

FREE HAVEN, LLC

Company Overview & Expansion Plans



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FREE HAVEN FOREST SCHOOL

Free Haven is committed to preserving childhood. We create memorable and educational outdoor learning experiences that create a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.



OVER 150

children are served by Free Haven Forest School at any given time, and

OVER 300

unique children have gone through our Forest School Experience.

FOREST SCHOOL BEGINS IN OUR OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS, WHICH CONSIST OF A SEATING AREA AROUND A FIRE PIT AND PICNIC TABLES TO WORK ON PROJECTS.

WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

Forest School is a concept originated in Scandinavia, where schools use local woodland areas to hold outdoor activities in order to foster children's problem-solving and cooperative skills, as well as their confidence and self-esteem.



The forest school philosophy is based on the idea that nature provides the context for all learning and provides meaningful, holistic, real-life experiences.



Forest school shifts away from the traditional education model and the pressures of attainment, achievement, and worksheets.



Instead, it looks towards the individual way that children develop beyond mere academic skills, giving a more rounded educational experience.

Our outdoor classrooms serve as the hub for learning. It is the place we do hands-on activities, discuss the learning topics, and is our gathering point for the day. Lots of other learning takes place in nature as students explore trails, study local ecology, and use their imagination as they build their own play environment.

100%

of our learning is done outside at Forest School!



WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS:



The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly supports children being outside for extended periods of time.

Studies show that children who spend more time outdoors report:

LOWER rates of obesity	LESS anxiety and depression	AND higher levels of focus.	They also experience lower symptoms of ADHD, MORE IMAGINATION & CREATIVITY,	AND LESS CONFLICT WITH PEERS, along with increased memory, lower rates of myopia and improved social skills. <small>1, 2, 3</small>
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1. Sprague, N. L., Bancalari, P., Karim, W., Siddiq, S., (2022). Growing up green: A systematic review of the influence of greenspace on youth development and health outcomes. *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology*
2. Li, D., Menotti, T., Ding, Y., Wells, N. M., (2021). Life course nature exposure and mental health outcomes: A systematic review and future directions. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18
3. Mygind, L., Kurtzhals, M., Nowell, C., Melby, P. S., Stevenson, M. P., Nieuwenhuijsen, M., Lum, J. A. G., Flensburg-Madsen, T., Bentsen, P., Enticott, P. G., (2021). Landscapes of becoming social: A systematic review of evidence for associations and pathways between interactions with nature and socioemotional development in children. *Environment International*, 146



FOLLOWING RULES AND BEING ABLE TO MEMORIZE AND REGURGITATE INFORMATION ARE THE MAIN TEACHING TOOLS USED FOR THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS.

Our goals need to shift to promote resilience, self-motivation, flexibility, creativity and collaboration.

The goals of public education are worthy ones: To make good people, to make good citizens, and to make each person his or her personal best.

The issue is, our approach to public education was based in the industrial age when a good citizen was an individual prepared for a workforce assembly line that is no longer existent the current American economy.

The Forest School method of education is set apart from the traditional methods in our modern, fast-paced, changing society by helping our students develop skills not just academic in nature, but also social and emotional. This is creating holistically healthy individuals ready to be successful in any job market. Creativity and innovation are paramount; the information age does not need more assembly line workers. Free Haven Forest School is teaching tomorrow's problem solvers and leaders.



WHAT MAKES US DIFFERENT?

The state of Illinois does not currently have any legislation or licensing regarding forest schools. We aim to be **the** standard in outdoor education, poised to work with lawmakers and other stakeholders to make the forest school experience accessible to as many children as possible while remaining true to its values.

Simply put, we don't compromise.

Our goal is to use a student's curiosity and wonder for the natural world to teach **how** to learn instead of **what** to learn. Instead of the traditional model of attainment and achievement, we look toward the individual way that children develop in areas of their life beyond just academics. Forest School is preserving childhood. All of this is safe, standardized, scalable, and fun.



