor Play Areas**

Are you hoping to add a unique play space to your preschool but are unsure where to start? Join us as we highlight a few of our favorite outdoor spaces at Children’s Country Day School and discuss the specifics that made those spaces a success. You will leave confident in your ability to design your own engaging, age-appropriate, safe and creative outdoor space of your own.

Wendy Tremblay, Seth Hayden, Children’s Country Day School  
Track: Admin  
Location: Preschool–Willow

**STEM in a Sandbox**

Share preschool and parent hands-on-activities from the Earth Materials STEM Curriculum. Presenters will explain how lessons are integrated (Early Childhood and Parent Education) and will show how to merge Earth Science and Engineering concepts.

Lu Ann Polejewski, Mi Yang, Early Childhood Family Education, Minneapolis Public Schools  
Track: Teachers  
Location: Farm Education Building—Lower West

2:15 pm – 3:00 pm

**Break**

Location: Refreshments served at Farm Education Building and Preschool

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

**Plenary Session: Diverse Perspectives on Dodge Nature Preschool**

As one of the nation’s oldest nature-based preschools, the Dodge Nature Center Preschool has a unique perspective on the importance of a nature based experience. In this session, we’ve brought together a diverse array of people connected to Dodge—from alumni to parents to educators to advocates—to share their perspectives on the opportunities and challenges of a nature-preschool. Panelists include: Jenny Hanlon, preschool teacher and parent educator; Nicole Winter Tietel, alumni parent and author; Milo Wittenberg, alumnus; Tim Krall, alumnus; Sierra Williams, alumnus; and Vicki Ford, early childhood advocate. Moderated by Sheila Williams Ridge, director of the University of Minnesota Lab School.

Location: Garlough Elementary

5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

**Happy Hour**

Location: Farm Education Building—Aerie

6:00 pm – 7:00 pm

**Closing BBQ Dinner**

Location: Farm Education Building

7:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**Optional Evening Session: Self Care**

Taking care of ourselves is not self-indulgent! Self-care is a tool for us to be more engaged and better meet the needs of our students. By employing relaxation methods as well as revisiting our own love of the natural world, we will explore many ways we can take care of ourselves as dedicated teachers: body, mind, and spirit.

Lauryn Smith Demyanovich, NatureBridge  
Location: Preschool–Movement Room

6:30 pm – 8:30 pm

Shuttles from Dodge Nature Center to Conference Hotel



Proudly supporting efforts to connect children to nature through discovery and play.



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## Field Trip

We look forward to visiting three area nature-based preschools on Wednesday. The field trip is completely full. Unfortunately, we cannot accommodate additional participants, even those driving their own cars.

**Where to Meet:** Please meet in the lobby at one of the conference hotels: Country Inn & Suites or AmericInn. If you are not staying at a conference hotel, please meet at the Country Inn & Suites located at 3035 Holiday Lane, Eagan, MN 55121, Phone: 651-287-8800.

**When:** Please arrive by 8:45 am so that we can load the buses quickly. Buses will depart conference hotels promptly at 9:00 am.



**Where We're Going:** Two buses will visit the following schools in reverse order:

**All Seasons Preschool** provides a model of early learning experience that meets children's developmental needs while fostering meaningful relationships with senior adults. The school offers an intergenerational program with a nature-based and art-centered curriculum.

**Children's Country Day School** has provided quality early childhood programming for young children for over 40 years. This model farm is located on seven acres of pasture and woodlands, overlooking the city of St. Paul and the Mississippi River Valley. Children learn lessons in biology, empathy, and responsibility through their care and interaction with a wide variety of animals. From feeding llamas and riding ponies, to grooming burros and walking goats, students interact with animals on a daily basis.

**Tamarack Nature Center** is a 320-acre preserve within Bald Eagle-Otter Lakes Regional Park. In September 2015, a new 3,500 square-foot center opened with two new classrooms that more than doubled the student capacity. The unique curriculum is focused on immersing children in nature, allowing them to learn with, from, and about it. Each class is led by both a preschool teacher from White Bear Lake Area Schools and an early childhood naturalist/educator from Tamarack Nature Center.

