



Agassiz Environmental Learning Center ~ Winter 2021 Newsletter ~

Mission: "To foster a greater awareness of the interrelationships between humans and nature"

In this Issue:

As the end of 2021 draws nigh, we take a moment to look back over the year and reflect on the many activities that the Agassiz ELC was involved with and the many partners who helped make it all possible.

We also look ahead to a special year in 2022 as the Agassiz ELC will be celebrating its 30 year anniversary from when it formed as a nonprofit back in 1992.

Members, partners, kindred souls...we invite all hands on deck to help the Agassiz ELC be an even greater asset for Fertile, the region and state in service to our kids, our community, and our collective future.

Most sincerely, thank you for your support!

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Agassiz ELC 2021— Year in Review

2021 was a year of challenges and opportunities. It was a very busy year with LOTS of activity at the Agassiz ELC and Fertile Sand Hills. Within guidelines for Covid safety, the Agassiz ELC provided opportunities for kids, families, and the public to enjoy discovery of the natural world through programs and recreational pursuits. With limited resources, the Agassiz ELC is grateful for the many partnerships that help make all this possible, including our generous membership support. Thank YOU!

Kids First!

Kids enjoyed exploring the many habitats of the Fertile Sand Hills during site visits in the spring. Goodridge 2nd and 3rd graders recorded observations they made on their Discovery Hike in Nature Journals that they received as part of the Discovery Kits provided to each student.



Ada-Borup Kindergarten students had a busy outing at the AELC as they recorded nature finds as part of a scavenger hunt activity. They also collected and planted native prairie seeds as they learned about prairies and pollinators.

Students from Crookston Cathedral enjoyed both the sandy expanses of Death Valley 1 and waded in the cool, refreshing waters of the Sand Hill River.



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Agassiz Environmental Learning Center

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The mission of the Agassiz Environmental Learning Center is to foster a greater awareness of the interrelationships between humans and nature.

The Agassiz ELC provides quality hands-on learning opportunities in the unique Fertile Sand Hills to promote stewardship of natural resources for present and future generations.

The Agassiz ELC shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations.

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Watch for 30 Year Commemorative Events in 2022 including a Summerfest Celebration in early June.

A brief history of the Agassiz ELC will be shared along with a commemoration of past AELC Board members, volunteers, and staff plus special recognition of members and donors over the years.

Agassiz ELC Origins

30 Year Celebration Ahead

This year in review issue not only provides opportunity to reflect on the past year's activities, but on the past many years as the AELC prepares to celebrate it's 30 year anniversary in 2022. Providing quality programs and recreation experiences has been the focus over these many years.

Engaging kids in a variety of outdoor experiences that sparks their curiosity, awareness, and appreciation of the natural world has been and continues to be a central focus and guiding force in all ongoing efforts of the Agassiz ELC.

The Fertile Sand Hills is truly one of the most unique landscapes to be found anywhere with an unmatched diversity of



ecosystems and the accompanying variety of flora and fauna native to these habitats.

Sustaining a safe and ecologically sound site is a key underpinning of Agassiz ELC's operations to ensure



future generations can continue to explore, enjoy, and connect to this natural treasure.

The Agassiz ELC looks forward to continuing to work

with partners who are also committed to preserve and protect the Fertile Sand Hills for sustainable educational and recreational opportunities to allow present and future generations to...

Explore

Enjoy

Connect!



(2021 Year in Review—continued from page 1)

Norman County East Summer Rec program participants took a guided tour of Fertile Sand Hills trails passing through both Death Valley 1 and Death Valley 2 while younger students followed the Sand Hill River trail on their quest in search of items noted on their Scavenger Hunt list.



Story Strolls continued to be a popular activity in 2021, with kids and adults alike enjoying leisurely outdoor hikes while reading book pages posted along the scenic Sand Hill trails. Three

books were featured including How to Find a Bird displayed along the bird-friendly Sand Hill River trail.

A related interactive “Crack the Code” walk was done in partnership with the Fertile-Beltrami Early Childhood Initiative with kids solving riddles with clues given on the posted trail signs.