Free Haven

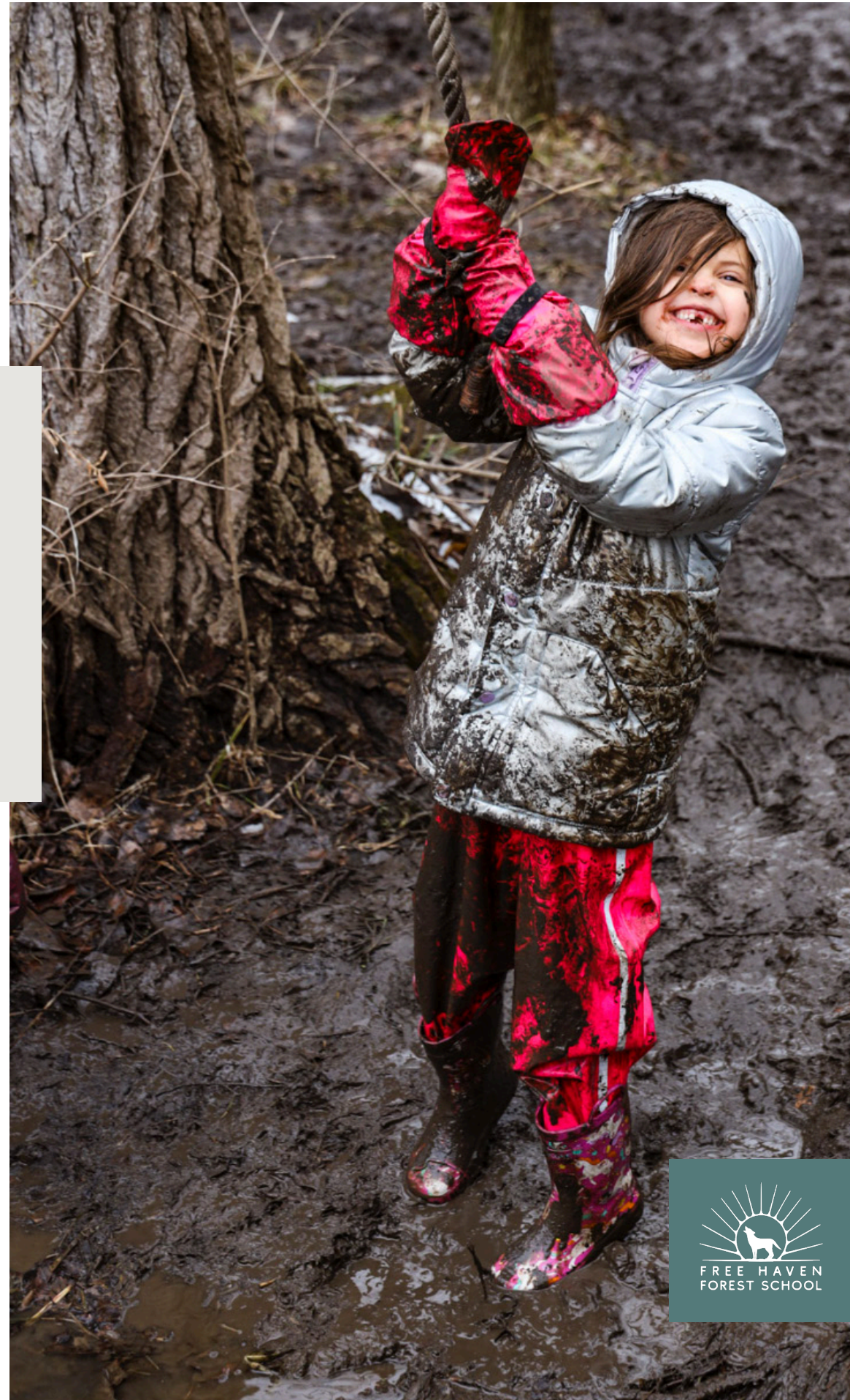
1. Our Forest School meets outside in all weather, an important aspect of our philosophy that teaches resilience.
2. Free Haven has a pure approach to the Forest School philosophy. We are free of worksheets and instead are filled with hands-on, real-life experiences as the catalyst for learning.
3. We own our space, which gives us the freedom to grow and expand beyond the capacities of what most Forest Schools can achieve.