**Lunch:** Boxed lunches will be served at Tamarack Nature Center, the second stop on the field trip.

**Return:** Buses will return to conference hotels by 5 pm.

## Shuttle and Parking Information

### Shuttles

Shuttles are available from both conference hotels—Country Inn & Suites and AmericInn—for transportation to and from the conference on Monday and Tuesday.

### Getting to the Conference

Shuttles depart regularly from 7:30 am to 8:30 am from the conference hotels to the conference on Monday and Tuesday.

### Getting Back to the Hotel

Shuttles depart regularly from the Dodge Nature Center to the conference hotels from 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm on Monday and 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm on Tuesday.

### At Other Times

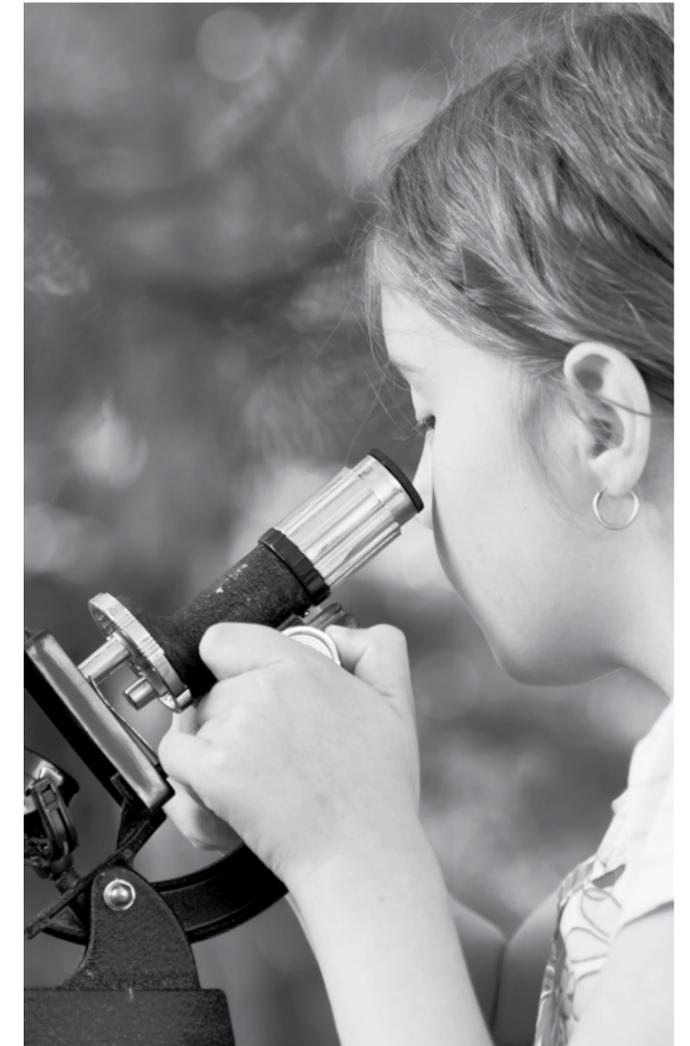
If you're staying at one of the conference hotels and need transportation to or from the conference at times outside of the regular shuttle hours, the hotels provide on-demand shuttle service. Call the hotel directly to request a ride.

Country Inn and Suites: 651-287-8800

AmericInn: 651-450-7511

### Parking

If you're driving your own car to the conference, parking is available for free. Please park in any of the following locations: the Garlough Elementary School parking lot, Dodge Nature Center Farm Education Building parking lot, or the Dodge Nature Preschool parking lot. To navigate to parking locations, use the following address: 1701 Charlton Street, West St. Paul, MN 55118.

