Issue 7

October 2026

SPRING LAKE
NATURE CENTER



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

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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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Keepers of the Prairie

The National Audubon Society has reportedly surpassed 20,000 acres of grassland restoration through its North Dakota Conservation Forage Program. This marks a significant milestone in this conservation effort and is great news for our prairie!

The Conservation Forage Program is a voluntary program for farmers and ranchers that helps convert marginal cropland back into native grasses. As we know, native grasses help build healthy soils and restore essential nutrients. They also help rebuild lost habitat and provide important homes and food sources for grassland birds throughout our region.

This is also the time of year when we start saying goodbye to some of our flying friends. Warblers such as the Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat will be leaving our area for warmer weather. Sparrows such as the Fox Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, and American Tree Sparrow will become fewer as well. And, of course, waterfowl such as Blue-winged Teal will continue their migration south as winter approaches. Don’t worry, though—we’ll see many of these familiar visitors again when spring migration begins!

Right now is also the perfect time to walk the Coteau Trail at Lewis and Clark State Park. The 1.1-mile self-guided loop takes you through native prairie and wooded ravines, showing off the beautiful colors of autumn. The Eskers Trail is another option, with a slightly longer 1.5-mile loop. Be sure to take some time to get outside and enjoy nature before the snow falls!

And something not quite prairie-related, but still worth looking up at, is Saturn. On clear October nights, Saturn can be seen in the southern sky. With binoculars or a telescope, you may even be able to spot its famous rings. The wonders of nature don't stop at the prairie, they continue all the way into our skies!

What’s Going On In October?

There may not always be something new to announce each month, but that doesn't mean things aren't happening behind the scenes at Spring Lake Nature Center!

Right now, we're in a season of planning, preparing, and building toward what's next. We're continuing to pursue grant opportunities, work with community partners, and think about how we can create meaningful nature and science experiences for our region.

Our vision hasn't changed: we want Spring Lake Nature Center to be a place where people of all ages can explore, learn, ask questions, and develop a deeper connection with the natural world.

The Prairie Rover remains an exciting part of that vision. A mobile nature center will allow us to bring hands-on learning directly to schools, homeschool families, community events, and communities throughout our region while we continue working toward the long-term goal of a permanent Nature Center.

In the meantime, we're looking forward to finding opportunities to gather at Spring Lake Park, offer pop-up experiences, and explore new ways to connect our community with the nature around us.

Sometimes building something worthwhile takes time. We're excited about where we're headed, and we're grateful to have you along for the journey.

If you'd like to be part of that journey, we're always looking for volunteers, community partners, program leaders, and people with ideas to share. There's a place for everyone in the Spring Lake Nature Center community.

Future Endveaors

As we continue working on fundraising ideas and opportunities, we're also beginning to look ahead at some exciting ways to bring Spring Lake Nature Center back into the community this winter and into the coming year.

One of the projects we're especially excited about is a collaboration with the Williston Community Builders and Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) for the upcoming Spring Lake Winter Lights and winter market event.

Inside the Keelboat building, we'll be creating a walking Winter Wonderland experience designed to bring the beauty and wonder of North Dakota's winter wildlife to life. Visitors will be able to step inside, explore, and experience a little bit of the winter prairie in a whole new way.

We don't want to give too much away just yet, but we can say this: Spring Lake Nature Center will be back at the Keelboat with something special this winter! We're excited to create an experience that brings families together and gives everyone another opportunity to connect with the natural world—even when the temperatures outside are less than inviting.

Winter also gives us a chance to start planning for next summer's 3rd Annual Roots & Wings Festival!

We'll be looking at forming committees and getting planning underway for another day of nature, science, learning, and fun at Spring Lake Park. Roots & Wings is one of our favorite events of the year, and we're already looking forward to bringing it back.

We hope to bring back many of the fan favorites from the past two years while also welcoming new and exciting vendors and organizations inspired by nature, science, conservation, and the prairie.

Most importantly, we want Roots & Wings to continue being a place where kids of all ages can explore, discover, get their hands dirty, ask questions, and have fun learning about the world around them.

Future Endveaors

As we plan for these events, we're also continuing to look for fundraising opportunities between now and next summer. Every event and fundraiser brings us one step closer to our goal of getting the Prairie Rover on the road. The Prairie Rover is a big part of our vision for the future—a mobile nature center that can bring hands-on science and nature experiences directly to schools, homeschool groups, community events, and communities throughout our region.