The Competition

"Nature-based" programs aren't committed to a full day outside, opting instead for comfort and convenience.

Other local Forest School programs water down the Forest School philosophy by doing worksheets outdoors, offering an ineffective hybrid of teaching styles and relying on traditional benchmarks.

They rent space, which limits opportunities for discovery off-trail, the ability to interact with nature, and hinders community involvement.



GETTING OUR HANDS DIRTY IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF FOREST SCHOOL.



FOREST SCHOOLS ACROSS THE NATION



Minnesota has recognized the benefits of forest school for over 70 years. In 1949 they passed a School Forest Law (Statute 89.41) enabling school owned lands to be a designated School Forest. The Minnesota DNR operates the School Forest Program under this statute, allowing all public schooled children in the state access to forest school programs.



In 2019, Washington State became the first state to license outdoor preschools. Legislation included the development of an Outdoor Preschool Advisory Group to provide the opportunity for all stakeholders to have a voice in the development of licensing standards. Programs participating in licensing can represent themselves in new ways, access new kinds of funding, and offer full-day programming, vastly improving accessibility to forest schools across the state.



AS ONE OF THE ONLY FULLY OUTDOOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN THE STATE, FREE HAVEN IS BLAZING THE TRAIL FOR FOREST SCHOOL METHODOLOGY TO BE ADOPTED BY LEGISLATORS AND TEACHERS IN ILLINOIS.

OUR ETERNAL FOCUS

At Free Haven Forest School, we point everything back to Christ. Where many secular Forest Schools teach chants to mother nature and make creation itself a deity, we keep the focus on the Creator. At our core, we are a Christian school and we preach the gospel to our students. In our daily activities we incorporate prayers, Bible stories, Bible verse memorization, and conversations about God.

All of our staff are Christians, but not all of our clients are. We believe that children's natural curiosity and wonder are perfect inroads to talk about God. As they take these conversations home with them, our hope is that it is an opportunity for the whole family to explore faith and discover the gospel.

The privilege of educating the next generation isn't lost on us. Our child-led curriculum means that our students get to explore and hone-in on their God-given abilities from an early age. We're committed to teaching each student how God values them just the way He made them. Because faith is woven into each area of learning, our students can discover how to find purpose and meaning through any area of their life.



START CHILDREN OFF ON THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO,
AND EVEN WHEN THEY ARE OLD THEY WILL NOT TURN FROM IT.
- PROVERBS 22:6



TEACHING ABOUT GOD'S CREATION IN HIS CREATION.

It is said that nature is the best teacher; we believe that this is because its beautiful designs and intricate harmonies point to a divine creator. Being outdoors makes it easy to talk about God.

The outdoor environment offers countless opportunities to have conversations about our eternal destination. When a dead dove was discovered at forest school, the children had lots of questions about life and death. As a way to work through their experience, the students decided to have an impromptu funeral for the creature, demonstrating a high level of empathy. As they buried the bird and paid their last respects, many of the children decided to say a prayer. These sweet children are a perfect picture of how all life deserves to be honored. We're so full of awe and pride as our students demonstrate how to be kind to all creation.

OUR PROGRAMS

Free Haven offers a variety of opportunities for families interested in getting their children outdoors in a meaningful way, from pre-k to first grade school-year programs, to one week specialty classes and summer camps, to educational experiences made for the whole family to enjoy all at once. Programs are always growing, changing, and developing but below is a sample of our core curriculum.

Preschool

Offered up to 3 days a week, this is a 3-hour program where children choose their own learning topics and build skills like leadership, independence, empathy, curiosity, the ability to research, and self-confidence.

K-1 Forest Explorers

A nature enrichment program for 5-7 year olds. Our teachers weave science, math, literacy, phonics and reading activities into our child-led curriculum, and help children explore academic topics through hands-on experiences.

Stay-&-Play

Stay-&-Play is a 2-hour weekly program for preschool aged children where mom or dad stay and hang out with like-minded families. This is perfect for homeschoolers or people thinking about home schooling.

