NATURE EVERYWHERE

Madison Region

Madison Region

Field Trip Guide

2025 - 2026

About this guide

This field trip guide was created by Nature Everywhere, Madison Region to help educators and learners step outside and embrace the rich opportunities available in southern Wisconsin's landscapes.

It highlights local sites and programs that offer intentional, nature-based learning experiences designed to inspire curiosity, ecological literacy, and a deeper connection to the environment.

> We must teach our children to smell the earth, to taste the rain, to touch the wind, to see things grow, to hear the sun rise and night fall—to care.
>
> John Cleal

The information provided in this guide, such as pricing and facility hours, was taken directly from the organizations website is subject to change without notice. Always visit the organizations website for current information before your trip.

How to use this guide

Explore Sites:

Each page includes information about local organizations or locations with details about what they offer, potential topics, age/grade suitability, and special features.

Plan Ahead:

Most sites require advance scheduling or have seasonal offerings. Please contact sites directly for reservations, fees, and logistical details.

Budget & Funding:

Some programs may have a fee; check out the Nature Express grant to support field trips that are indicated by the icon. Visit naturenet.org for more information.



Forest

Madison-area forests are outdoor classrooms filled with oaks, maples, and pines. Students can hike shaded trails, spot wildlife, and see how forests provide oxygen, shelter, and seasonal changes while highlighting biodiversity.



Garden

Gardens give students a hands-on look at plant life, pollinators, and food systems. From planting to harvesting, they spark curiosity, responsibility, and connections to science, health, and sustainability.



Prairies

Central Wisconsin prairies feature tall grasses, bright wildflowers, and habitats for birds and pollinators. Students learn how native roots conserve water, stabilize soil, and support conservation.



Wetlands

Wetlands filter water, prevent floods, and support frogs, turtles, and birds. Students explore how land and water connect while discovering wetlands' role in protecting communities and wildlife.



Nature Net Sites

Locations with the Nature Net icon in the top right corner represent Nature Net sites that may be eligible for field trip funding.

Aldo Leopold Foundation

aldoleopold.org | (608) 355-0279

Suggested Grade Level: Middle - High School

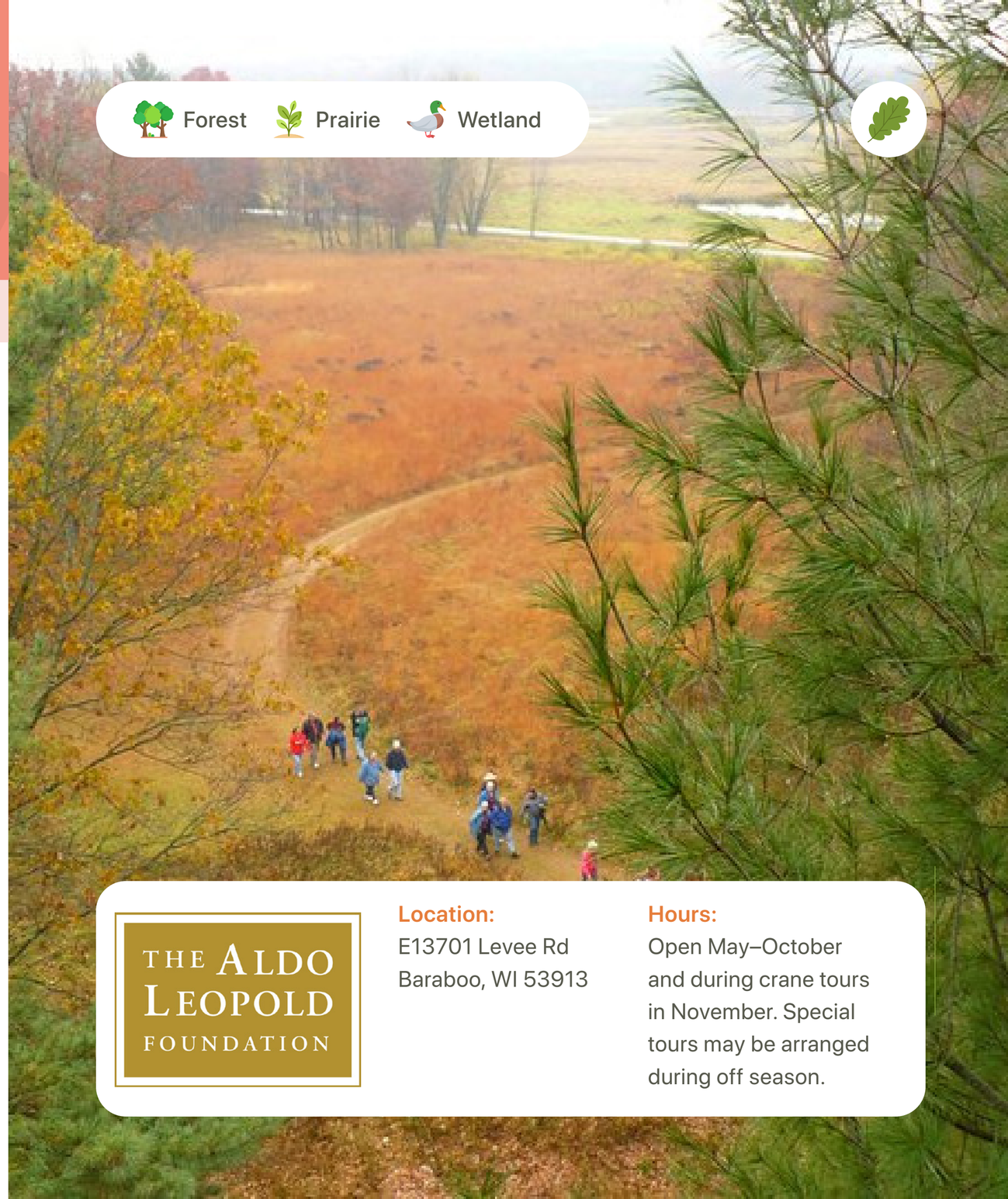
Cost: Minimum tour fee is $125 for a group of 1 to 20 people.

Located near Baraboo, the Aldo Leopold Foundation offers opportunities to explore environmental history, land stewardship, and the legacy of Aldo Leopold. Field trip experiences often include a guided tour of the historic Leopold Shack, exploration of restored prairie, wetland, and oak savanna habitats, and a visit to the green-built Leopold Center.

Programs connect to science, environmental literacy, and social studies standards. Participants engage in observation, discussion, and hands-on learning inspired by Leopold's writing and ideas. Seasonal highlights such as the fall migration of Sandhill Cranes provide memorable connections to both place and curriculum.

For educators working with younger students, the Foundation offers the *Learning with the Land* e-book, which includes adaptable classroom activities to extend or enhance learning. The e-book is available for download below.

Learning with the Land



Aldo Leopold Nature Center

aldoleopoldnaturecenter.org | (608) 216-9382
schools@aldoleopoldnaturecenter.org
Suggested Grade Level: PreK-8

Cost: $80 - $100 per class

At the Aldo Leopold Nature Center, students engage in place-based field trips that bring Wisconsin's natural environments and ecological concepts to life.

Programs cover topics such as habitats, food chains, plant and animal adaptations, seasonal changes, and sustainability through hands-on exploration of prairies, wetlands, forests, and ponds. Seasonal experiences like maple syruping and snowshoeing add unique, timely learning opportunities.

These immersive field trips provide meaningful connections between classroom learning and the natural world, helping students build environmental literacy and a deeper understanding of their local ecosystems.

Programs are designed to support state science and social studies standards and can be adapted for diverse learners.



