



2017-2019 2-YEAR ANNUAL REPORT



Environmental Education

“I attended your Wild Edibles program last week. Thanks so much for an inspiring program!!! We all appreciate how much preparation you did ahead of time to make the class such a positive hands-on experience. Thanks again for the class and the great work you do for Polk County.”

Kim Holland



TWO YEARS AT A GLANCE

July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018 (Before Nature Center)

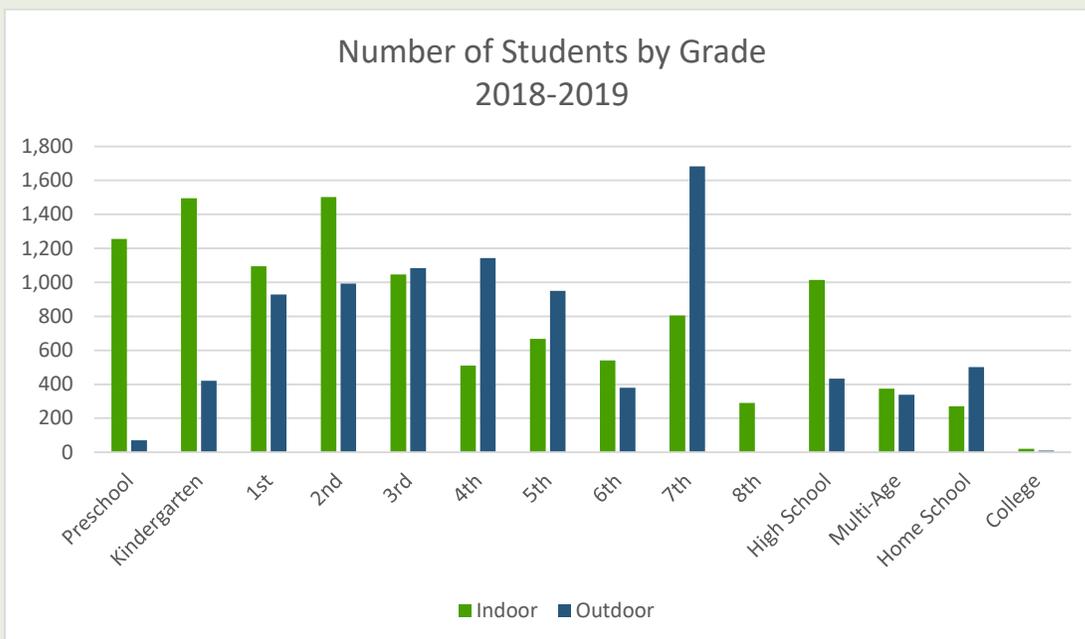
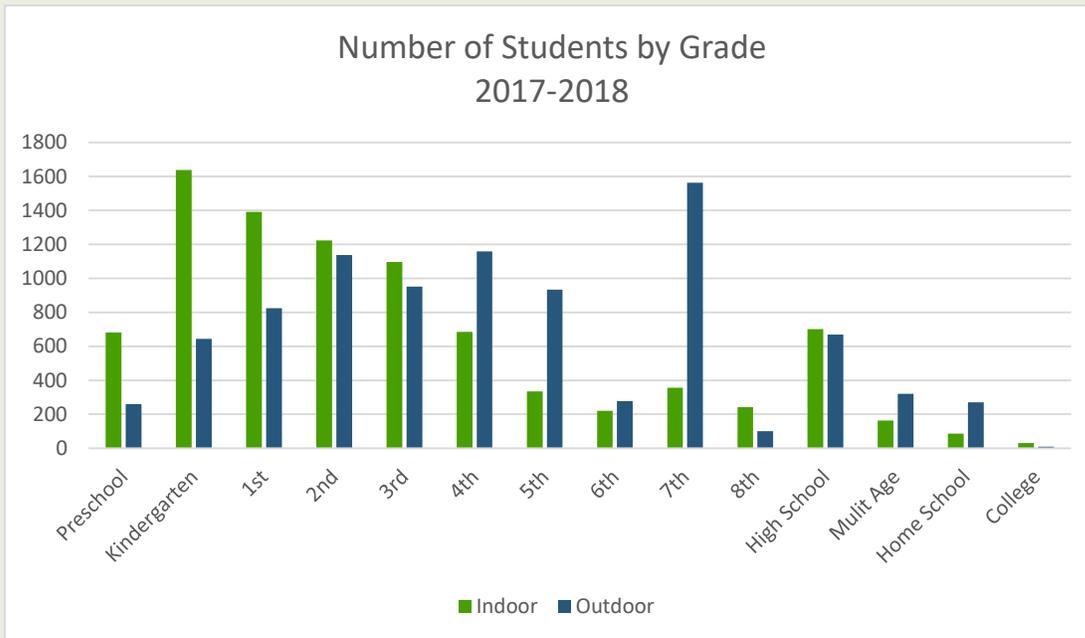
	PROGRAMS	PARTICIPANTS	CONTACT HOURS
SCHOOL	1,070	18,372	23,459
FAMILY	66	2,776	3,400
ADULT	49	1,578	3,806
YOUTH	114	2,143	4,153
TOTALS	1,299	24,869	34,818