Survival School

Designed to meet students where they are, a multitude of skills are taught to our survivors such as: fire making, shelter building, first aid, orienteering, knot tying, outdoor cooking, knife safety, and more!

Family Lab

Experience an outdoor ecology lab for the whole family! Offered as a flat-rate for any size family, children go through a weekly lesson on a local flora, fauna, and fungi then have a hands-on exploration of the weekly topic.

Summer Camps

Summer camps are offered as a week-long deep dive into a variety of topics such as art making from found objects, ecological scavenger hunts, shelter building, and more.

While we are constantly growing and developing new programs, these are the family favorites you can always expect from Free Haven.



A FOREST EXPLORER TESTING THE LIMITS OF HER BALANCE AND COURAGE



MEET OUR FOUNDER

Rachel Mikottis is a quintessential homeschool success story. Since her entire education K-12 was spent homeschooled, she was untethered from the rigid structure of the traditional school system and had plenty of opportunities to tinker and explore outdoors.

Being connected to nature in a free-play setting was foundational to her childhood, fostering traits such as curiosity, independence, fine motor skills, imagination, self-confidence, and a love for all things growing and living.

By the age of 16, she had graduated from high school and began pursuing a degree in education. In 2015 she began her teaching career at a traditional daycare facility and quickly came to the realization that this model was not a good fit for her or for the children in the program. The contrast between her joyful upbringing and the harsh fluorescent light, worksheets, and instructions to sit still and be quiet felt like an environment where children are not meant to thrive.

Seeking a better alternative, she co-founded a nature-based 503c non-profit preschool in 2016 that would go on to become licensed by DCFS in 2018. This, however, was still not the right formula. Being nature-based meant that the teaching style was still a hybrid of the traditional teaching philosophy and something more organic, and being indoors more than half the time hindered the development and learning experience of the students.

While the world shut down during the peak of the COVID pandemic in 2020, Rachel would take that opportunity to further her education and attend the Forest School Teaching Institute and get a certification in both teaching and directorship. This led her to pursue a master's degree in outdoor education, which she will earn in May, 2023.

With the formula finally perfected, in the fall of 2021 she founded Free Haven Forest School, which has grown from a staff of 1 to a staff of 8 and serves over 150 children a week.

Free Haven aims to become the premier hub of outdoor education in the Midwest, offering not only a wide range of outdoor experiences for children, but also Continuing Education Credits and professional development opportunities for teachers from all over the region, spreading the mission of getting as many children outdoors as possible.



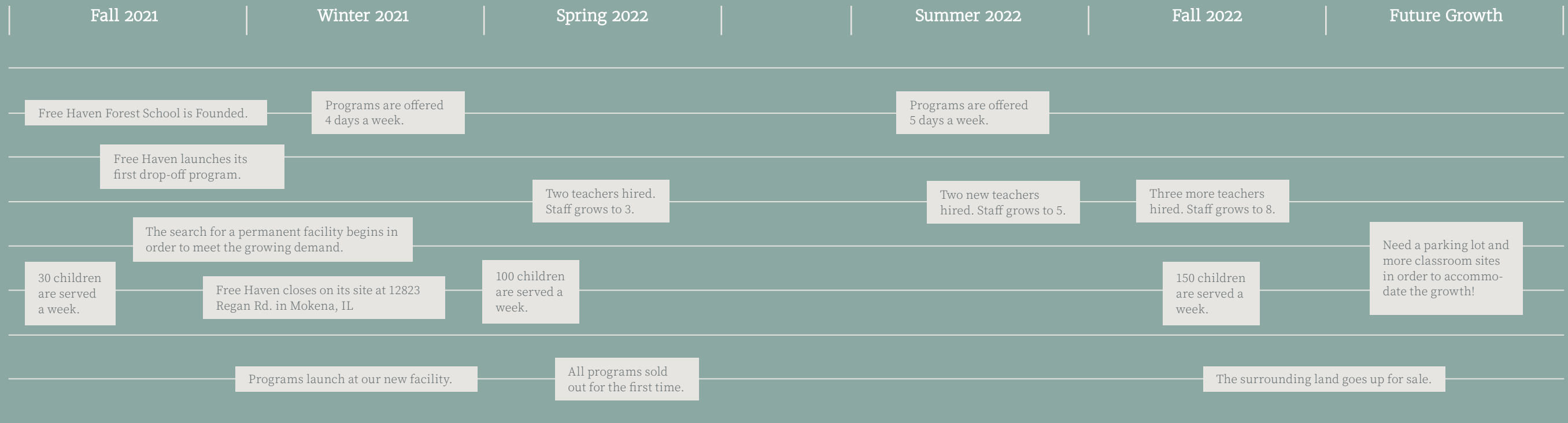
RACHEL MIKOTTIS AWARDING A PRESCHOOL DIPLOMA.
FREE HAVEN FOREST SCHOOL, MAY 2022