Bethel Horizons

bethelhorizons.org | (608) 257-3577 | hello@bethelhorizons.org
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Programs vary: $20 - $34 per participant

Bethel Horizons offers half-day, full-day, and overnight programs throughout the year, set in the scenic Driftless Area. All activities are selected or adapted to fit the age and needs of each group and align with Wisconsin academic and social-emotional learning standards. Programs are led by trained environmental education staff, guided by an experienced education director, and designed to spark curiosity, respect for nature, and meaningful connections to the outdoors.

Environmental education experiences may include pond studies, nature hikes, live animal encounters, environmental games, canoeing, cliff exploration, and nature center visits. Adventure programs focus on teamwork, leadership, and social-emotional skills through challenge courses, rock climbing, rappelling, and mountain biking. Activities can be customized to support specific classroom topics or learning goals, providing educators with flexible, hands-on opportunities that build both academic knowledge and essential life skills.

Program Alignment Guide



Cave of the Mounds

caveofthemounds.com | (608) 437-3038
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Student tickets $10–$15, depending on grade level and time of year.

Located less than 45 minutes from Madison in Blue Mounds, Cave of the Mounds offers hands-on experiences in geology, earth science, and history.

Guided tours take students underground to explore stunning cave formations while uncovering the geologic history of Wisconsin's most famous natural cave. Above ground, interactive programs led by educators extend learning through topics like karst landscapes, rocks and minerals, and fossil evidence of Earth's past.

Most visits include a 45–60 minute cave tour plus a one-hour program with engaging presentations and hands-on activities tailored for kindergarten through high school. Additional options include guided hikes, gemstone and fossil mining, and time to enjoy gardens, trails, and picnic areas. Pre-visit videos and follow-up activities help educators prepare students and deepen learning back in the classroom.



Cherokee Marsh

cherokeemarsh.org | ekjust@madison.k12.wi.us

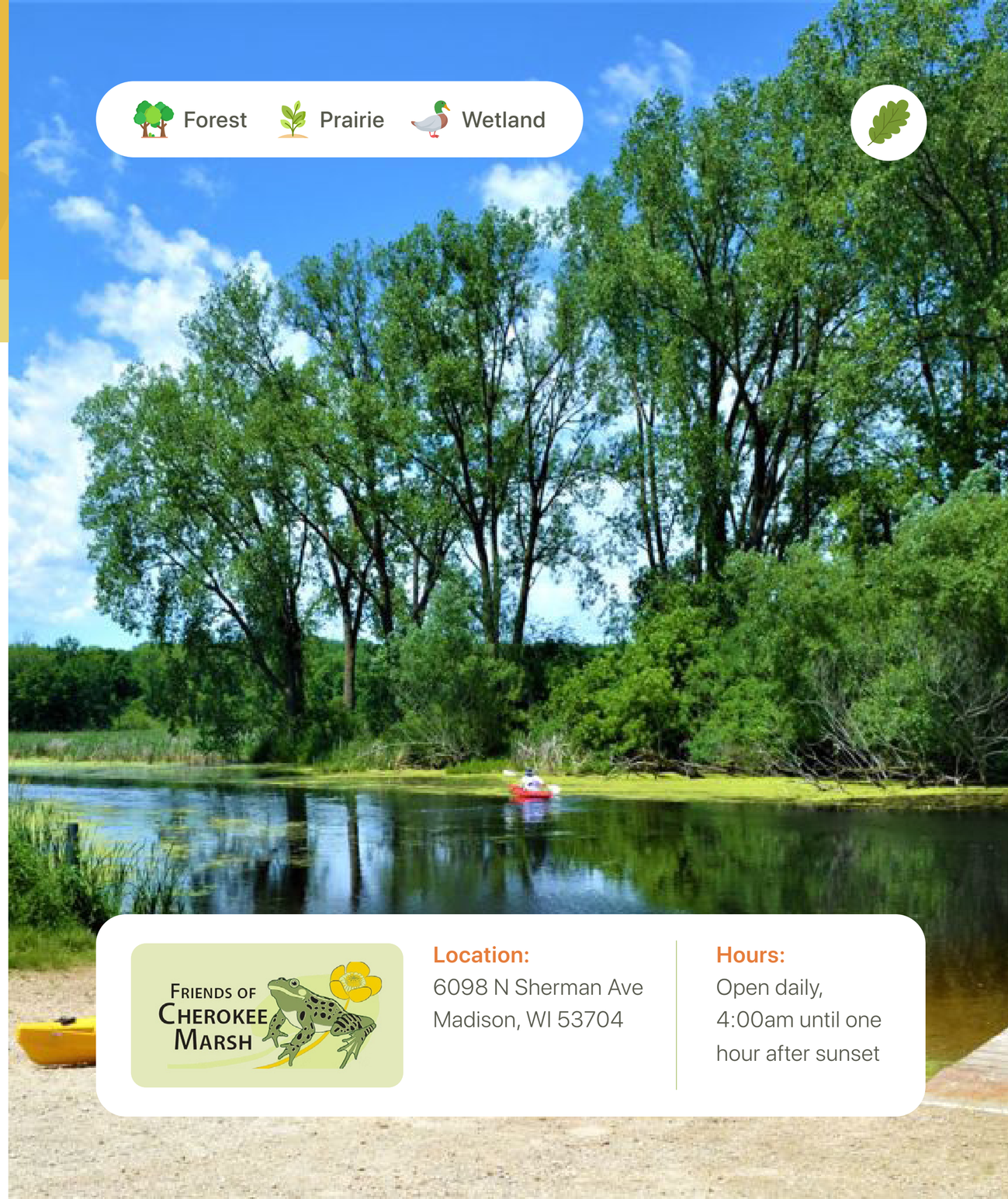
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: MMSD transportation costs are funded by Friends of Cherokee Marsh.

Cherokee Marsh, the largest conservation park in Madison, invites students to explore over 1,200 acres of wetlands, prairie, woodland, and glacial landscapes through hands-on, guided field studies. Located on the city's north side, the park features accessible trails and boardwalks, the upper Yahara River, Native American mounds, and a glacial drumlin.

Teachers are welcome to bring their students on self-guided visits or request a guided field study through Madison School & Community Recreation (MSCR). Naturalist-led programs are active, engaging, and adaptable to meet curriculum needs across grade levels. Field study topics often focus on the needs of plants and animals, their relationships and defenses, features of the Earth's surface, how living things interact with their environments to survive, and the importance of ecosystem restoration.

All field studies are customizable, and MSCR's Naturalist Coordinator will work with educators ahead of the visit to shape the focus of the program.