July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019 (After Nature Center)

	PROGRAMS	PARTICIPANTS	CONTACT HOURS
SCHOOL	1,227	19,286	23,460
FAMILY	134	5,851	6,622
ADULT	92	2,766	6,527
YOUTH	260	4,223	5,869
TOTALS	1,713	32,126	42,478
% Increase	24.17%	22.59%	18.03%

Contact hours are the amount of time each individual spends with a naturalist. Example: If a two hour program has 10 participants, the contact hours equal 20.

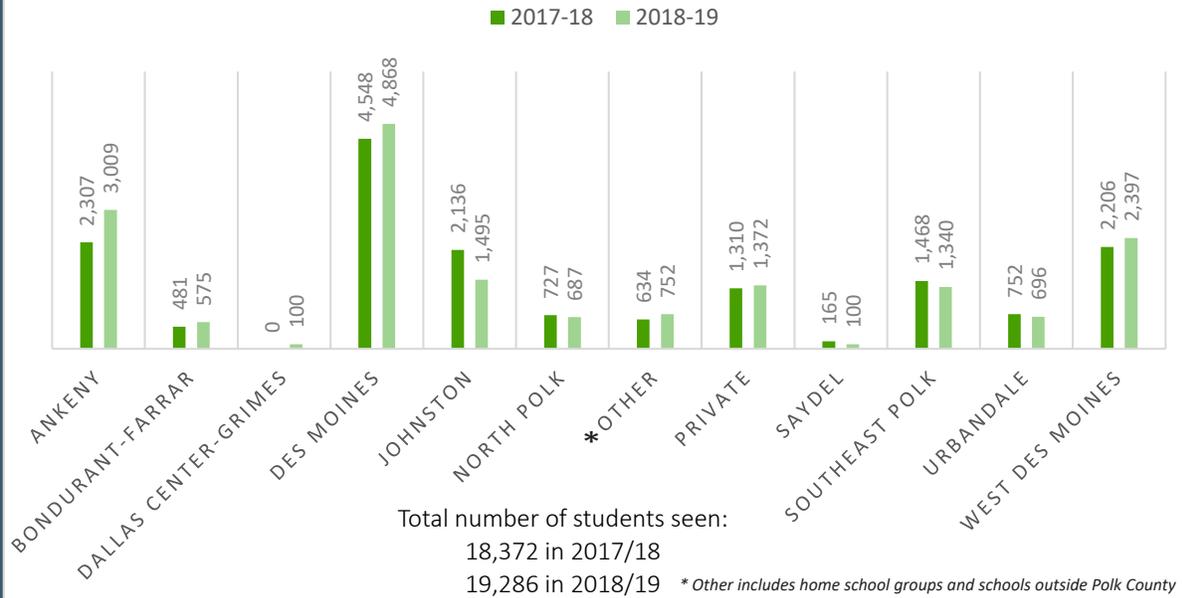
SCHOOL PROGRAMS



In 2017/18, naturalists taught more kindergarteners than any other grade and in 2018/19, naturalists taught more 7th graders than any other grade.

POLK COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SEEN BY A NATURALIST



We saw more students from Des Moines Public Schools in both 2017/18 and 2018/19 than any other school district. Des Moines Public Schools is the largest public school district in the state of Iowa.