COMPANY TIMELINE

A brief history of our company and its growth from inception to date.



August 2021

Company is founded.

Free Haven began by meeting at forest preserves in Will County under a permit for "Family Lab", a weekly hands-on ecology program for students aged 3-10 and their parents. We held our weekly classes at Goodenow Grove, Hammel Woods, and Hickory Creek preserve.

October 2021

Drop-off Program Launched.

We launched our first drop-off preschool program for ages 3-5 at a rented location: Amazing Love church in Frankfort, IL, which met two days per week. We also hosted a stay-and-play preschool program in which parents were invited to stay and participate 1 day per week with their children.

January, 2022

Programs begin in Mokena, IL.

By January 2022, all programs have been transitioned over to our permanent location in Mokena, IL, with access to a rich outdoor environment and a schoolhouse shelter with 2 bathrooms.

May, 2022

Summer Camps Start

Free Haven launches a variety of summer camps that were full all summer long. We had 30 kids in summer camps and over 40 families in our Family Lab program.

Fall 2022

Bursting at the Seams

We added a K-1 program while we continued Family Lab and our Preschool program. Families are filling up classes with pre-registration before they are publicly available. The majority of our programs have waiting lists. Continued growth is becoming restricted by parking.

Future Plans

Where do we go from here?

Free Haven has outgrown its existing parking and teaching spaces. We need more land in order to keep meeting the growing demand.



EXPANSION PLANS

The simple fact is that we have outgrown our site. Over 60 cars a day park and pull out of our residential driveway, representing the 75 students a day that are taught in our two classroom sites. Thankfully, our 2 acre site is surrounded by 47 additional acres of undeveloped land that consists of prairie, wetlands, creek, and forest. This land just went up for sale, which is an incredible opportunity for Free Haven Forest School to expand into the premier site for outdoor education. With a site of this scale, we will become the hub - not just for children - but also for teachers throughout the region to learn from nature and experience Forest School.



A vision of the future of Free Haven

01

02

03

Phase 01

Build-out. We expand to a 50 acre wooded site and build long-term facilities.

Phase 02

Development. We add 3 additional classroom sites and create more trails.

Phase 03

Refinement. We add 2 additional classrooms, bringing the total to 9. An outdoor amphitheater is built. The trail network is developed across the entire property.



Our current site
Our room to grow!





PHASE 01

In Phase 01, we acquire the 47 acres of land surrounding our current property, we build a 75+ car parking lot to accommodate our growing traffic, and construct a 5,000 sf multi-purpose nature center. This building will be used as a restroom facility, a shelter for our students during extreme weather, a learning environment, as well as a space for professional development. As a satellite site for the Forest School Teacher Institute, this will be our hub for certifying local teachers and providing CEU courses for anyone in the region. After hours, it may also be a space rented out for large events such as weddings.

In this phase, we also add two new classrooms to the land and an construct additional 1-1/2 miles of trails, more than doubling our current capacity for programming.



