Louisa County Conservation Board
2006 Application for Outstanding County Conservation Board EE Program (pop.<35,000)

Environmental Education Program Goal

The overall goal of the LCCB's environmental education program is to interpret the natural resources of the county, to promote their conservation and to develop an environmentally responsible community. A five-year plan outlines objectives to meet this goal. The focus in recent years has been on maintaining a high quality program and developing Langwood Education Center and Camp as a multi-faceted facility.

History

The LCCB's environmental education (EE) program was started in 1985 with a half-time program coordinator. That position included maintenance duties, effectively reducing EE time to 0.25 Full Time Employee (FTE). In FY 06 permanent and seasonal EE staff had increased to 2.0 FTE's. The program has grown accordingly. Louisa County's population is about 12,100. There are eight towns in the county and four school districts with a total enrollment of about 3,000 in the 06/07 school year. Total attendance at EE programs for FY 06 was 7,074.

School Program

The LCCB program is based on the belief that positive outdoor experiences are key to effective environmental education. One objective is to reach every elementary student in the county with at least one field trip per year. Most years we manage to take 80% of the enrolled students on fieldtrips. The remaining bulk of our programs are in classrooms or utilizing outdoor classrooms.

Grade Level/Group	Total Enrollment	No. Programs	Total Attendance
K-6	1504	98	4427
7-12	1544	9	238
Preschool		3	56
Out of County			34
Total			4755

Numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story. Though field trips are often with 60 or more total students, most group sizes are kept under 17. A progression from awareness to action is achieved by building on previous classroom visits and field trips. Field trips are tied into curriculum and other classroom activities. Students are exposed to a variety of learning experiences and different places. By sixth grade, most Louisa County students have been to six different parks and wildlife areas on field trips.

School Program Partnerships

The LCCB has partnered with the Louisa County Soil and Water Conservation District since 1997 to provide two specialized programs to students in Louisa County. The district provides funding for the LCCB to present "Save our Soil" to all 5th graders and a "Keep Our Water Clean" to all 7th graders. Both programs are hands-on.

Other Programming

Several non-school programs are offered to the county's youth. The LCCB teams up with the city of Morning Sun to provide a week-long summer recreation program. Children in 1st through 9th grade meet for two hours each day, with an half day field trip on Friday. An average of 40 children per day attended the summer rec program in a town with only 135 students enrolled in school.

In June 1998 the LCCB started a series of nature camp programs. Group sizes have been kept small with a staff to child ratio or no more than 1:6. These camps have been highly successful and most children return year

after year. As their popularity has grown, camps have been added with a progression from day camps to overnight stays to multi-day river trips. One camp is held during winter school break.

Adult and family programming focuses on outdoor recreation and land management. This year's public offerings included: Halloween Hike: So You Think You Can...; Public Ropes Program; Family Campout; Maple Syruping; Master Conservation Workshop; Prehistoric Sites Workshop; Lighten Up Louisa hikes, bike rides and canoeing; Chinkapin Makeover, Running Wild for Langwood and a Fish and Fun day. Over 469 participants attended the 14 public programs offered.

Public Relations and Media

- News releases on all of public programs are sent to newspapers and radio stations in a five county area.
- Feature articles about LCCB programs and staff have been written by newspaper staff.
- At least three radio stations regularly call for interviews about upcoming events.
- Pictures and post-publicity are sent to newspapers on all public programs and many school field trips.
- The LCCB web site is kept current with information about both programs and areas.

LCCB Newsletter

The LCCB newsletter is distributed to over 1400 addresses. An electronic version was added in FY 03 which has been a popular addition.

In FY 03 the newsletter was expanded by four pages to include other conservation agencies and organizations. We dedicate one page each to the Iowa DNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the Louisa County Soil and Water Conservation Service. Another page contains news from non-governmental organizations. This has been a popular addition. Another bonus is that by printing in-house and receiving some financial support from the other groups, we have reduced the newsletter budget even with the additional pages and mailing costs.

Support Facilities

The LCCB has access to more than 10,000 acres of public land in Louisa County. Except for very small areas like boat accesses, we have used all our county areas for field trips and programs. We also make use of the Fish and Wildlife Service's areas in our county and several DNR-owned areas.

Langwood Education Center is the most popular area for field trips because of the many facilities: canoes, challenge course, bird blind, pond, trails, lodge and dormitory. It is also used by area youth groups for weekend outings year-round. The Langwood Advisory Committee is developing plans to expand Langwood's residential and EE facilities.

Toolesboro Mounds and Visitor Center is owned by the State Historical Society of Iowa and managed by the LCCB. The prehistoric mounds and visitor center are open to the public seasonally and year-round by appointment. There is an on-site interpreter. All fifth graders in the county visit the area as part of a Louisa County historical field trip. It is a great place to tie together natural and cultural history.

Other Partnerships

One key to success is cooperation with other groups and government agencies. This past year cooperative efforts included working with the DNR (law enforcement, fisheries and wildlife); the soil and water conservation district; Natural Resources Conservation Service, Iowa State Extension and 4-H; girl and boy scout groups; the Fish & Wildlife Service; the Louisa County Historical Society; Louisa Regional Solid Waste Agency, the State Historical Society of Iowa; Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation; Monsanto Company, MidAmerican Energy; the Louisa Longbeards Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Louisa County Izaak Walton league, the Columbus Community School District and the city of Morning Sun.

Unique to Louisa County: Extreme Makeover – Louisa County Editions

The LCCB developed the Extreme Makeover as a way to utilize the solid base of support it enjoys with the local community and improve the facilities available for environmental education on a very limited budget.

Starting in 2004 at Langwood Education Center and Camp, the LCCB organized over 100 volunteers to help renovate and improve the center's facilities. During *Extreme Makeover: The Langwood Edition* volunteers installed new kitchen cabinetry, insulation and siding on the lodge; improved trails, bridges and fire rings; built new picnic tables; pulled out old fencing; moved, split and stacked firewood; painted the A-frame dormitory and bathroom; and landscaped around the bathroom and the entrance sign.

The volunteers were treated to a lunch and snacks throughout the day. Many took great pride in improving the Langwood Center and asked to be included in similar future events. The event got a huge group of people working together as a community, supporting one of their favorite conservation agencies. The changes they created improved the experience for hundreds of children and adults who visit Langwood yearly on fieldtrips, public programs, camps and private outings.

A similar effort turned Chinkapin Bluffs Recreation Area from a semi-developed park into a showcase recreational area with something for everyone from families with children to birdwatchers and mushroom hunters.

On Earth Day 2006, 150 volunteers spent the day at *Extreme Makeover: Chinkapin Bluffs Edition*. During the day volunteers installed benches and a playground; planted trees, shrubs, and flowers; painted the shelter house; built trails; and constructed an overlook deck. The results include a beautiful view of the Iowa River, a fully-accessible walking trail, a fun place for kids to play and a new trail linking hikers to the Hoover Nature Trail.

Since the makeover, the use of all parts of the park has greatly increased. More reservations are also made for children's parties, 4-H meetings, and family gatherings. Chinkapin has even been used for a pre-school day camp this past summer.