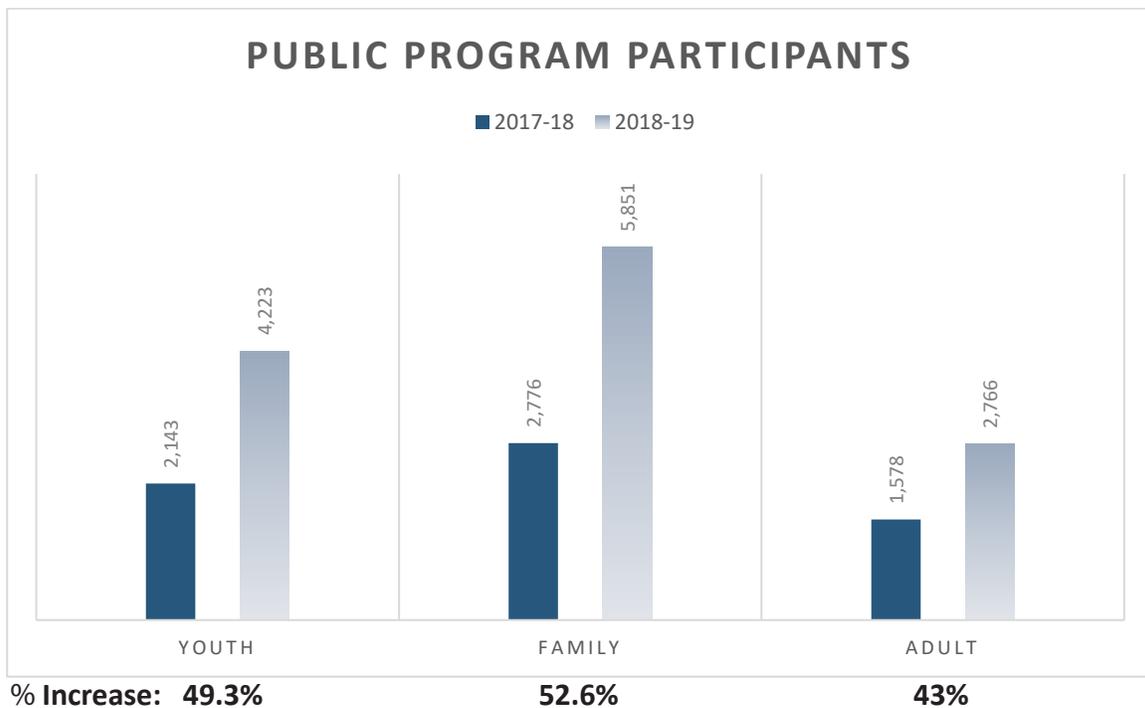


PUBLIC PROGRAMS

SPECIAL EVENTS

Environmental Education staff participated in the following special events (event partners are in parentheses:)

- **Iowa Outdoor Expo** at Des Moines Izaak Walton League (Iowa DNR and Des Moines Izaak Walton League)
- **Walk for Wildlife** at Jester Park (Greater Des Moines Volkssport Association)
- **Bald Eagle Watch** at Jester Park & Saylorville Lake (Army Corps of Engineers - Saylorville Lake, Iowa DNR, Dallas County Conservation)
- **Three STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) Festivals** (Governor’s STEM Advisory Council)
- **Fall Frenzy** at Walker Johnson Park (Urbandale Parks and Recreation and UCAN)
- **Monarch Festival** at Blank Park Zoo. Many conservation organizations participated with hands-on educational activities.
- **Swan Soiree** at Walnut Woods State Park (Iowa DNR, Des Moines Water Works and many others)
- **Downtown Earth Day Event** at Des Moines Botanical Garden. Many conservation organizations participated with hands-on educational activities.
- **Pedal the Prairie** at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Many conservation organizations participated with hands-on activities.



YOUTH PROGRAMS

- In 2017-18 we conducted 114 youth programs and in 2018-19 we conducted 260 youth programs.
- Offered numerous day camps including:
 - Discovery Camp for 6-7 year olds
 - Frogs, Toads, Snakes Camp for 6-7 year olds
 - Water Wonders Camp for 8-9 year olds
 - Jr. Naturalist Camp for 10-11 year olds
 - Shooting Camp for 12-16 year olds
 - Paddle Camp for 12-16 year olds
 - Survival Camp for 12-16 year olds
- Offered Summer Skills programs (fishing, kayaking, canoeing, archery, geocaching, survival) for 10-16 year olds



FAMILY PROGRAMS

- In 2017-18 we conducted 66 family programs and in 2018-19 we conducted 134 family programs.
- Examples of family programs included:
 - Antler Shed Hunt
 - Critter Club
 - Fireflies by Firelight
 - Giants of the Prairie
 - Geocache Leprechaun Hunt & Geocache Egg Hunt
 - Ice Fishing
 - Light the Night
 - Moths & Moons
 - Nature Story Hours and Playdates
 - Owl Prowl
 - Seeing Stars
 - Solar Eclipse Party
 - Toddler Tales

