# *2006 Conservation and Environmental Education Excellence Awards Program*
# *Outstanding County Conservation Board EE Program (pop. > 35,000)*

## Program History

Cerro Gordo County has a population of 46,447 people. The Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board (CGCCB) was one of the first counties in Iowa to hire a full-time naturalist, doing so in 1979. The public's response to the new program was enthusiastic and the program continued to expand.

The Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation was established in 1981 to raise funds for a nature center, and by the fall of 1984, the Lime Creek Nature Center was completed and opened to the public. The project was funded entirely by donations and volunteer labor, and the educational programming budget of the nature center continues to be funded entirely by grants, donations, and memberships to the Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation.

The Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation continues to serve the center, with a current board of 12 members. The board, which meets monthly, assists with fundraising efforts and provides guidance to the environmental education program.

## Goals & Evaluations of Program

**EE Program Major Goals**

1. To build, strengthen, and promote environmental awareness and appreciation in the populace of Cerro Gordo County; to foster an environmental ethic among the population; and to teach the skills that Cerro Gordo County citizens need to properly use, conserve, and protect our natural resources.
2. To provide information, instruction, and guidance to the public on the variety of outdoor experiences and activities that are available for their enjoyment of the natural environment; to build support for the other programs administered by the Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board; and to strengthen public knowledge and opinion toward conservation issues and problems.

**Lime Creek Nature Center Mission Statement:** The mission of the Lime Creek Nature Center is to develop an awareness and appreciation of our natural world through conservation and education.

**Program Planning/Evaluation:** long range goals have been developed and are reviewed and updated on a yearly basis. Short term objectives are developed and reviewed quarterly.

## Programming & Resources

**Annual Numbers:** over the last 10 years, the CGCCB provided an average of 225 programs and field trips to 10,000 citizens annually. Programming in elementary schools reaches at or near 100% of the students each year, and programming is also provided at the secondary level.

**School Programs & Resources:**

1. **Earth Month:** Each year a program is developed that is specific to Iowa's natural resources and environmental issues. The program is presented to elementary schools during the month of April. Past programs include: endangered species, predators, backyard habitat, environmental issues in Iowa, a history of Iowa's habitats, explore nature in your neighborhood, and water quality. The program is provided to grades K-5 in all elementary schools throughout the county with an annual average of 35 presentations for 2500 students.
2. **Garbage Busters Program:** This program was developed by the CGCCB and Landfill of North Iowa. It encourages students and teachers to reduce the amount of garbage they create from school lunches on field trips to the Lime Creek Nature Center by avoiding disposable items, using recyclable materials, etc. There are two competing levels: K-5 and 6-12. Participating classrooms receive free curriculum materials to help them find ways to reduce their lunch garbage on the field trip. The educational coordinator for the Landfill of North Iowa visits the classroom prior to the field trip to provide a garbage reduction presentation. The winning classroom receives a Garbage Busters trophy, and all participating classes receive Honorable Mention certificates.
3. **Learning Trunks:** thirteen learning trunks containing educational materials focusing on wildlife and ecosystems are available for checkout to teachers for use in the classroom to complement educational units. The following trunks are available for checkout: raptors, bats, monarch butterfly, bald eagle, whitetail deer, wolf, wild turkey, reptiles/amphibians, insects, prairies, trees/forests, water/wetlands. Each trunk is loaded with educational items such as videos, books, posters, puppets, pelts, skulls, track replicas, scat replicas, egg replicas, and curriculum guides with classroom activities.
4. **Water Quality Models:** the following water quality models are utilized by the naturalist for classroom programs and are also available for checkout to teachers that have been trained in using them - **Stream Table:** demonstrates the mechanics of a flowing stream, and shows how sediment, vegetation, and flowing water interact in a dynamic system; **Enviroscape:** demonstrates the basic concepts of watershed, point and nonpoint source pollution, and siltation; **Groundwater Model:** demonstrates the mechanics of groundwater movement and pollution pathways.
5. **Star Lab** – This astronomy dome and projector with accompanying curriculum materials is utilized by the naturalist for classroom programs and is also available for checkout to teachers that have been trained in using it.