Dane County Parks

Lussier Family Heritage Center

lussierheritagecenter.com | (608) 224-3604

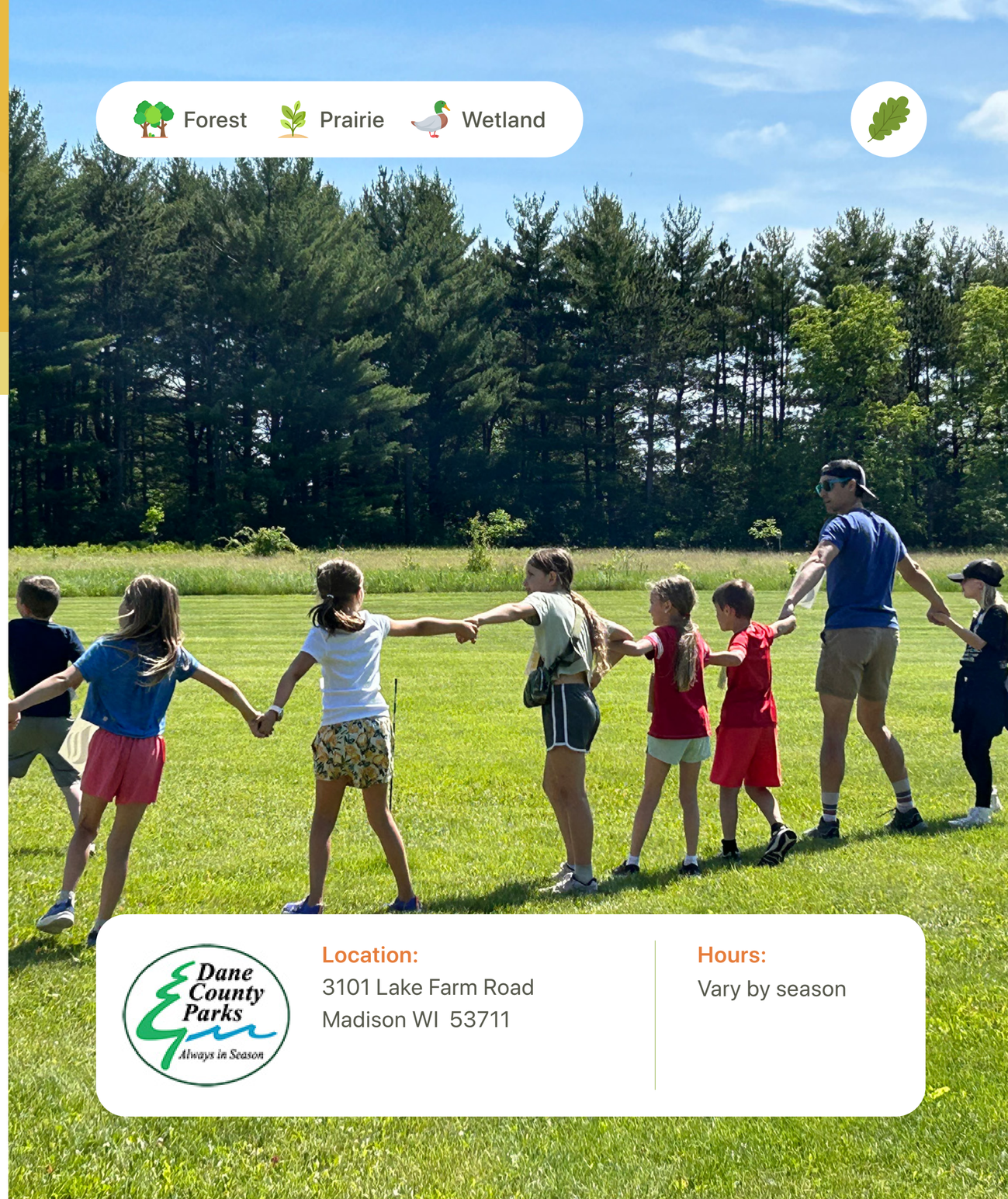
Suggested Grade Level: K-8

Cost: Youth $5.00, Adult $10.00

The Lussier Family Heritage Center offers nature-based field trips designed to engage students in hands-on exploration and environmental learning. Each 1.5 hour session is guided by experienced outdoor educators and thoughtfully tailored to the age, interests, and curriculum goals of your group.

Students might explore the life of trees through bark, branches, and leaves, uncover the important role of plants through games and crafts, or learn survival skills like fire-starting and shelter-building in the forest. Older students can become wildlife detectives as they identify animal clues and signs or head to the water's edge to collect and study aquatic critters as part of a lake and pond health investigation.

For upper elementary and middle schoolers, GPS-based geocaching introduces both technology and adventure as they navigate to hidden treasure boxes.



Henry Vilas Zoo

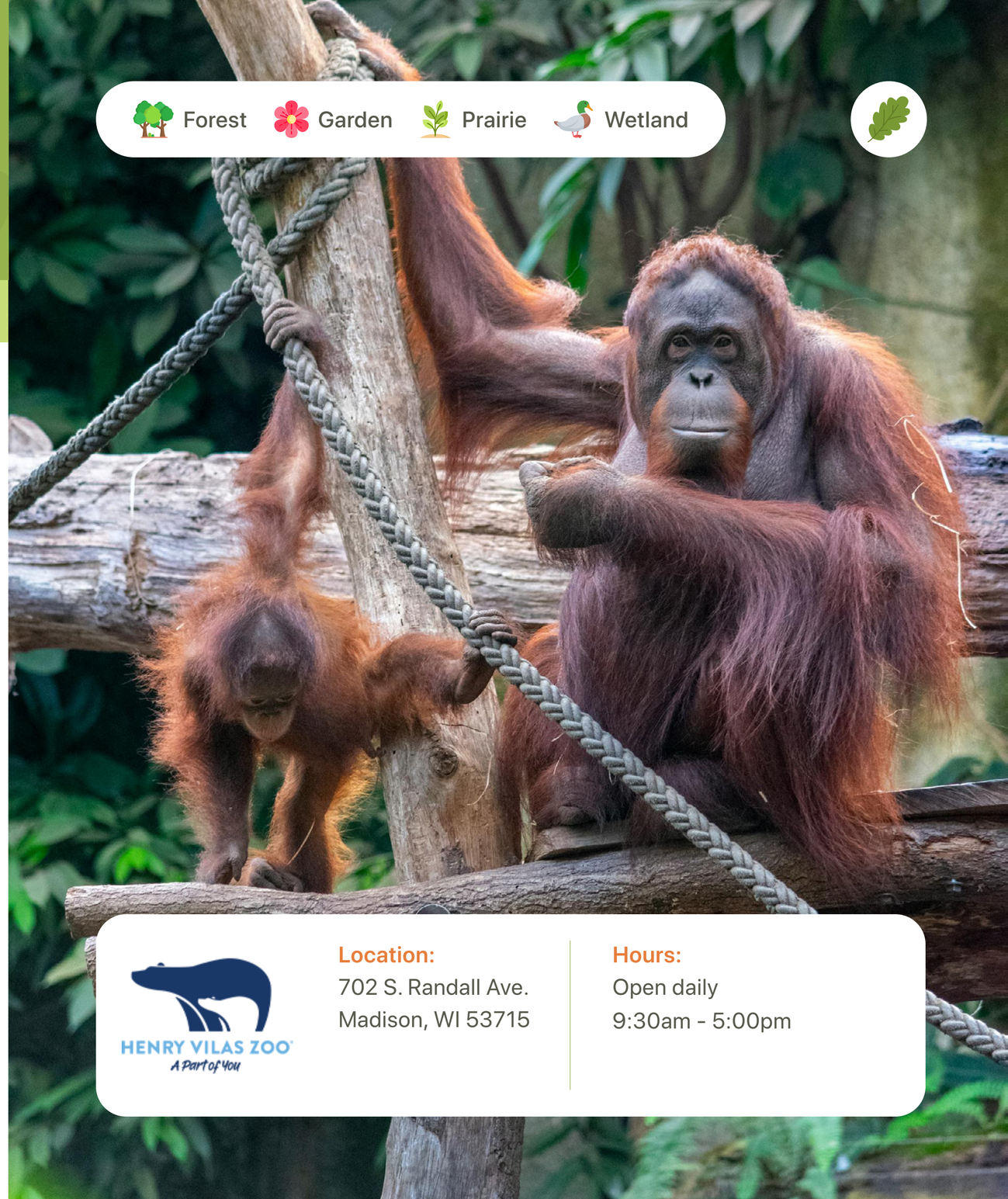
henryvilaszoo.gov | (608) 266-4732 | education@henryvilaszoo.gov
Suggested Grade Level: K-5

Cost: $50-$165 depending on season and group size.

A beloved Madison destination, the zoo offers enriching field trip experiences for schools with multiple ways to connect with wildlife. Educators can schedule a Critter Connections program, a 30 minute live animal presentation tailored to the group's interests, or choose from virtual animal or career themed programs.

For free, self-guided visits, the zoo provides a collection of teacher resources to enhance the experience. Empathy Field Trip Guides for K–5 help students build compassion for animals through observation and understanding of behavior. Exhibit specific lessons, such as the Wisconsin Heritage and Arctic Passage units, offer opportunities to explore local history, energy, and conservation topics. Supplemental worksheets and activities are available online, and programs can be adapted for a variety of age levels.