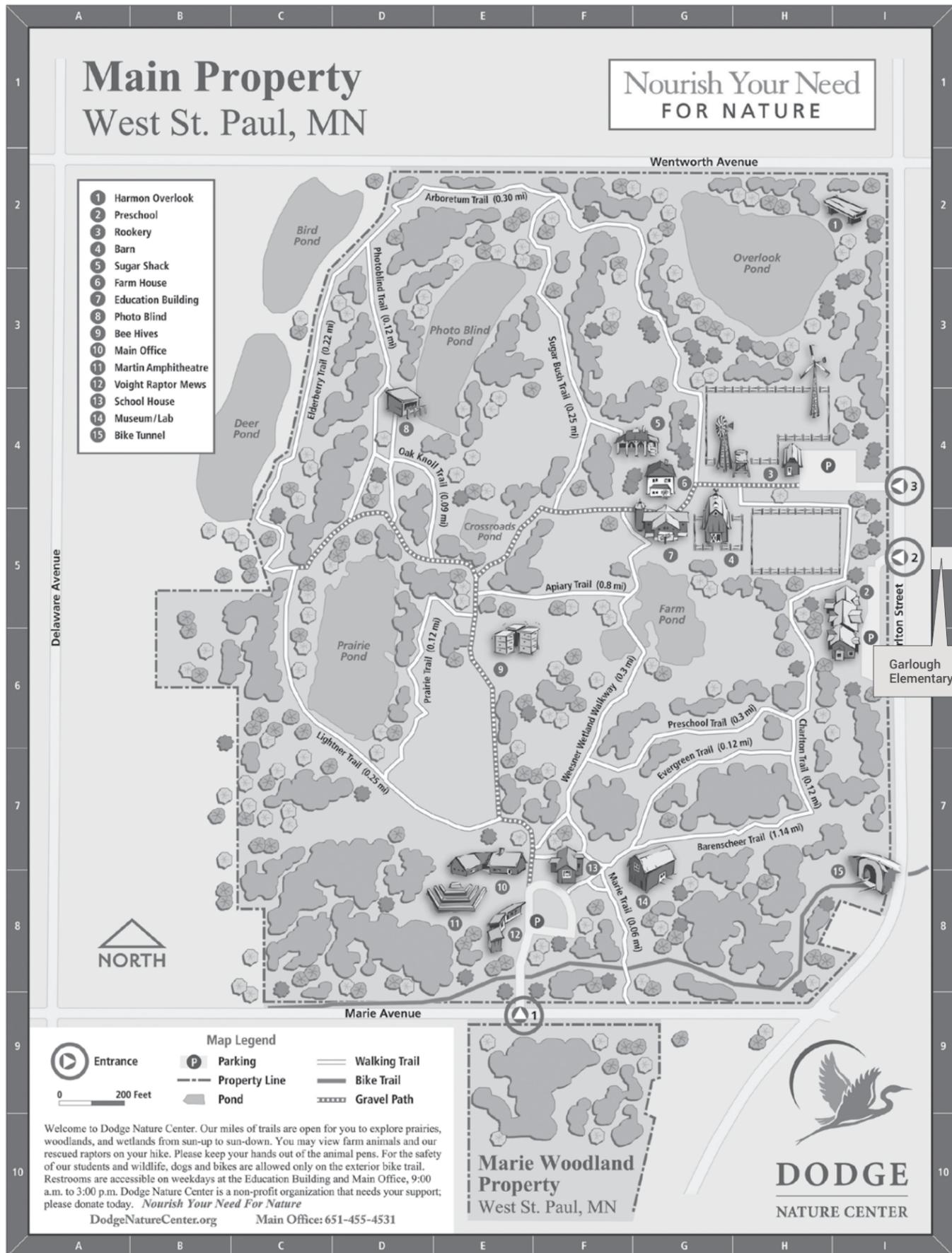


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## Council of Nature and Forest Preschools

### Dear Conference-goers,

As the demand for nature-based early childhood programs increases, so does the need for professional support. We need an organization that specifically addresses the needs of nature-based early childhood practitioners. Look no farther!

The Natural Start Alliance has formed a new organization called the Council of Nature and Forest Preschools. We are seeking members to help elevate our profession by sharing resources, research, and best practices nation-wide. Naturally, you are invited to join us!