6. **Teacher Newsletter:** Three issues (Fall, Winter, Spring) of "The Double E" (environmental education) newsletter are sent to all Cerro Gordo County elementary teachers, and to all science teachers in grades 7-12. The newsletter contains information on the CGCCB's Environmental Education Program, as well as environmental resources, activities, and workshops.
7. **Teacher Guides:** the following guides have been developed for teachers - a field trip activities guide (one for K-5 and one for 6-12), classroom programs guide (one for K-5 and one for 6-12), and field trip preparation and information guide. Programs and field trip activities are developed to compliment school curriculums.
8. **Conservation Careers Brochure:** a brochure highlighting careers in conservation has been developed for high school students throughout Cerro Gordo County. Copies of the brochure have been distributed to guidance counselors and it can also be downloaded from the CGCCB web site.
9. **Teacher's meetings:** the naturalist visits area schools in the fall and again in the spring to schedule programs and field trips and provide resource information.
10. **Outdoor Classroom Assistance:** the naturalist serves as an advisor on two school outdoor classroom committees.
11. **Teacher workshops:** teacher workshops are provided occasionally. Examples of past workshops include: eii Tropical Birds Workshops, Leopold Education Project, and Project Wild, Aquatic, and Learning Tree.

**Public Programs and Resources**

1. **Public Program Diversity:** the CGCCB schedules an average of 35 public programs annually. Target audiences include adults, children, and families. Several guest speakers are scheduled each year. Programs are offered under the following subject areas, with a specific program example listed in parenthesis: Ecology/Resource Management (Landscaping For Wildlife workshop series); Wildlife (The Polar Bears of Churchill), Recreation/Nature Enjoyment (Family Ice Fishing Event), Arts (North Iowa Shutterbug Contest), Environmental Issues (Halloween Hikes).
2. **Community Organizations:** a wide variety of programs are provided for civic groups, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, youth organizations, and special needs groups.
3. **Lime Creek Day Camps:** Two week-long day camps for youth are held annually. "Those Amazing Animals," focusing on different orders of Iowa animals, is held for children entering the third and fourth grades. "Outdoor Adventures," where participants learn about topics such as backpacking, orienteering, edible plants, shelter building, fishing, canoeing, air rifles, and archery is held for children entering 5$^{th}$ and 6$^{th}$ grades.
4. **Earth Day Clean-up Event:** the CGCCB partners with various community organizations in Mason City to organize an Earth Day cleanup event each April. Following a community-wide trash pick up, participants meet for a rally including refreshments, displays, and a prize drawing. Radio interviews on various environmental topics are held each day during Earth Week.
5. **Dorothy Curtis Memorial Lecture:** this lecture series was initiated in 2002, funded by the Dorothy Curtis Trust. Past speakers include Jeff Corwin of the Animal Planet, black bear expert Dr. Lynn Rogers, and ornithologist and wildlife expert Dr. James Dinsmore.
6. **Toddling series:** two to four programs are offered each year for toddlers and their parents. Program examples are: Toddling into Nature, Toddling into Fish, Toddling into Fossils, and Toddling into Stars.
7. **Motor coach trips:** the CGCCB takes two motor coach trips each year. Past trip destinations include: Neal Smith NWR, International Crane Foundation, International Wolf Center, sandhill crane migration in Kearny, NE; National Bald Eagle Center, Minnesota Zoo, and Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium.
8. **For Seniors Only:** a program is offered quarterly for senior citizens, which includes a presentation, lunch, and social time. Examples of past programs include: History of the Great Lakes Fur Trade, The Birds and Wildlife of Sri Lanka, Early Iowans, The Birds of Chile, and Dragonflies of Iowa.
9. **Virtual Geocaching:** Virtual geocaching involves locating not a cache, but a specific landmark, feature, park sign, etc. on a county park or wildlife area. Participants can choose which landmark they would like to locate using their own personal GPS device. Participants that successfully locate and verify ten landmarks receive a virtual geocaching T-shirt for a $15 fee.
10. **Lime Creek Nature Center newsletter:** A quarterly newsletter entitled "In Nature's Care" is sent to all paid members of the Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation, and various other individuals, institutions and organizations. The newsletter contains feature articles covering many aspects of the natural resource field and also contains a list of public activities scheduled at the nature center and other CGCCB areas. The average circulation of the newsletter is approximately 500.
11. **Brochures:** the following brochures are made available to the public: A brochure entitled *Beautiful County* highlighting the CGCCB's areas and programs; and a brochure entitled *Welcome to the Lime Creek Nature Center* highlighting the nature center and surrounding area.
12. **Recreational Experiences Close to Home:** CGCCB staff has developed 21 fliers highlighting recreational experiences available on CGCCB areas. These fliers are available to the public to provide all of the information they need to enjoy opportunities such as camping, canoeing, fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, trails, winter activities, and many others.
13. **Web Page:** the county conservation and Lime Creek Nature Center web page includes informational articles, a public program schedule, a list and map of conservation board areas, a list of *Recreational Experiences* fliers that can be downloaded, information on the Lime Creek Nature Center, and other useful information to assist the public.
14. **Outdoor Recreation Equipment:** the CGCCB has purchased the following equipment items to help people learn about and enjoy the outdoors: archery equipment, air rifles, canoes, compasses, snowshoes, fishing rods and reels.