Henry Vilas Zoo Teacher Resources



Ice Age Trail Alliance

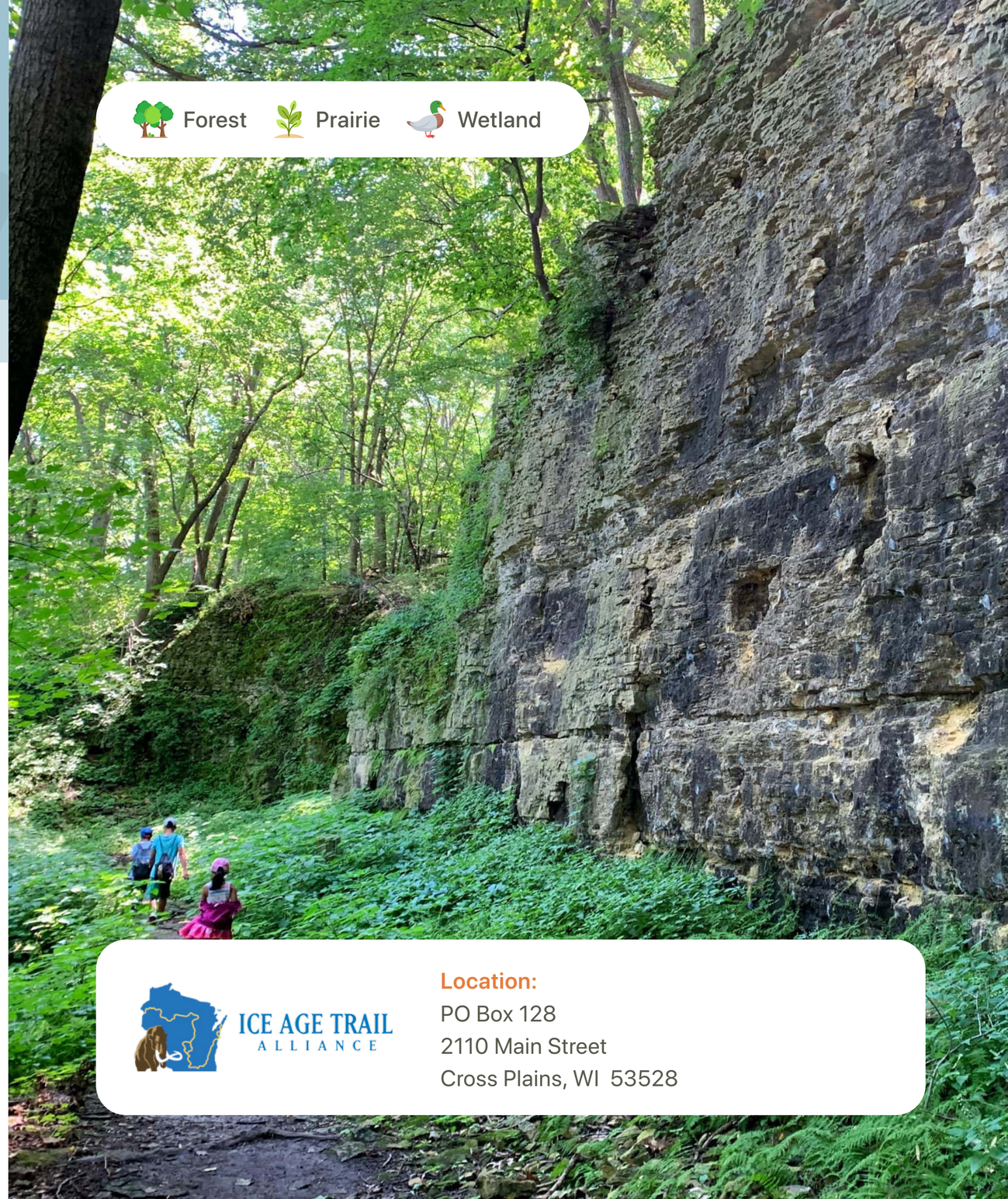
iceagetrail.org/think-outside | (608) 257-3577
kathy@iceagetrail.org
Suggested Grade Level: Grades 3-5

Cost: Transportation costs reimbursement for 4th graders

The Ice Age Trail Alliance's Think Outside program offers fourth-grade students a dynamic field experience along Wisconsin's Ice Age National Scenic Trail, one of the state's premier outdoor classrooms.

This program brings textbook concepts to life by immersing students in real-world glacial features such as kettles, eskers, and moraines. Guided by Ice Age Trail staff, students engage in hands-on activities that integrate multiple facets of the curriculum, including science, geography, and environmental stewardship.

The experience encourages students to step beyond the classroom, breathe fresh air, and gain a deeper understanding of the natural world. Educators interested in participating can register their classes through the Ice Age Trail Alliance's website.



International Crane Foundation

savingcranes.org | (608) 356-9462
info@savingcranes.org
Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: $2.00 per student

The International Crane Foundation in Baraboo offers engaging field trips that focus on conservation, biodiversity, and global stewardship. Visitors have the unique opportunity to see all 15 of the world's crane species in one place while learning about crane biology, habitat threats, and worldwide efforts to protect these endangered birds.

Guided by experienced educators, programs are interactive and tailored to fit each group's needs. Students observe crane behaviors and habitats, explore lessons in biology, ecology, and endangered species, and learn how they can help protect the natural world.

To support learning before and after the trip, pre-visit activity packets are available in English and Spanish. Educators can also borrow the Whooping Crane Trunk, a hands-on resource filled with materials to extend the conservation conversation in the classroom. Staff collaborate with teachers to ensure programs connect meaningfully to curriculum goals.



MacKenzie Center

dnr.wisconsin.gov/education/mackenzie | (608) 635-8112

Suggested Grade Level: K-8

Cost: Admission varies from $2-$20 per student.

Just outside of Poynette, the MacKenzie Center offers hands-on programs that bring Wisconsin's natural landscapes to life for students of all ages. With forest, prairie, wetland, and pond habitats, students can explore ecosystems, build outdoor skills, and connect with native wildlife.

Programs are tailored to grade level and learning goals, with offerings like fire building, compass navigation, nature hikes, birding, and stream or pond studies. Seasonal opportunities include maple syruping, snowshoeing, and night hikes.

Whether planning a day trip or an overnight stay in the center's lodge and dormitories, MacKenzie staff will help customize a meaningful experience for students.



Madison Children's Museum

madisonchildrensmuseum.org | (608) 256-6445

Suggested Grade Level: K-5

Cost: $9.00 per child

Designed for discovery, the Madison Children's Museum offers hands-on exhibits that encourage play, exploration, and learning. Field trips provide a two hour window of exploration throughout the museum's engaging indoor and outdoor spaces. While guided programs aren't currently offered, the exhibits themselves provide rich learning opportunities for a wide range of ages.

Group sizes range from 12 to 80 participants (children and adults combined). A short staff-led orientation kicks off the visit, and groups can then break into smaller self-guided teams. All children must be accompanied by a group chaperone at all times.