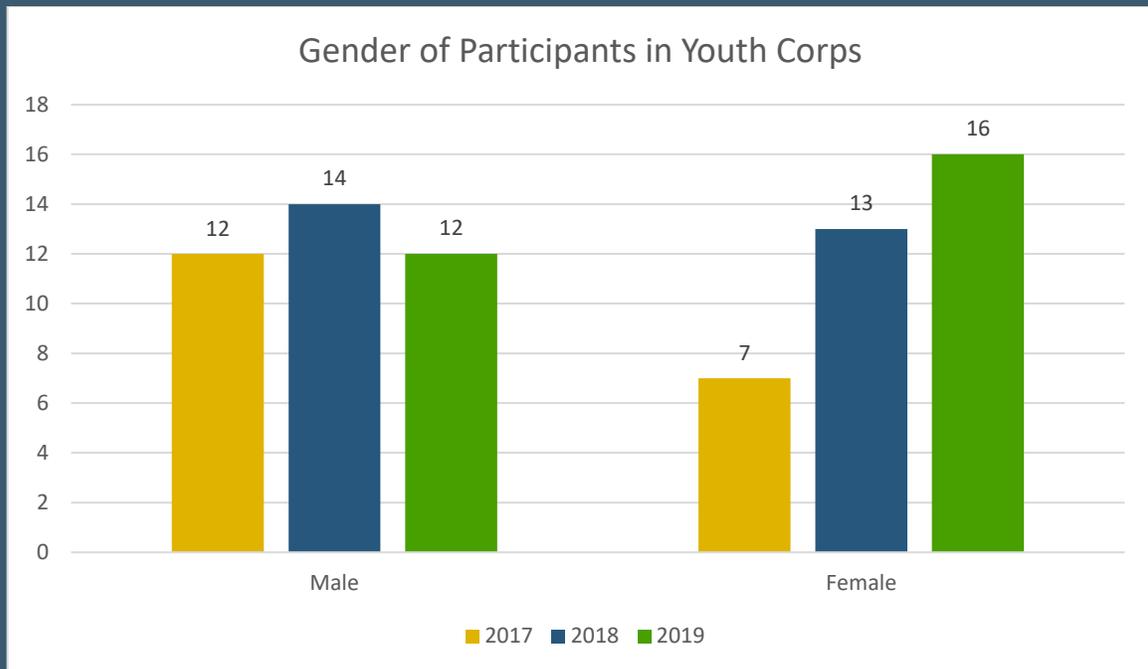


ADULT PROGRAMS

- In 2017-18 we conducted 49 adult programs and in 2018-19 we conducted 92 adult programs.
- Continued growth of O.W.L.S. (Older Wiser Livelier Seniors) monthly program, average attendance was 93 people
- Conducted 11 eco-bus tours over 2 years, for a total of 520 participants
- Led paddling adventure trips to the Current River, Missouri; Bluffton, Iowa; Harrison, Arkansas
- Facilitated "Book Worms" (environmental book club) programs during the winter months
- Presented multiple programs to senior centers and assisted living facilities
- Offered wellness programs, including Shinrin Yoku (Japanese Forest Bathing), Drumming, Mindfulness & Movement, and Meditation Around Town
- Offered art classes, including Water Color, Nature Photography, and Stained Glass



YOUTH CORPS



“I’m inspired to serve outdoors because I enjoy going into the woods and seeing what nature actually is. I like seeing what you can do to help it, change it, and make it better.” - Youth Corps member

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION YOUTH



In 2017, Polk County Conservation launched a brand new program called Youth Corps.

The mission of Youth Corps is to engage and inspire diverse youth (ages 15-18) through hands-on environmental stewardship projects, outdoor recreation, and conservation education.

	2017	2018	2019
PARTICIPANTS	19	27	28
CREW LEADERS	2	3	4
CONTACT HOURS	1,995	4,320	5,700



2017 Project Highlights:

Crews removed soft stem bulrush (*Scripus validus*) from a marsh at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt and transplanted 240 plants at Easter Lake and Chichaqua to restore wetlands. They combined canoeing at Jester Park with prairie restoration, transporting native seedlings by canoe to plant them on the island in Discovery Pond. Assisted in the creation of the Mindful Contemplative area at Jester Park.



2018 Project Highlights:

Each crew spent a week at Fort Des Moines Park focused on a "Free the Aspen" project. The crew used hand saws, loppers, and pruners to clear invasive honeysuckle and oriental bittersweet from a grove of quaking aspen trees. Crews also traveled to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge to help for a day. They assisted with one of the first stages of prairie restoration, removing over 600 feet of barbed wire fence and posts.

2019 Project Highlights:

The first ever eight week crew worked on several trail maintenance projects. They helped build steps at a creek crossing at Jester Park's lower Paw Creek and helped with water bar installation. At Strasser Woods State Preserve, they removed over a hundred feet of old stairs made of landscaping timbers to help increase safety for hikers and decrease erosion along the trail. The July crew provided a helping hand at the Jester Park Equestrian Center where they removed invasive plants from horse pastures, revamped a rock garden, and cleaned up trails.