## Awards

1. **Friend of LCNC Award:** This biannual award was created to honor individuals, families, and organizations for exceptional efforts in the area of conservation education and support of the Lime Creek Nature Center's mission.
2. **Jim Walter Volunteer Award:** This award is given periodically to individuals that provide exceptional dedication, hard work, and beneficence towards conservation.
3. **David & Phyllis Murphy Scholarship:** The Lime Creek Nature Center provides two $500 scholarships or one $1000 scholarship annually at the North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) for area students in environmental studies or a closely related field.

## Passive Interpretation

1. **Lime Creek Nature Center:** a variety of displays are maintained in the nature center, including mounts, a touch table, and interactive displays. Several displays are changed on a seasonal basis. Five educational bulletin boards are changed periodically.
2. **Backyard Habitat/Wildlife Watching:** a backyard habitat area was created on the south side of the nature center, including two ponds with a running stream, a prairie planting, and an improved year-around bird feeding system. Chairs are arranged along the south windows to provide comfortable seating for prime wildlife watching opportunities. The Lime Creek Conservation Area is listed as an Iowa Watchable Wildlife Area.
3. **Portable Displays:** a portable display publicizing the Lime Creek Nature Center and Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board is utilized at various public events throughout the county.

## Public Relations and Media

**Articles and Media Releases:** CGCCB staff provides numerous articles and press releases announcing public programs and other information pertaining to the conservation board. They are sent to all area newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. A bi-weekly "Nature Center Report" is also taped for a local radio station.

**Staff/Volunteers**

1. **Naturalist Interns:** two naturalist interns are employed for 24-week terms each year. These interns assist with programming, displays, publicity, and numerous other duties.
2. **CGCCB Staff:** all members of the CGCCB staff periodically contribute to the environmental education program via labor, advice, program assistance, etc.
3. **Professional Service:** the naturalist has served on numerous local and state committees and on the executive committees of the Iowa Association of Naturalists and Iowa Conservation Education Council.
4. **Volunteers:** an average of 125 volunteers contribute approximately 1250 hours to the environmental education program in the following areas: public programs, special events, school field trips, pre-school programs, visitor/nature center host, newsletter & fundraising mailings, youth programs, display work, grounds maintenance, volunteer contacts, library, service projects, Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation.

## EE Program Budget

**Lime Creek Nature Center Foundation (LCNCF):** This organization provides the major source of funding (with the exception of the naturalist's salary) for the programs and activities of the Lime Creek Nature Center and the Cerro Gordo County Conservation Board's Environmental Education Program. This unique relationship allows the conservation board to offer a progressive and quality environmental education program without increasing the tax burden on residents. Funding is acquired through memberships, donations, grants, special events, and gift shop sales. The Lime Creek Nature Center maintains an average of 400 members per year.

**Major Donations:** the Lime Creek Nature Center construction was funded entirely by donations and grants. In 1992 a major donation funded an auditorium remodeling and addition. In 1998 a major donation funded an educational and office wing addition. The LCNCF receives annual payments from a trust donation, and maintains an endowment fund which has received several major donations.

**Average Annual Budget:** the annual LCNCF budget, which funds the entire EE program with the exception of the naturalist salary, has grown from $20,000 in the early 1990's to nearly $70,000 currently.