



# SPRING LAKE

NATURE CENTER



To inspire curiosity, stewardship, and connection through hands-on exploration of North Dakota's natural world.

## In this issue:

- Our Story
- June News Recap
- What's going on in August
- Future Endeavors
- Featured Plant
- How to Get Involved
- Donation Information
- Thank you Sponsors

## Our Story

Founded by Lee Lusht as her long-held dream, Spring Lake Nature Center in Williston, ND, is a 501-c3 non-profit organization and the only nature-based science center serving northwest North Dakota. Early planning began in 2023, and the organization has since grown with the guidance of a committed board and broad community support.

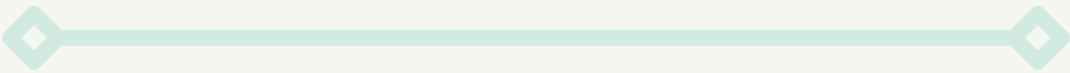
Since its soft opening in early 2026, the center has offered monthly rotating exhibits, hands-on programs, and seasonal activities exploring local ecosystems, fossils, pollinators, and more, all designed to inspire curiosity and stewardship.



Spring Lake Nature Center has grown through the support, encouragement, and generosity of the community. Financial and in-kind contributions have played an important role in helping bring the vision to life. The Williston STAR Fund awarded a community grant to support development efforts, Williston CVB has provided ongoing support, and Western Cooperative Credit Union pledged \$100,000 over three years to help advance the center's mission and programming. Volunteers, local organizations, and community partners have also contributed countless hours, materials, and resources to help create engaging exhibits, programs, and experiences for visitors of all ages.

As the Nature Center continues to grow, the primary long-term goal remains establishing a permanent home in Spring Lake Park — a welcoming community space where people of all ages can gather to learn about, explore, and connect with the natural world. Looking further ahead, future outreach initiatives such as the Prairie Rover could help expand nature-based learning opportunities to schools and rural communities across the region.

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## June News Recap

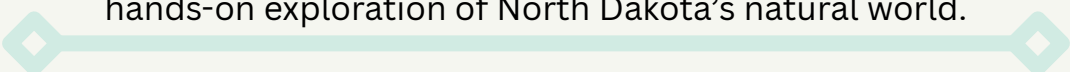
Throughout June, our wonderful founder and leader, Lee, traveled to several nature and science centers across the country to explore new ideas, innovative exhibits, and educational programs that could help shape the future of Spring Lake Nature Center. Every stop offered fresh inspiration and valuable insight into creating engaging experiences that encourage curiosity, exploration, and a lifelong love of nature. Below, Lee shares her reflections from the journey in her own words.

“June was filled with inspiration. Along the way, I visited several outstanding nature and science centers, including Quarry Hill Nature Center in Rochester, Minnesota, the UW–Madison Arboretum, and the Black Earth Children's Museum in Wisconsin. Each one offered fresh ideas and a reminder of how powerful hands-on learning can be.

One of the highlights was returning to Shaver's Creek Nature Center in Pennsylvania, the place that first sparked my love of nature education as a child and planted the seed for what is now becoming Spring Lake Nature Center. While I was home, I also visited my 91-year-old friend Shirley Fonda, a lifelong paleontologist and adventurer whose passion for discovery is as strong as ever. Growing up, I lived across the street from her. I took piano lessons in her home, watched her rehabilitate blue herons in the kitchen, stepped over squirrels racing through the living room, and sifted through buckets of dirt from her fossil digs looking for tiny bones. There was even a skunk living under the stairs. As a child, I had no idea that not everyone had a neighbor like this. I simply thought it was normal. Looking back, I realize just how fortunate I was and how profoundly she shaped my curiosity about the natural world. Her influence helped set me on the path that would eventually lead to Spring Lake Nature Center.

She welcomed me back with stories, laughter, and an astonishing collection built over more than half a century of exploration—including a mastodon jaw resting on her coffee table. Even more generously, she sent me home with several incredible specimens that will one day become part of our exhibits. It was a full-circle moment and a reminder that the greatest gift we can give the next generation is the chance to wonder, explore, and discover.”