Madison Conservation Parks

cityofmadison.com/parks | (608) 267-4918

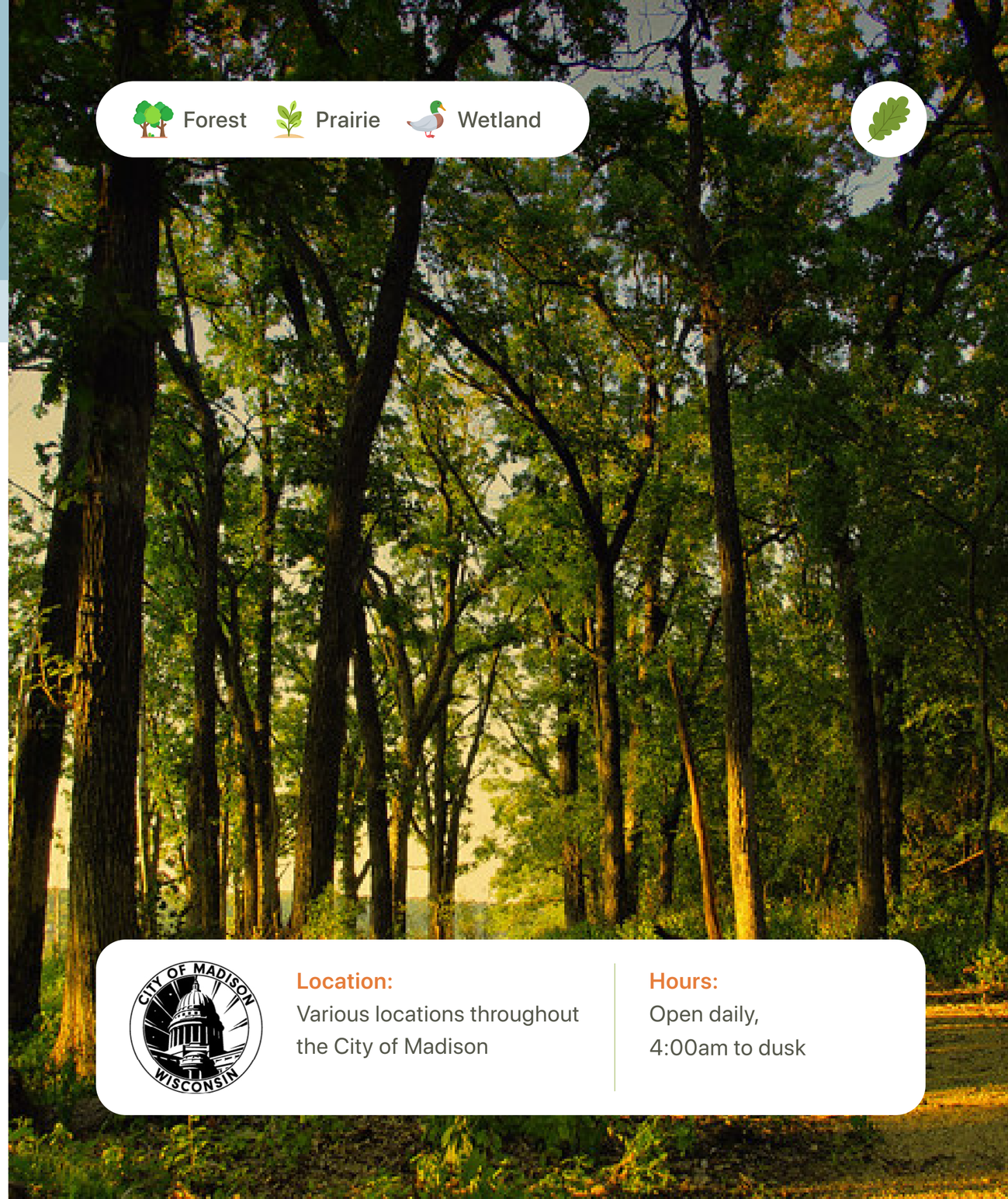
Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: Admission is free.

Madison's Conservation Parks offer over 1,600 acres of preserved natural areas across 21 unique sites throughout the city. With more than 20 miles of hiking trails, these parks invite visitors to explore native landscapes, encounter local wildlife, and experience the beauty of geological features and cultural history tucked into neighborhoods across Madison.

Since the 1960s, the City of Madison has actively acquired and cared for these lands through a dedicated land stewardship program. This ongoing effort focuses on restoring and maintaining native plant and animal communities, ensuring these spaces remain vibrant, ecologically healthy, and accessible for generations to come.

Each conservation park has its own character. Some parks feature glacial landforms, while others preserve remnant prairies, oak savannas, wetlands, and woodlands. Whether you're observing wildlife, exploring trails, or connecting classroom learning to the natural world, Madison's Conservation Parks provide a rich, accessible setting for environmental education and exploration.



Madison Parks

Hoyt Park

cityofmadison.com/parks | (608) 266-4711

Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Free admission. Fees for shelter rental apply.

Located just minutes from downtown Madison, Hoyt Park offers a peaceful woodland setting with stone shelters, open fields, and trails winding through oak woodlands and restored prairies.

Students can investigate local ecosystems, practice plant and wildlife identification, and explore topics like forest succession and prairie restoration. The park's historic stone structures, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, provide a tangible link to Wisconsin and U.S. history, enriching lessons in social studies. The accessible location and variety of habitats make it an ideal outdoor classroom for science, history, and nature-based art activities.



MMSD Jackson School Forest

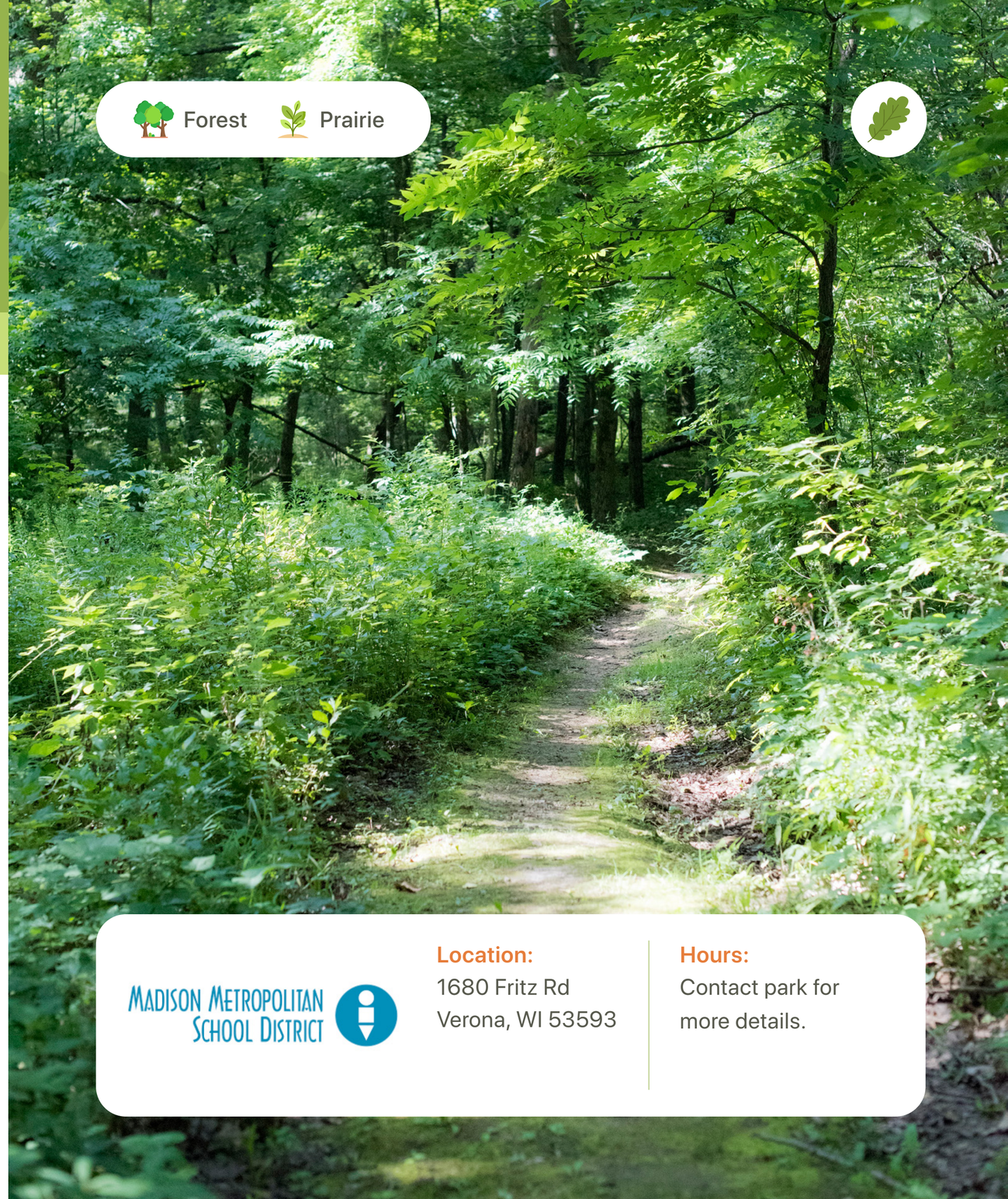
mscr.org/programs/outdoors/school-forest
ekjust@madison.k12.wi.us
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Admission is free.

