

*2019-2020*

# ANNIE'S BIG NATURE LESSON

*Annual Report*





## Greetings from the Director

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What will students remember from this year? Will they remember the walks in the woods, the lessons about plants, water, rocks, animals, and the environment? Will they remember the quiet moments of sitting by the pond or in the forest, writing and drawing in their journals?

Maybe they will remember the solitude as we were asked to distance ourselves from our friends and loved ones. Maybe they will remember the quiet, or the way time stood still for awhile, with the busyness of regular life on hold. Maybe they will remember that one of the safest places was outdoors.

I know I will remember the creativity, flexibility, and dedication of teachers, naturalists, and volunteers as we designed and implemented each ABNL week. I will also remember the positive energy and "reimagination" as we work together to plan for the 2020-2021 school year.

Thank you for your support of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. Your generosity has supported lessons of embracing the wonder that can be found in solitude and in nature, lessons that are all the more important during these unusual times. May we find joy in the unexpected and creativity and perseverance as we come to terms with a world that has changed so rapidly. May we see these changes as opportunity, just as a rock is upturned so that we can see the life beneath it.

This year's report is about gratitude to all the wonderful people who contribute to ABNL.

Margaret Holtschlag  
Director of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson



Annie's BIG Nature Lesson is named in honor of Ann Mason, environmentalist and enthusiast about all things of nature. Ann was director of Clinton County's Department of Waste Management, and built one of the most respected solid waste and recycling programs in Michigan. After her death from melanoma in 2002, Anne's family and friends established a fund to continue Anne's legacy of taking care of the environment, and Annie's BIG Nature Lesson was created. ABNL is a five-day study trip to local nature centers in which students, teachers, and parents learn about the natural world, local environmental issues, and general ecology. ABNL inspires children, parents, and teachers to value nature and take care of the environment by offering learning activities and meaningful connections with nature.

Please consider making a tax-deductible gift to Annie's BIG Nature Lesson. Contributions can be sent to: Ann Mason Memorial Fund, Clinton County Regional Education Agency, 1013 South US27, St. Johns, MI 48879.

## Ann Mason

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## Thank You to the Friends of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

Betty Upjohn Mason  
 Ann Mason Memorial Fund  
 R. E. Olds Foundation  
 Joe D. Pentecost Foundation  
 Richard and Lorayne Otto Charitable Fund  
 Capital Region Community Foundation  
 Friends of Eaton County Parks  
 Harris Nature Center Foundation  
 MiSTEM Advisory Council  
 Meijer, Inc.  
 Michigan Nature Association  
 Wheels to Woods Fund  
 Michigan State University Outreach and  
 Engagement  
 Michigan Alliance for Environmental and  
 Outdoor Education  
 Clinton County Regional Education  
 Service Agency  
 School Districts: Bath, Diocese of Lansing,  
 Holt, Lansing, Portland





# Recognition for Annie's BIG Nature Lesson



September 28, 2019 -- the Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE) presented the Julian W. Smith Excellence in Outdoor Education Award to Margaret Holtschlag. This award celebrates Margaret's accomplishments of creating and implementing Annie's BIG Nature Lesson for more than 30,000 students, hundreds of educators, and countless families, schools, and communities throughout mid-Michigan. Margaret Holtschlag was recognized for her work of creating and implementing Annie's BIG Nature Lesson since 2002, and for spreading this unique model of teaching and learning to 10 nature centers throughout mid-Michigan.

February 19, 2020 -- Michigan State University Outreach and Engagement presented the 2020 Distinguished Partnership Award for Community-Engaged Teaching to Dr. Shari Dann and Margaret Holtschlag for their work of Teacher Leadership Development for Annie's BIG Nature Lesson and Great Lakes Watershed Stewardship. This award recognizes highly engaged and scholarly community-based research, creative activity, teaching, and collaboration that positively impact both the community and scholarship.





# Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

## *By the Numbers*

**12**

Lansing area schools across 5 districts, investing the  
time and energy in this worthwhile program

**957**

Lansing area students learning, engaging, and cultivating a love of  
the natural world, along with their 41 incredible teachers

**25**

Classes canceled due to Covid-19 in March 2020,  
across 8 school districts

**18**

Years of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson

**31,341**

(and counting) students who have experienced the awe-inspiring  
study trip that they will remember for a lifetime at  
Annie's BIG Nature Lesson



2019-2020

# Stewardship Projects

*Ushering in the newest generation of  
environmental stewards*



RESTORING SCHOOL NATURE TRAILS  
TESTING WATER QUALITY OF LOCAL RIVERS  
BUILDING ANIMAL HABITATS  
PICKING UP LITTER

COLLECTING, SORTING, DISPERSING SEEDS  
CELEBRATION OF LEARNING SCHOOL EVENT  
BUILDING MASON BEES "HOTEL" (NESTING SITES)  
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY FAMILY NIGHT