Story Strolls are an example of partnerships helping make programs happen. Librarian Laura Gullickson from the Fertile Public Library provides lead support in selection, purchasing and prep of the books. The Fertile-Beltrami Community Fund and Early Childhood Initiative have provided funding for supplies. The City of Fertile allows use of its Ranger for transport and installation/removal of the Story Stroll posts by Agassiz ELC staff and volunteers. THANKS ALL for making these popular Story Strolls possible.

Public Programs and activities onsite...

Public Programs were also provided to raise awareness of natural resource topics, especially as relates to the local environment of the Fertile Sand Hills. Two guided hikes were provided including a popular pasque flower hike featuring the early blooming pasque—a special annual attraction of the Fertile Sand Hills. Large flowered beardtongue and spiderwort were two featured blooms on a June hike of the Fertile Sand Hills.



Monarch butterflies were featured in a fun and informative program provided by Laura Bell from the



University of MN Crookston . The life cycle of monarchs from egg to adult and their amazing migratory journey were just some of the many fascinating facts shared about this popular pollinator.

Another important pollinator and pest control friend—bats, were featured at an August program presented by Amy Westmark, MnDNR Region 1 Nongame Wildlife Specialist. Five of the seven bat species found in Minnesota were detected in a “listening” session following the program using a bat echo location meter.



A Mosaic Arts program was featured at the Nature Center with participants creating nature inspired artistic mosaics. Ada mosaic artist Elizabeth Rockstad provided guidance to the creative process enjoyed by 12 participants at the Nature Center.

Recreational Opportunities

Hike, Snowshoe, Paddle, Ride

Trail fees were again waived in 2021 to encourage public use for physical and mental wellbeing. While the Nature Center was closed for much of the year due to Covid, the bathrooms continue to remain open 24/7 for public use with regular cleaning and disinfecting provided. The Nature Center is again available for group rentals.



Snowshoe trails on both sides of the Sand Hill River plus a trail out to Scout Tower provide excellent opportunity to explore in the shelter of wooded areas. The river trails are especially scenic with much of the river staying open year-round, attracting birds to the open water.

The snowshoe trail to Scout Tower has become multi-purpose with rave reviews from mountain bike enthusiasts who have found it to be a great single track mountain bike trail. The mountain bike riders have been helping trim branches along all the snowshoe trails as they use them for mountain biking rides.



Limited snow carried over into limited rain and drought conditions during the summer of 2021. Hitting rocks and getting stuck in low water is not fun and is hard on equipment—so kayak rentals did not happen last summer. We're looking forward to making the Agassiz ELC kayak "fleet" available in 2022 to enjoy the wonderful Sand Hill River trail in the Fertile area.

Fertile Maintenance Department staff took over much of the trail mowing in 2021 including mowing the snowmobile trail which serves as the designated trail for horseback riding in the Fertile Sand Hills.

Ski the Fertile Sand Hills

With over 10 miles of groomed trails, the Fertile Sand Hills provides premier cross-country skiing for all. Casual skiers can enjoy flatter terrain along the scenic Sand Hill River trail. More advanced skiers can explore the hilly oak savanna and dunes terrain in the Sand Hills.



2021 marked a big improvement in ski trail grooming with the aid of a "new/used" Ginzugroomer and tracksetter which has "teeth" that can chew up old icy snow to recondition it and then set a new track. It really helped to make the most of our limited snow last winter.