Located just 20 miles southwest of Madison in the Driftless Area, Jackson School Forest, also known as the Madison School Forest, spans over 300 acres of diverse terrain, including sandstone ridges, oak woodlands, and rare native ecosystems. This MMSD property is managed in partnership with MSCR and serves as a registered Wisconsin School Forest, offering a living classroom for environmental learning and stewardship.

School field trips and outdoor programs are designed to support a wide range of learning goals, from ecology and land navigation to teamwork and leadership. Students can explore oak savanna, hike through forested ravines, observe wildlife, and connect with land restoration efforts in a space where nearly 300 plant species and over 40 bird species thrive.

Outdoor learning experiences may include guided nature hikes, birding and wildlife observation, map and compass skills, orienteering, survival skills, night exploration, high ropes challenge courses, and service-based restoration projects. The site also includes a rustic campground with cabins, a nature center, restrooms, and accessible facilities.



MMSD Planetarium

madison.k12.wi.us/planetarium | (608) 663-6102
planetarium@mmsd.org
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Free for school day MMSD/Madison K-12 visits.

The MMSD Planetarium offers immersive, STEAM-aligned programs for school and youth groups during the school day, with limited evening options. Housed in a domed multimedia theater, students can explore astronomy, space science, and more through interactive presentations or full-dome films.

Programs include live sky simulations, solar system tours, moon and star lessons, and cross-curricular topics such as history and scientific discovery. Planetarium staff can also customize programs or lead lab-based experiences.

Additional resources include a telescope loan program, teacher support materials, and public events throughout the school year. Field trips align with NGSS and are designed for all ages.

Planetarium Instructional Resources



MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

Location:
201 S Gammon Rd
Madison, WI 53717

Hours:
See website for full schedule.

MSCR Madison Schools & Community Recreation

mscr.org | ekjust@madison.k12.wi.us

Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Varies depending on program

MSCR offers customizable environmental education programs that can be tailored to fit any group's needs. From half-day outings to full-day explorations, educators can combine activities to design experiences that are engaging, hands-on, and seasonally relevant.

Programs range from guided nature hikes to birding activities that teach binocular skills and species identification. Orienteering at the Madison School Forest builds map and compass skills, while pond dipping introduces students to aquatic ecosystems. Special offerings include night programs such as fire building, night hikes, star gazing, and telescope viewing at MSCR's observatory. Seasonal options range from snowshoeing adventures to survival skills like fire and shelter building, knot tying, and plant identification.

The MSCR team works closely with teachers and group leaders to align programs with learning goals, ensuring meaningful outdoor experiences for all ages.



Natural Resource Foundation of Wisconsin

wisconservation.org | (608) 409-3122

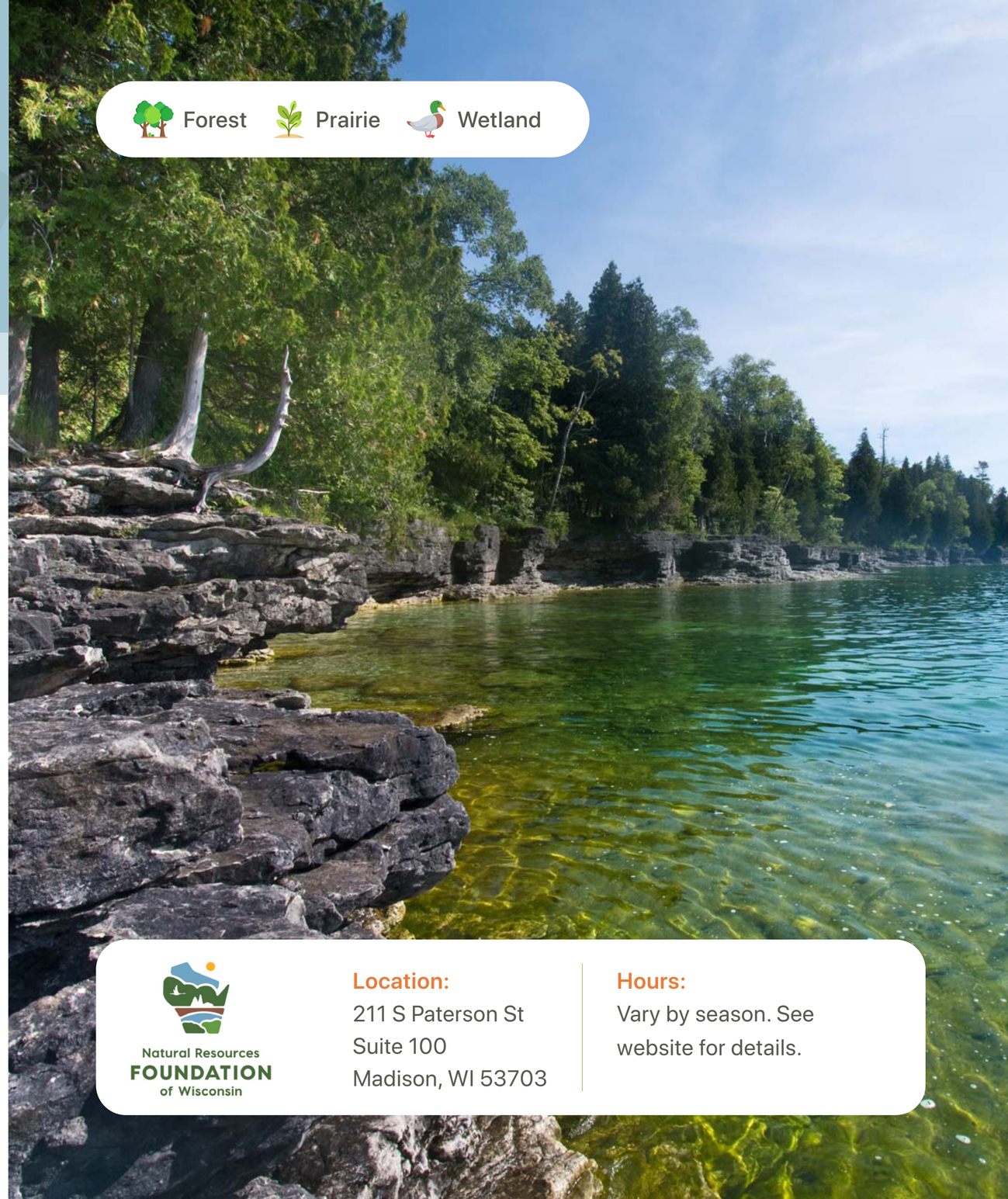
Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: See website for program pricing.

From spring through fall, the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin offers learners of all ages a chance to experience the beauty and diversity of Wisconsin's outdoors.

With more than 275 field trips each year, participants can explore prairies, wetlands, forests, and rivers by foot, bike, or boat. Led by knowledgeable conservationists, ecologists, and naturalists, each trip provides an opportunity to connect with nature while gaining insight into the state's unique ecosystems.