PREPARING AREA AND LAYING BOARDS FOR SALAMANDER RESEARCH PROJECT  
STEPPING STONES FOR BENDEL LABYRINTH GARDEN





# Participating Teachers

2019-2020

*Thank you to the teachers who exemplify the very best in education,  
with creativity and flexibility in this school year.*

**Lansing School District Schools:**  
**Dwight Rich School of the Arts,**  
**Gier Park, Lewton Global**

**Studies/Spanish Immersion**  
**School, North, Sheridan Road**  
**STEM, Wexford Montessori**

Jennifer Adams

Terrel Boyd

Alesha Cole

Ellen Corrie

Sarah Curry

Jody DeLong

Katerin Duran

Tiffany Gravier

Jennifer Haring

Cynthia Kolberg

Karen McKinstry

Shirley Patrick

Karla Pavey

Jennifer Rice

Jaimie Rollins

Anna Romsek

Traci Shepard

Kristina Swisher

Pamela Switzer

Jody Albert-Vicary

Anastasia Vuckovich

Esther Weiss

**Bath School District**  
**Bath Elementary**

Andrea Hartlund

Parker Mannon

Harleigh Putmon

Michelle Walters

**St. Martha's School**

Marynia Lorencen

**St. Michael's School**

Katie Schneider

Nathan Sweet



**Portland School District:**  
**Westwood Elementary**

Amanda Beckett

Laura Crossley

Michael Fezzey

Rachel Fisher

Kyle Janetzke

Katlyn Moran

**Holt School District:**  
**Elliott, Sycamore**

Megan Curtis

Jason Gentry

Roxanne Klauka

Lise Martin

Emily Simowski

Traci Steere



# ABNL Nature Centers

*Thank you to the nature centers, who say to children and parents,  
"You are welcome here anytime!"*

**Bengel Wildlife Center**, located in Bath, is the home of the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy. Bengel has 259 acres of wetlands, ponds, upland forests, prairies, a bog, and Prigooris Lake. Staff: John Ropp.

**Fenner Nature Center**, located in the heart of Lansing, has 134 acres of prairies, ponds, and forests. Fenner Conservancy connects people to nature through conservation, education, and stewardship. Staff: Liz Roxberry, Jenny Mensch.

**Harris Nature Center**, located in Okemos on the Red Cedar River, features 200 acres of forests, meadows, and wetlands. Its mission is to protect, promote, and interpret the Red Cedar River and its surrounding ecosystems. Staff: Kati Adams, Allison Goodman.

**Lincoln Brick Park**, located in Grand Ledge along the Grand River, has 90 acres of prairies, woodlands, ponds, and historic ruins. Eaton County Parks provide protection of natural, cultural, and historical resources, preservation of green space, and environmental education. Staff: Jackie Blanc.

**Woldumar Nature Center**, located on the Grand River on Lansing's west side, has over 5 miles of trails and 178 acres of prairies, ponds, forests, and woodlands. Its mission is to educate people about the natural environment. Staff: Kevin Wernet, Emma Campbell, Dan Auer, and Whitney Beaird.

**Other Participating Nature Centers:** Kalamazoo Nature Center (Kalamazoo), Dahlem Conservancy (Jackson), Seven Ponds Nature Center, (Dryden), Leslie Science and Nature Center (Ann Arbor), and Wilder Creek (Marshall).





# Annie's ReWired Teachers

*Thank you to the Rewired teacher volunteers who taught nature lessons, designed and presented learning activities at the teacher training, and facilitated 34 planning meetings with naturalists and teachers. Now, they are furthering the mission of ABNL through online opportunities and experiences: designing and producing videos, learning activities and plans, and meeting virtually with teachers and students.*



Pictured below in a Zoom meeting (from left): Ruth Pearson, Margaret Holtschlag, Dave Brigham, Dave Buetel, Cathie Wood, Stephanie Knapp, Jill Tribell and Roseann Dailey.  
Not pictured in Zoom: Jan Derksen, Shirley Hazlett and Joni Baker





# Wows and Wonders

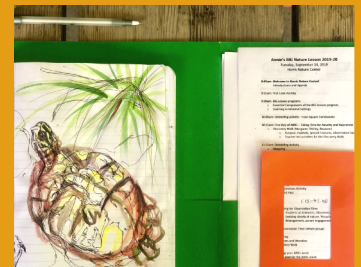
*Celebrating those who embody the spirit of Annie's BIG Nature Lesson with their commitment to students during these uncertain times*



It was a strong beginning of the 2019-20 school year, with 41 classes of children, teachers, and parents. A wet and chilly autumn season did not dampen the enthusiasm for learning outdoors, and the children inspired us in their wonder and resilience in the ABNL weeks from September 2019 to mid-March 2020. Schools closed on March 13, 2020, because of Covid-19, and 25 ABNL classes were cancelled. What happened next was an inspiration—teachers continued the teaching and learning online in creative and flexible ways, and many of our ABNL teachers continued to nurture the love and awareness of the natural world with their students, inviting the children to do outdoor explorations with their parents.