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## June News Recap cont.



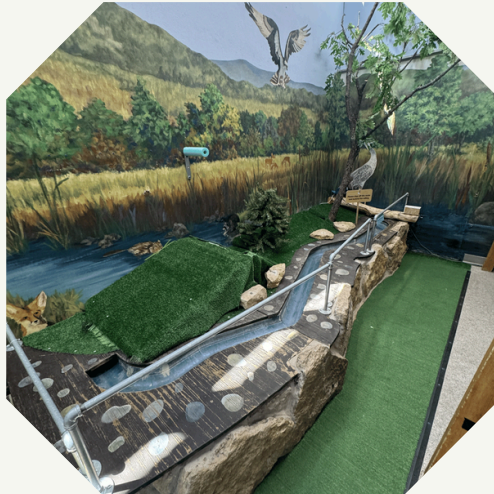
Quarry Hill Main



Shavers Creek Sign



Quarry Hill



Black Earth Children's



Shavers Creek Bird Case



Shavers Creek Classroom



Shavers Creek Copperhead

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## What's Going On In July?

The countdown is on! This month marks one of our biggest events of the year as we prepare for the 2nd Annual Roots & Wings Festival on Saturday, July 11. While our exhibit space remains closed during Kids Summer Camp and other summer activities, our volunteers, sponsors, and community partners have been hard at work bringing this exciting celebration of nature, science, and community to life.

Festival visitors can look forward to a day filled with hands-on learning, family-friendly activities, local vendors, delicious food, and opportunities to explore the natural world. We're excited to welcome back many wonderful community partners, including the Missouri-Yellowstone Confluence Interpretive Center, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Williston Community Library, the Paul Broste Rock Museum, Nessel Consulting Service, the Williston Fire Department's Free Will Donation BBQ, Susie Q's Ice Cream Truck, and many more!

Whether you're discovering local wildlife, exploring rocks and fossils, enjoying a great meal, or cooling off with a sweet treat, there will be something for everyone to enjoy throughout the day.

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered, donated, sponsored, and supported this year's festival. Your encouragement and generosity continue to help Spring Lake Nature Center grow, and we can't wait to celebrate with you at Spring Lake Park on July 11!

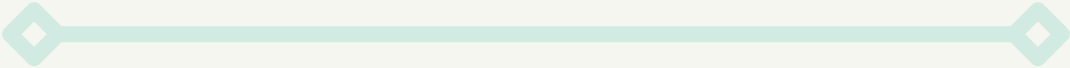
Follow us on Facebook & Instagram throughout the week as we introduce more of the amazing organizations, activities, and vendors that will be joining us for this year's festival!

@SpringLakeNatureCenter

## Upcoming Events

**July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026**- Roots & Wings Festival  
10:00 AM to 4:00 PM  
Spring Lake Park

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## Looking Ahead

As the excitement of the festival winds down, our work continues. This summer we're focusing on building new educational opportunities, strengthening community partnerships, and exploring ways to make nature and science learning even more accessible throughout the year.

One area we're especially excited to continue developing is educational programming for schools and homeschool families. We're working with local educators and community partners to explore future field trip opportunities, hands-on learning experiences, and flexible programming that complements classroom learning.

Behind the scenes, we're also evaluating future exhibit plans and how best to serve our growing community. As we continue to learn and grow, some of our programming may evolve to better meet community needs and make the most of our available spaces.

Be sure to follow us on social media and visit our website for the latest updates on volunteer opportunities, nature walks, educational programs, pop-up events, and future exhibit announcements.

We look forward to sharing the next chapter of Spring Lake Nature Center with you!



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## Featured Plant

### Maximilian Sunflower

Towering above the prairie with brilliant golden blooms, Maximilian Sunflower is one of North Dakota's most striking native wildflowers. Blooming from mid-to-late summer, these cheerful flowers bring vibrant color to grasslands while providing an important source of food for pollinators and wildlife alike.