Trips are open to foundation members, with financial assistance available to help keep them accessible. From hiking and paddling to exploring conservation projects up close, there's an adventure for everyone.



Olbrich Botanical Gardens

olbrich.org | (608) 246-4550 | achristian@cityofmadison.com

Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: Varies depending on group size and season.

Olbrich Botanical Gardens offers hands-on, inquiry-based field trips that invite students to explore the exciting world of plants. Visits include a mix of indoor learning stations and guided walks through the outdoor gardens and the lush, tropical Bolz Conservatory.

Seasonal themes help frame each experience. In October, the Ecology Explorer program explores habitats and plant-animal relationships through scavenger hunts and outdoor tours. The Forest Explorer program, offered in February, encourages students to compare tropical and deciduous forests through hands-on activities. During April and May, Botany Explorer introduces students to plant parts, adaptations, and pollination through engaging discovery indoors and out.

For groups unable to attend during scheduled program times, Olbrich also offers 60-minute youth tours. These interactive tours can be tailored to your group's age and learning goals, with themes like plant adaptations, habitats, and pollinators.



Pheasant Branch Conservancy

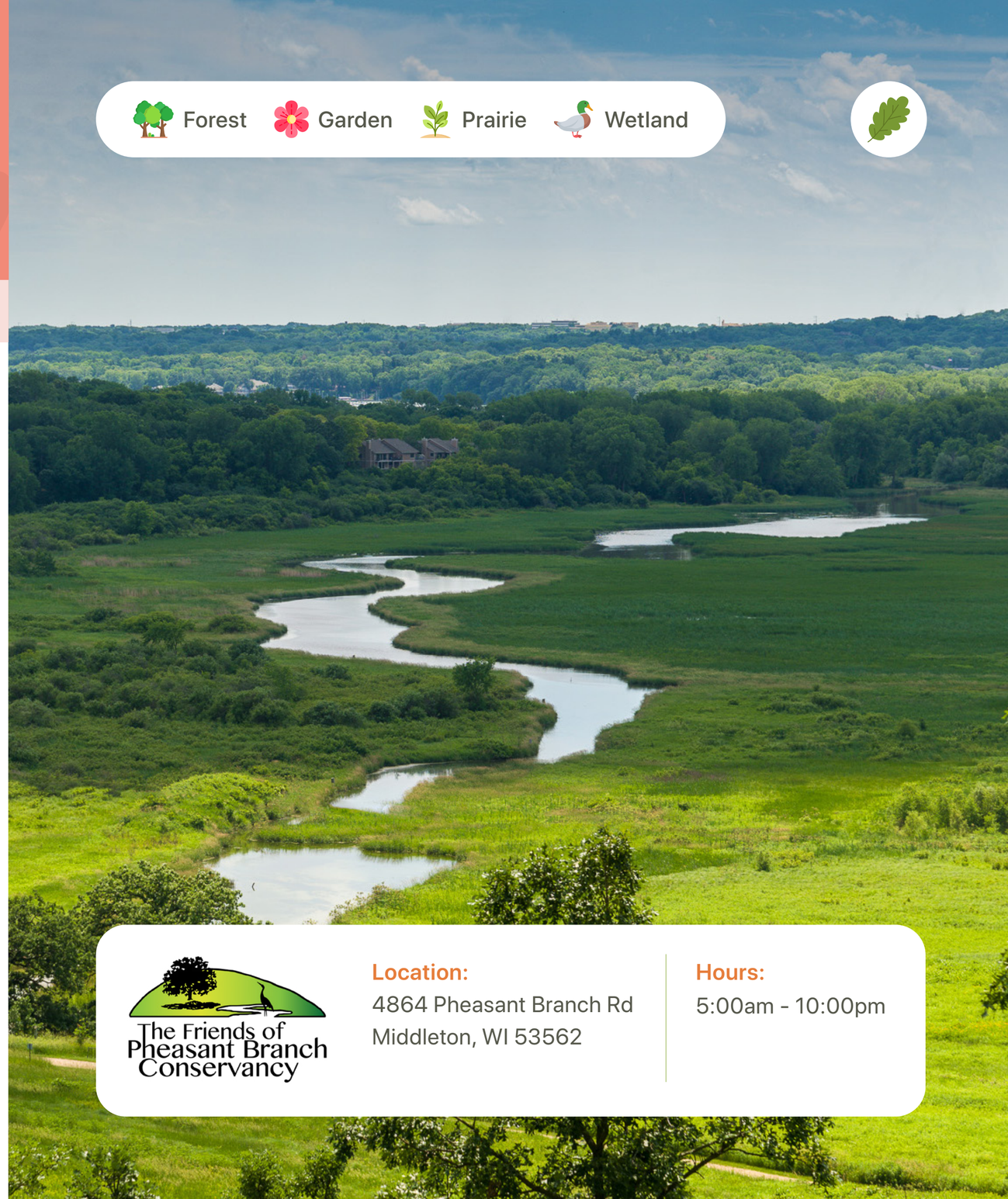
pheasantbranch.org | timhansel@pheasantbranch.org
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Donations accepted

Pheasant Branch Conservancy offers curriculum-aligned field trips that connect students with nature through hands-on, outdoor learning. Field trip topics include trees, soils, plants, water, landforms, and ecosystems, with engaging activities conducted directly in the Conservancy.

Each grade-level experience varies in length and focus. Some activities include, exploring trees and colors in kindergarten, soil in first grade, plants in second, water in third, ecosystems in fourth, and landforms in fifth.

A set of lessons for educators to use independently is also available for download, and materials for many activities can be borrowed from the Conservancy's education program. Field trips are offered by donation, and groups must arrange their own transportation.



Rooted Community Gardens

rootedwi.org | (608) 240-0409 | info@rootedwi.org

Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: $5.00 per student. Scholarships available.

Rooted offers immersive, hands-on field trips that connect youth of all ages with food, farming, and the natural world at two outdoor learning sites in Madison: Troy Kids' Garden on the north side and the Madison School Farm on the east side. Programs are designed to spark curiosity, build ecological literacy, and foster meaningful relationships with land, food, and community.

At Troy Kids' Garden, students explore through planting, harvesting, composting, and outdoor cooking in a space intentionally created for sensory learning, cooperative play, and seasonal connections. At the Madison School Farm, students rotate through interactive stations such as gardening, pollinator studies, seed saving, food preparation, and beekeeping. These activities provide real-world entry points into sustainable agriculture and environmental stewardship.

Each program can be tailored to curriculum goals, grade-level standards, or group interests. Rooted's educators collaborate with teachers to create experiences that are developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant.



Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance

swibirds.org | (608) 255-2473 | info@swibirds.org

Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: Varies depending on program and class size.

The Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance offers free, flexible outdoor education programs designed to connect students with local wildlife and nature right in their own neighborhoods.

Their education team partners with teachers and community leaders to provide engaging lessons and activities that align with classroom goals and incorporate STEAM themes. Whether for a one-time visit or an ongoing collaboration, educators can request visits where supplies are brought to their site, or access a variety of ready-to-use lesson plans and activity kits available for pickup in Madison.

These programs aim to inspire curiosity about birds, pollinators, and natural habitats while equipping educators with tools and confidence to teach nature-based topics.



Natural Resources FOUNDATION of Wisconsin

Location:
211 S Paterson St
Suite 100
Madison, WI 53703

Hours:
Office hours
Monday-Friday
9:00am - 4:00pm

Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center

fyi.extension.wisc.edu/uphamwoods | (608) 254-6461
uphamwoods@extension.wisc.edu
Suggested Grade Level: Elementary - Middle School

Cost: Varies depending on program needs.

Upham Woods is a residential outdoor learning center operated by UW Madison Division of Extension.