## Teacher Workshops

August 2019: Pure Michigan summer days for teachers along the Lansing River Trail to learn about Michigan Science Standards, animals of the Great Lakes, and technology tools for observation and plant identification. They participated in guided walks along the Red Cedar River, conversations among teachers, and curriculum writing as they prepared for their ABNL weeks.



September 2019: 49 new and returning ABNL teachers gathered at Harris Nature Center and Bengel Wildlife Center to learn outdoor lessons and strategies for their ABNL weeks. Rewired teachers taught environmental and science-based lessons including: Aquatic Life, Plant Dissection, Careers in Conservation, Poetry, Orienteering, Animal Habitats, Drawing and Looking Closely, Ecosystems, Water Topics, Photography, and Journal Writing. Teachers' dedication, purpose, and enthusiasm for showing students the wonder of the outdoors was an inspiring way to launch the school year.





Andrea Hartlund, third grade teacher in Bath said, "During our ABNL week, I was amazed by the high level of questioning my students had with each naturalist and the deep understanding they were grasping. They brought a variety of styles, sketches, and emotions to the pages of their journals each day. I treasured our final goodbye huddle we had on Friday. It felt so natural and full of genuine appreciation for having spent the last five days together. ABNL is always a true highlight of my year! During the shutdown, my lesson plans frequently included outdoor learning, using our memory of ABNL to help kids connect when everyone was missing each other. Our in-person community ended so abruptly and I wanted them to know our experiences together were still at the core of our distant connection. My heart is so full!

By consistently pointing out the beauty, sounds, smells, and calm all around them, Tiffany Gravier, multi-grades teacher from Wexford Montessori in Lansing, instilled wonder in her students, many of whom were previously fearful of the outdoors. By the end of the ABNL week, one student said, "I love the forest trails now. It's not scary, it's peaceful!" Tiffany gave her students a fun and positive experience outside, changing their fear into love. When schools shut down, Tiffany invited students and parents to join her every Sunday for cycling on the trails at Harris Nature Center. She taught them how to pedal up and down the "pump track," how to ride on the trails, and everyone wore a helmet, and everyone learned about safety. Tiffany's goal was to get kids outside and to help parents have quality time with their kids. Tiffany continued nurturing the love of the outdoors, and said that it was mentally and physically awesome for everyone—children, parents, and her.



Chelsee Schram, second grade teacher in Morrice said, "I started in the beginning of the school year with building classroom community, using the principles of ABNL. Our lessons were built on the dream of connecting everything to the real world. Throughout the school year, we did First Look every day, and nature walks, so when school shut down, I refused to let the momentum slow down. My kids took lots of pictures (bones, fossils, leaves, anything) and sent them to me before class so that we could all discuss together. We connected their pictures to geometry, graphing, and categorizing. I did a Zoom lesson at my beehives to teach about bees and pollination. We were learning online, using the outdoors as part of our learning, and we kept it up. I was teaching my students not only about thinking critically, but about communicating their natural thoughts. Kids naturally ask questions, and in my class we inquire about everything."







# THE MISSION OF ANNIE'S BIG NATURE LESSON

**Immerse** children, teachers, and parents in the beauty and wonder of the natural world;

**Engage** them in authentic scientific investigations of the local ecology by observing, drawing, and writing;

**Nurture** citizens who value and protect natural resources;

**Build** school-community based partnerships that inspire responsible environmental stewardship.



*Endnote from the Director, thinking about the past and present of racial justice as it relates to Annie's BIG Nature Lesson:*

Black Lives Matter  
in the schools, hospitals, streets, businesses, everywhere.

And...Black Lives Matter  
on the trails, at the pond, in the forest, in the prairie.

Black Lives Matter  
in our conversations with children, parents, and teachers  
with their nature journals, binoculars, magnifying lenses -- we are learning together.

Black Lives Matter  
with the children's wonder, questions, observations, reflections.

Delight in all that we see/hear/do in nature.  
ABNL is committed to learn and to do better.

ABNL is committed to question with you, learn with you, explore with you, wonder with you.  
We will stand with you, shelter with you, take care of this Earth with you.