There is still plenty of work to do, but there is also plenty to look forward to. Winter Wonderland, Roots & Wings, new programs, new partnerships, and eventually a Prairie Rover on the road—we're excited to keep building, and we hope you'll be part of the journey!

Where curiosity takes root and imagination takes flight.

The below picture is a visualization of the Prairie Rover as an idea and inspiration. Artwork may differ on actual bus.



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Featured Plant

Native Hazelnut

When you think of North Dakota agriculture, hazelnuts probably aren't the first thing that comes to mind. In fact, they probably don't come to mind at all!

But North Dakota is home to two native hazelnut species: American hazelnut (Corylus americana) and beaked hazel (Corylus cornuta). Both are native shrubs that can be found growing in wooded areas, thickets, and other suitable habitats across the state.

Not a Big Crop, But a Native Treasure



Native hazelnuts aren't an important commercial crop in North Dakota. The nuts produced by wild plants tend to be relatively small, and harvesting enough to make it worthwhile can take quite a bit of work. NDSU notes that a hardy, commercially productive hazelnut variety has not yet been developed for North Dakota.

That doesn't make them any less interesting! In fact, October is listed as the harvest season for North Dakota's native hazels.

The nuts can be eaten and can be surprisingly tasty, although you're likely to have some competition from the wildlife that knows exactly when they're ready.

Who Gets There First?

Squirrels, birds, deer, and other wildlife all make use of hazelnuts. The shrubs themselves also provide valuable cover and nesting habitat, while the catkins become an important winter food for birds such as turkey and ruffed grouse.

One NDSU writer described finding a good crop of hazelnuts and being promptly scolded by a red squirrel who apparently believed the entire harvest belonged to him. A little farther away, a black bear and her cubs were harvesting hazelnuts too!

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Featured Plant cont.

Native Hazelnut

Two Hazels, One Curious Difference
American hazelnut and beaked hazel can look quite similar, but their nut husks are different. American hazelnuts grow in leafy clusters, while beaked hazelnuts have a distinctive long, beak-like husk covered in bristly hairs. Those hairs can irritate the skin, so anyone handling beaked hazelnuts should take care.
So while you won't see fields of hazelnuts stretching across North Dakota, these little native shrubs are another reminder that our state has more natural treasures than we sometimes realize.
This October, keep an eye out. You might discover that hazelnuts have been part of the North Dakota landscape all along.











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How to get involved:

Want to volunteer?



We would love to have you involved! While we don't have immediate openings right now, we are always looking ahead and would love to connect with folks who want to help us grow. Here is what is on the horizon where we could use a hand:

- Pop-Up Events: Helping out when we host our park activities, birthday events, and exhibits.
- Getting the Word Out: Spreading the news about what is happening at the Nature Center and helping us connect with the community.
- Committees: We are also getting ready to form a few committees, like a dedicated fundraising group! While these are still in the planning stages, we'd love to hear if you would be interested in helping

If you are interested in helping with events, spreading the word, or jumping onto a committee, drop us a line and let us know what you're passionate about!

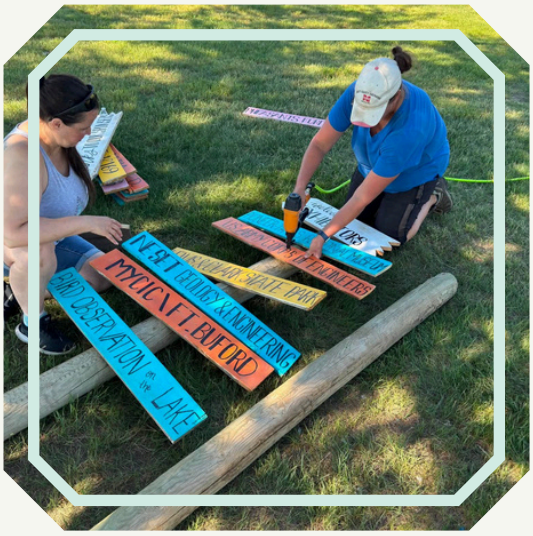
Future Opportunities

As Spring Lake Nature Center continues to grow, so do the opportunities to become involved! We are building 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.

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 or sign up through PointsApp at 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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