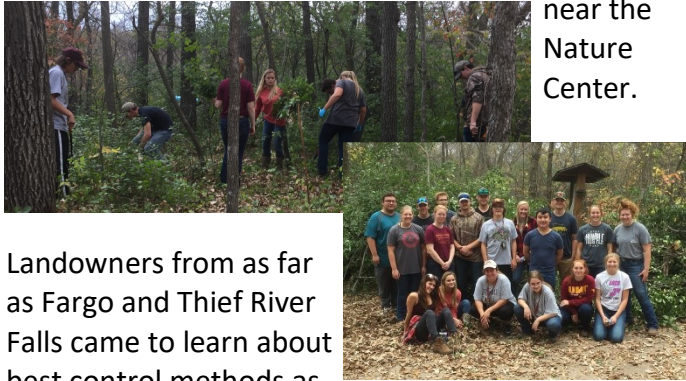


Youth Skiing ~ The Sand Hills SkiSparks youth x-c ski club enjoyed their second year of ski instruction at the Fertile Sand Hills in 2021. Skiers from ages 4 to 16 learned and advanced their skills through drills and tips from adult leaders. It was great to see kids learn this fun life skill and watch some of the "older" youngsters bombing down the steeper hills after their Sunday regular sessions. The Ski Sparks Ski Club will begin sessions again in January 2022. If interested, contact local club leader Matt Forgit at sandhills@mysl.org.



Univ. of MN-Crookston Assists with Fertile Sand Hills Site Management

Buckthorn control was the hot topic featured at a demo/work day in October. The University of MN Crookston Natural Resources Club demonstrated cutting and stump treatment of this aggressive invasive shrub/tree, clearing an area of buckthorn near the Nature Center.



Landowners from as far as Fargo and Thief River Falls came to learn about best control methods as they seek to maintain diversity of their woodlands by controlling the spread of this aggressive invasive species. Watch for more buckthorn removal work days in 2022—VOLUNTEERS WELCOME!

Open sand management is an ongoing strategy to promote continued survival of rare flora and fauna that require these fringe open sand areas to exist. Dr. Matt Simmons has involved students from his UofMN-Crookston Ecological Restoration class for many years helping to manage and monitor the open sand areas in the Fertile Sand Hills.

Death Valley 2 was the primary work area in 2021 with spraying



of vegetation as well as tree removal to enhance wind flow and drying conditions to promote open sand areas.

Archery...after Covid cancellation in 2020, the spring and fall 3D Archery Shoots were back in 2021 as coordinated by the Fertile Community Conservation Club. Archers were treated to two new areas utilizing snowshoe/bike trails for challenging target placement. The fall shoot attracted 130 archers from a 3 state area.



A **prescribed burn** of MnDNR and Fertile Sand Hills property that was planned for 2021 was cancelled due to drought conditions and safety concerns. This is a MnDNR high priority burn for spring of 2022. The Fertile Fire Department has burned portions of the City's Sand Hills property in the past to help control the spread of aspen and maintain a healthy oak savanna and prairie ecosystem.



Bluebird House Full Occupancy! All ten of the bluebird boxes at the Agassiz ELC were occupied in 2021. Wrens and tree swallows each occupied 5 houses each by season's end, though bluebirds did use two of the boxes for initial broods.



Pollinator Garden renovation is underway as the area previously referred to as the botanical garden was sprayed in the fall to kill off the quack grass that had taken over. Spring 2022 plans include scraping off the top layer of soil and spraying again for any regrowth of quack grass before a heavy mulch layer is applied and selected prairie and pollinator plants are planted. Watch for more details including volunteer opportunities in the Spring newsletter.



Many more activities and developments took place or are in the works. It's been a busy year at the Agassiz ELC, with more in store for 2022!

Agassiz ELC Support Opportunities

Bare feet in the cool sandy depths of Death Valley, searching for bugs in the Sand Hill River, and looking down on the tree canopy from Lookout Point—just a few of the experiences kids enjoy as they explore the Fertile Sand Hills. Membership and donor support make these experiences possible.



A special fundraising project is underway through Giving Hearts Day to help support outdoor opportunities



for all in 2022 and beyond. You can help provide funds up front to establish our challenge match or “match the match” on Feb. 10th— Giving Hearts Day, to help promote youth outdoor engagement.

Another way to ensure that quality youth outings continue into the future is to contribute to a permanent endowment that provides stable funding support for youth outdoor programs. Gifts can be made in a variety of ways including appreciated assets, required minimum distributions from retirement funds and estate gifts.