The Council supports our field by working in three committees:

*Professional Development and Resources*—Helping our field stay connected and informed about professional development opportunities

*Research*—Making sure we are all aware of the latest research of interest to nature-based early childhood educators

*Advocacy*—Working together to look for opportunities and resources to help us better advocate for nature-based learning for young children

If you'd like to connect with others who are part of the Council and learn more, join us at a brown bag session at lunch on Monday. Signs will be posted to help you find the committees. And you can visit [NaturalStart.org](http://NaturalStart.org) and click the "Nature Preschools" tab for more information.

### Happy Trails,

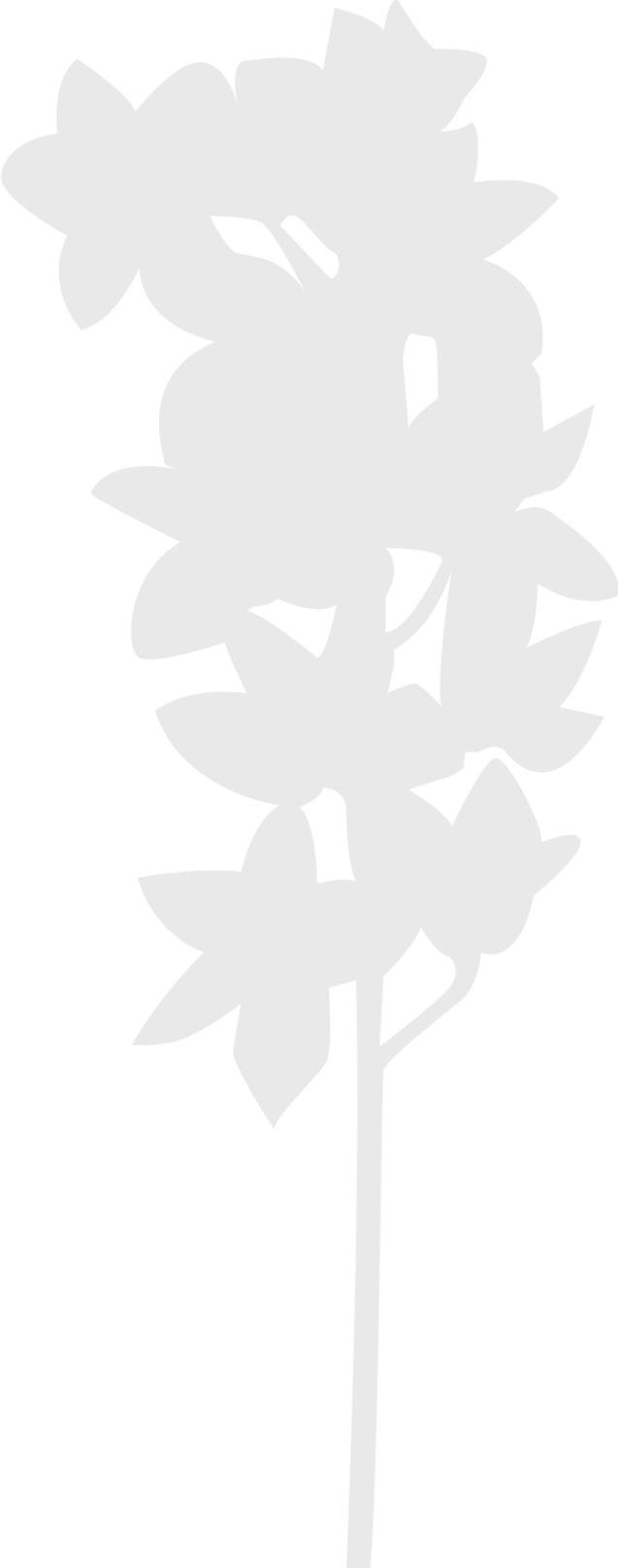


**Rachel Larimore**  
Co-chair of the Council of  
Nature and Forest Preschools



**Monica Wiedel-Lubinski**  
Co-chair of the Council of  
Nature and Forest Preschools

Field notes.





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