Located two miles north of Wisconsin Dells along the Wisconsin River, the center provides an ideal setting to explore the state's natural and cultural history. The 318 acre property includes forested land and Blackhawk Island, a 210 acre island classroom. Facilities include 14 buildings, a nature center, a raptor enclosure, and lodging for up to 200 people.

Upham Woods offers year-round programming for youth and youth leaders, including environmental education, summer camps, leadership workshops, and more.



UW Arboretum

arboretum.wisc.edu | (608) 263-7888 | info@arboretum.wisc.edu

Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: See website for up-to-date program fees.

The UW Arboretum offers immersive, inquiry-based field trips that bring science and environmental learning to life across more than 1,200 acres of restored and remnant ecosystems, including prairie, wetland, savanna, and forest. Serving as a living laboratory, the Arboretum allows students to observe natural processes firsthand and deepen their connection to the land.

Led by experienced naturalists, programs explore ecological concepts such as interdependence, adaptation, seasonal cycles, biodiversity, and habitat restoration. Depending on group goals and grade level, topics may also include Indigenous land history, urban ecology, or citizen science.

Through guided exploration, journaling, observation, and discussion, students practice scientific thinking while building environmental awareness. Activities may include comparing soils, tracking seasonal changes, or examining how fire and water shape landscapes. Students are encouraged to ask questions, think critically, and connect field experiences to classroom learning. Custom programs are available to meet specific learning goals.



UW Geology Museum

museum.geoscience.wisc.edu | museum@geology.wisc.edu
Suggested Grade Level: K-12

Cost: Admission is free. Guided tours are $3 per person.

A visit to the UW Geology Museum invites students to step into Wisconsin's ancient past and explore the forces that have shaped our planet. Students encounter a wide range of fascinating exhibits, including glowing minerals under black light, towering dinosaur skeletons, and fossils that tell the story of Wisconsin's prehistoric seas. The museum's collection offers a hands-on way to explore earth science concepts aligned with classroom learning.

Guided tours offer a deeper dive into geologic history and natural processes, led by knowledgeable staff who engage students with stories behind the specimens. For a more flexible experience, self-guided visits can be enhanced with scavenger hunts and interactive materials that encourage close observation and inquiry. Whether guided or self-directed, a trip to the Geology Museum makes earth science come alive in an accessible and memorable setting.



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

Location:
Weeks Hall
1215 West Dayton St.
Madison, WI 53706

Hours:
Monday-Friday
8:30am –4:30pm

Welty Environmental Center

weltycenter.org | (608) 361-1377

Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: $125 for a group of up to 25 people.

The Welty Environmental Center, located in Big Hill Park near Beloit, offers immersive, nature-based field trip experiences designed to deepen students' understanding of local ecosystems and environmental science.

Through guided exploration of forests, prairies, and rivers, students investigate topics such as forest ecology, Wisconsin geology, and the state's fur trade history. Programs emphasize hands-on learning, like fossil hunts, live animal observations, composting experiments, and interactive storytelling, to help students connect classroom science concepts with the natural world. Welty also offers virtual field trips that include live sessions, follow-up activities, and materials for continued exploration.

Each experience is rooted in place-based education and designed to foster environmental awareness, scientific thinking, and curiosity.



Wisconsin State Parks

dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/learn | (888) 936-7463

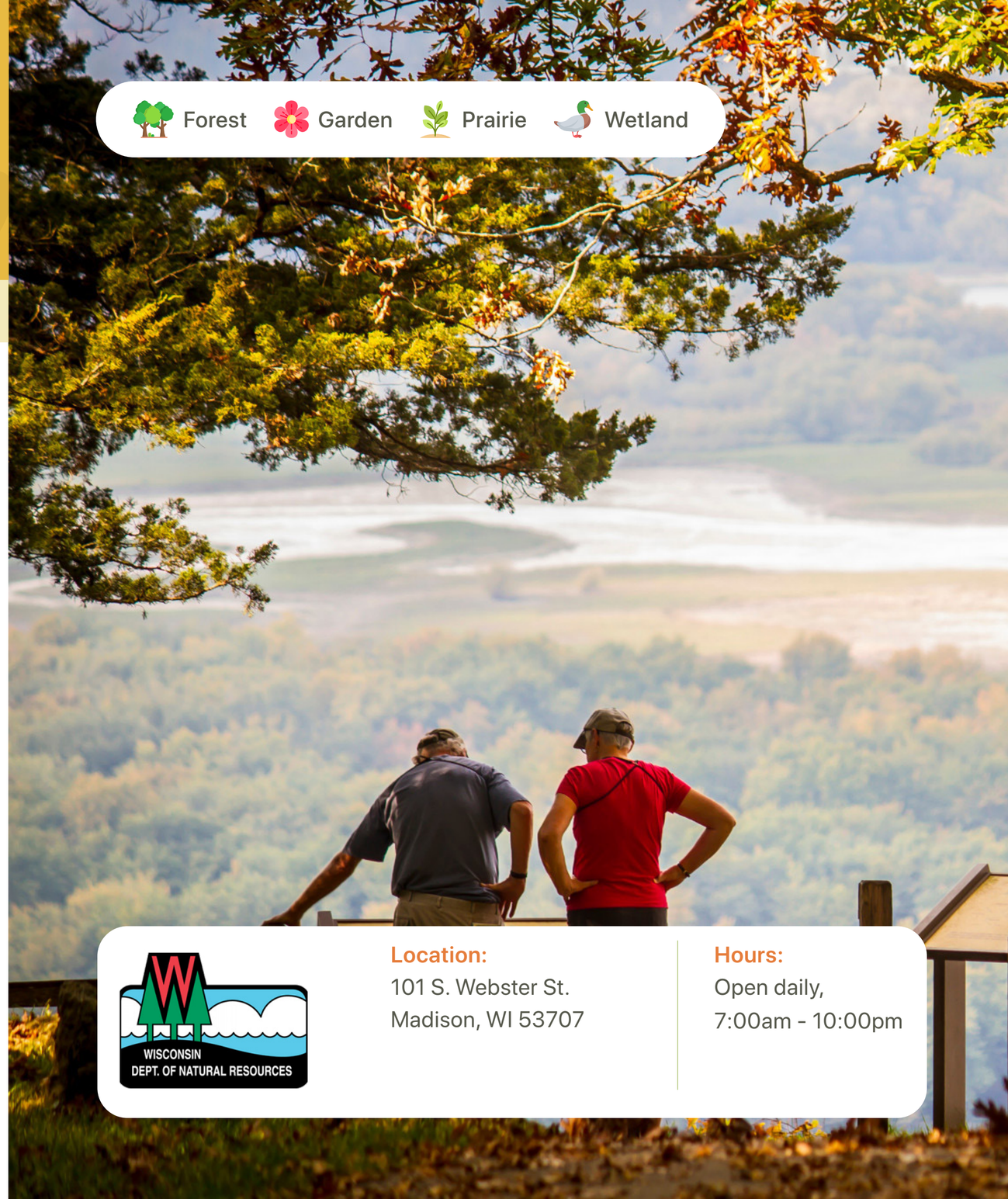
Suggested Grade Level: Grades K-12

Cost: Varies depending on program and student count.

The Wisconsin State Park System offers students the opportunity to experience Wisconsin's rich natural and cultural heritage firsthand through a variety of field trip options.

Guided programs, available for all grade levels from pre-kindergarten through college, provide expert-led experiences that deepen understanding of the parks' diverse ecosystems and history. These programs are presented by staff, trained volunteers, or guest educators and may include a fee. Schools are also encouraged to visit independently, with the option to borrow equipment and receive support from park staff to enhance their visit.

Advance registration is required for guided trips to ensure a well-planned and engaging experience tailored to your group's needs.



This guide was compiled by the
Nature Everywhere Initiative, Madison Region.

To learn more, discover additional resources, or
get involved, visit:
www.naturenet.org