For more information on support options, please contact Wayne Goeken, AELC Executive Director at wgoekenmn@gmail.com or 218-280-0516.

Membership and special year-end donations to the Agassiz ELC make these experiences and memories possible. Memories that last a lifetime. Thank you for your support in making all this possible.

Agassiz ELC Annual Membership

- ___ \$20 Student/Senior/Military
- ___ \$30 Individual
- ___ \$40 Family
- ___ \$100 Centurion
- ___ \$250 Patron
- ___ \$ 500+ Benefactor
- ___ \$2,500 Lifetime
- ___ \$ _____ Other

After an initial contribution of \$100, future gifts count towards being a lifetime member.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

E-mail Address _____

Please remit this form and payment to Agassiz ELC at PO Box 388, Fertile, MN 56540

or join on-line at www.aelcfertile.org.

*Agassiz Environmental Learning Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization
Contributions are tax-deductible*

Renew or become a new member online at aelcfertile.org or mail the completed form to: Agassiz ELC, PO Box 388, Fertile, MN 56540, or drop off at the Fertile City Office. A receipt acknowledging your tax deductible donation will be sent with a heartfelt THANK YOU!!

Membership benefits include:

- Support youth education/outdoor recreation programs and site management to advance the mission of the Agassiz ELC
- Tax-deductible membership contribution
- Printed version of Agassiz ELC newsletter
- Free use of cross-country ski equipment and snowshoes—use of all trails
- Reduced fee for kayak rental (\$6/day)
- Free or reduced admission to Agassiz ELC programs
- Recognition in Agassiz ELC newsletter

Your contribution helps fulfill the mission of the Agassiz ELC,

To foster a greater awareness of the interrelationships between humans and nature



SAVE THE DATE

Winter Fest

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2022

Agassiz Environmental Learning Center
400 Summit Ave SW, Fertile, MN 56540

Featured Activities

**Sleigh Rides
Skiing
Snowshoeing
Snow Snake
Schmoosh Races
Activity Stations
Prizes
Refreshments**

Questions? Contact Stacy Erickson or Lisa Liden at (218) 945-3136 or cityoffertile@gmail.com

Many partners are planning additional activities...watch for updates on Agassiz ELC Facebook page and in local media. Exciting opportunities for Winter Fun!

The Back Page...more activities and updates...



Haunted Trails 2021 was a huge success with 850 people coming out to “enjoy” the thrills and chills. Thanks to all the dedicated volunteers who did the scaring and support crews—and those who came out to be scared—all proceeds go to help deliver more youth programs at the Agassiz ELC.

...and the Jack-O-Lantern Walk was also enjoyed by families et al.—many thanks to Jody Gudvangen and Garden Hills Farms for donating pumpkins and to those who helped carve the designs.



Scenic Sand Hill River oxbow



Old skis repurposed as signposts along Sand Hills trails

Several “Parking arrow” signs were installed to help guide people back to the trailhead and parking area.

We’ve been short on short skis for families that want to get their young kids started skiing. No more—18 pairs of smaller kids skis were purchased with over half using a strap binding system that uses kids existing boots rather than needing a ski boot and binding. Come on out and give them a try!

To follow updates to ski trail conditions in the Fertile Sand Hills, check the Skiwise app for regular reports of the most recent grooming and ski conditions.



A Winter Birds and Bird Feeding

program will be presented at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 23rd



at the Nature Center by Laura and Jeff Bell. Learn about which birds tough it out in our northern winters, their winter adaptations, and how you can help by feeding the birds. Come and make your own bird feeder that you can take home.

Watch for a “Special Edition” newsletter in early 2022 where all 2021 members, donors, and memorials will be published plus additional details for Winterfest and programs being planned for early 2022.

Happy Holidays! Enjoy the season and wishing all safe travels and cherished time with loved ones.

...to find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter...to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird’s nest or a wild flower in spring—these are some of the rewards of the simple life.

John Burroughs (1837-1921) American naturalist and writer

Letter from a 2nd grade student who enjoyed her visit to the AELC. Rewards of providing memorable experiences for kids!