Named in honor of Prince Maximilian of Wied, a German explorer and naturalist who traveled across the Great Plains in the 1830s, the Maximilian Sunflower has become an iconic part of prairie landscapes throughout the Midwest. Unlike the cultivated sunflowers grown in farmers' fields, this hardy native species has evolved alongside prairie



grasses and wildlife for thousands of years.

Throughout the summer, its bright yellow flowers attract a wide variety of native bees, butterflies, beetles, and other beneficial insects seeking nectar and pollen. As the growing season comes to an end, the flower heads produce seeds that become an important food source for goldfinches, chickadees, and many other birds, while the sturdy stems provide shelter for insects through the winter.

With roots that can extend several feet into the soil, Maximilian Sunflowers are well adapted to the changing conditions of the prairie. Their deep root systems help them survive periods of drought while also improving soil health and reducing erosion, making them an important part of healthy native ecosystems. As we celebrate the beauty of summer during this year's Roots & Wings Festival, take a moment to look around and appreciate the incredible diversity of native prairie plants that call western North Dakota home. Every wildflower plays an important role in supporting the birds, butterflies, bees, and other wildlife that make our prairie such a remarkable place.

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## Featured Plant cont.

### Maximilian Sunflower

#### Did You Know?

- **Native vs. Garden Sunflowers**
  - The towering sunflowers growing naturally on the prairie are often Maximilian Sunflowers—a native species that returns year after year without being replanted.
- **Pollinator Paradise**
  - One patch of blooming Maximilian Sunflowers can attract dozens of different pollinating insects throughout the day.
- **Nature's Bird Feeder**
  - After the flowers fade, their seeds provide a valuable food source for birds well into autumn.
- **Built for the Prairie**
  - Deep roots help Maximilian Sunflowers withstand drought while supporting healthy prairie soils.
- **North Dakota Connection**
  - North Dakota is the nation's leading producer of cultivated sunflowers, but our state is also home to several beautiful native sunflower species that have thrived on the prairie long before modern agriculture.



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## How to get involved:



### July Roots & Wings Festival

Join us for the 2nd Annual Roots & Wings Festival on July 11, 2026, and be part of the fun! Opportunities include vendor assistance, greeting guests, setup and cleanup crews, and more. It's a great way to be involved in a large, family-friendly community event while helping bring nature education to life.

### Future Opportunities

As Spring Lake Nature Center continues to grow, so do the opportunities to become involved! Beyond the Roots & Wings Festival, we are beginning to explore future community programs and activities such as bird watching groups, nature walks, hands-on learning experiences, family activities, seasonal exhibits, and more.

Right now, we are still in the exciting stage of building and discovering what our community is most passionate about — and volunteers will play a huge role in helping shape that future. Some opportunities may be short-term event help, while others may grow into recurring groups or programs led by community members who simply love sharing their interests with others.

You do not need to be a scientist or expert to volunteer with Spring Lake Nature Center. Whether you enjoy greeting visitors, helping with activities, leading a hobby group, sharing knowledge, assisting behind the scenes, or simply supporting nature education in our area, there is a place for you here.

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## How to get involved cont.



As we look toward fall programming and future expansion, we are especially interested in connecting with people who are passionate about:

- Bird watching
- Prairie plants and gardening
- Nature photography
- Hiking and outdoor exploration
- Science and hands-on learning
- Family-friendly community activities
- Environmental education
- Local wildlife and conservation

Many of our future programs will only be possible through community involvement and volunteer support. If you have ideas, interests, or would like to help us grow, we would love to hear from you!

To get involved, visit our website at [www.springlakenaturecenter.org](http://www.springlakenaturecenter.org) or sign up through PointsApp at [pointsapp.org/orgs/9094](http://pointsapp.org/orgs/9094) to join our volunteer team.

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## How to Donate:

Donations are a vital part of how the Nature Center continues to grow. Every contribution, big or small, helps bring new exhibits, events, and festivals to the community and supports exciting future projects like the Prairie Rover.

Another meaningful way to give is through in-kind donations – this can include goods, services, or volunteer time to help us make our programs and events possible. Every gift makes a difference!

<https://givebutter.com/BZh6be>

## Thank You!!!!

A big heartfelt thank you to our sponsors, trailblazers like you that make this possible



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