JESTER PARK NATURE CENTER OPENS IN 2018

After four years of fundraising and 16 months of construction, the Jester Park Nature Center opened its doors to the public on August 5, 2018. At the grand opening, visitors were able to explore the new habitat exhibits in the lower level of the nature center, attend live animal programming, canoe and kayak, and try their hand at air rifle and archery inside the newly renovated Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center, adjacent to the nature center. More than 5,000 visitors attended a series of four grand opening events.

EE staff were an integral part of the Capital Campaign committee raising \$ 2.3 million dollars in private donations. The \$10.34 million dollar JP Nature Center project included over \$550,000 dollars in interpretive exhibits. The EE team with over 100 years of combined Environmental Education experience developed the interpretive exhibits with Split Rock Studios. The interactive exhibits assist the public in learning about Iowa's woodlands, wetlands and prairies. The large aquatic tanks assist in learning about Iowa's native fish and aquatic turtles. The magnetic habitat wall encourages discussion on where animals live and why. The Jr. Naturalist nook with the puppets and storybooks encourage free play and learning.

EE staff spearheaded the Jester Park wayfinding signage inside the Nature Center and the outdoor building signage.





NEW Jester Park Nature Center and Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center Programs:

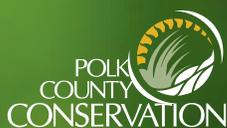
- Air Rifle Target Shooting
- Coffee & Chat
- Critter Club
- Holiday Wreath Making
- Homeschool Ology Series
- Light the Night
- More summer camps like Frogs, Toads & Snakes and Shooting Camp
- Art Classes like Water Color, Nature Photography, and Stained Glass
- Toddler Tales
- Wellness based programs like Drumming, Mindfulness & Movement, Meditation Around Town, and Sunset Yoga
- Woodworking for Bats
- Women in the Woods with Wine
- Build a Composter

Nature Center Attendance

September - December 2018	9,292
January - June 2019	17,927



ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS



STAFF:

Patrice Petersen-Keys,
Environmental Education Coordinator
Heidi Anderson, Naturalist
Joe Boyles, Naturalist
Janna Coulter, Youth Corps Coordinator
Nikki Dunbar, Assistant Naturalist
Lori Foresman-Kirpes, Naturalist
Lewis Major, Naturalist
Andrew Phelps, Assistant Naturalist

AWARDS & GRANTS

- PCC Naturalist, Lewis Major, received the 2018 Heartland Rising Star Award from the National Association for Interpretation for being an artistic and innovative educator.
- Received a \$27,880 Resource Enhancement and Protection - Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP) grant for the Student Air Rifle Program in November 2017. This grant allowed us to offer official training for professional educators to become certified air rifle instructors.
- Received a \$3,271.50 Resource Enhancement and Protection - Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP) mini-grant for the Waste Reduction Awareness Program in November 2018. This grant enabled us to purchase a composter for the Nature Center and reduce waste produced from students on field trips.
- Youth Corps received a \$925 Restore Iowa! Grant from the Iowa Native Plant Society for work at Fort Des Moines Park in 2018.
- Youth Corps received a \$2,000 Community Gear donation from REI Co-op in 2019.



These educators were certified to teach Student Air Rifle program as part of the REAP-CEP grant.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

- Served as board members on the REAP-CEP Grant Review and Central Iowa Tourism committees.
- Offered Teaching Science Through Nature teacher workshop at Studebaker Elementary and Fort Des Moines Park in 2018 and Jester Park Nature Center in 2019.
- Hosted an opening reception for Naturally Iowa, an art exhibition at Jester Park Nature Center.
- Hosted Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards and Iowa Association of Naturalists workshops at Jester Park Nature Center.
- Presented sessions at the Iowa Association of Naturalists workshop.
- Developed mobile displays for the Jester Park Nature Center.
- Groomed nordic ski trails at Jester Park.
- Worked with Wild Birds Unlimited - Ames to set up a birdfeeding station at the Jester Park Nature Center.
- Coordinated management of the Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center.
- Assisted with trail planning and maintenance of the rock crossing on Paw Creek at Jester Park.
- Staff became certified in the Student Air Rifle Training program.
- Managed the Guide by Cell program with over 5,463 callers from area codes representing 47 states, 1 territory and the District of Columbia.
- Formed PCC art committee with staff and community leaders. Commissioned the first two art sculpture installations at the Jester Park Nature Center, and the STICKS Founding Donor wall art piece and RDG Minor Donor wall.
- Offered a stained-glass community art project for the Jester Park Nature Center.