Phase 01
BUILD-OUT

Phase 02
DEVELOPMENT

Phase 03
REFINEMENT



PHASE 02

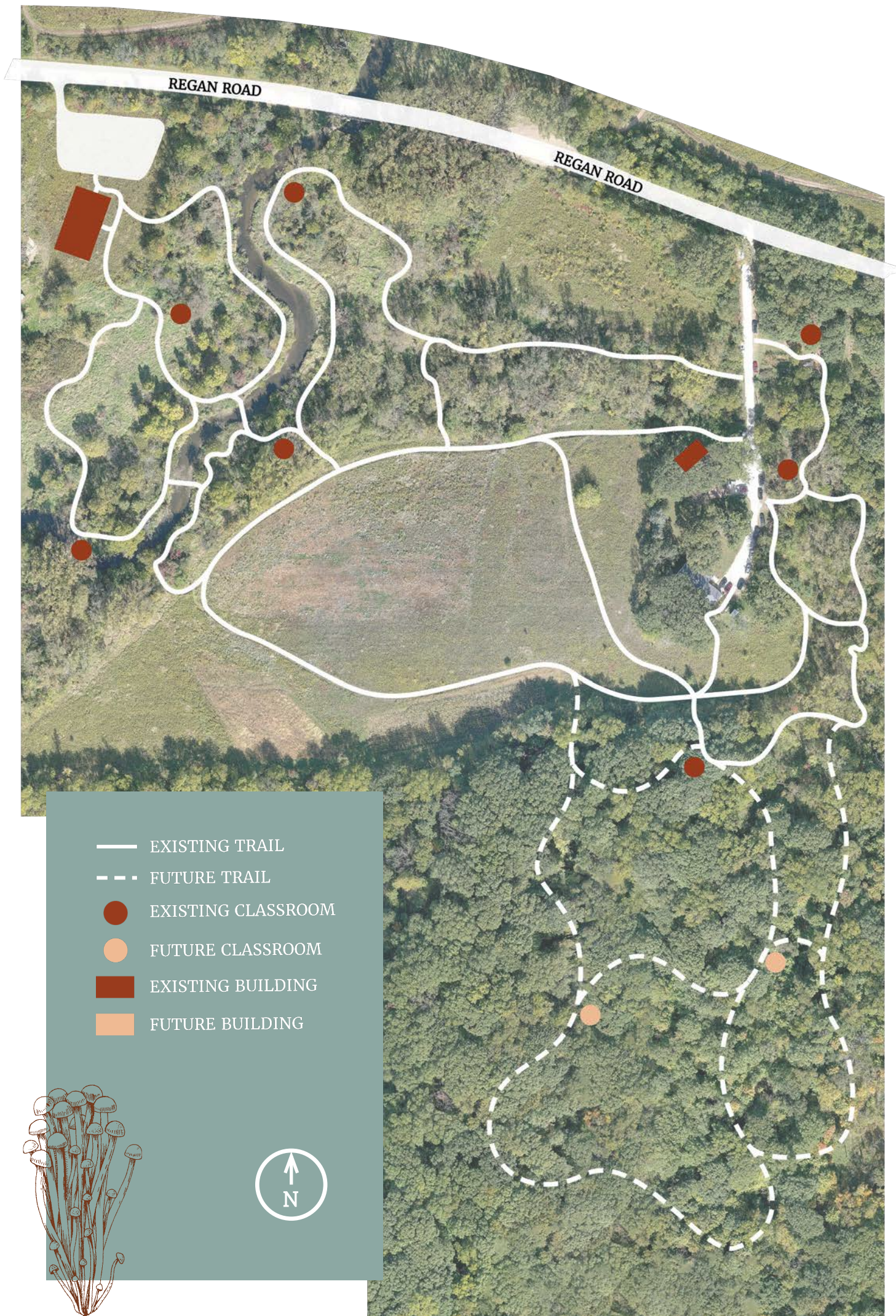
In the second phase, we add an additional 0.25 mile of trails and construct three additional classroom sites, bringing the total number of teaching locations to 7. At this point, we plan to offer full day programs for a variety of ages. The site on the west side of Marley Creek becomes properly linked to the east site with a professional grade bridge. Existing trail widths and grades are greatly improved, creating a loop that parents can walk with strollers through our preserve.



Phase 01
BUILD-OUT

Phase 02
DEVELOPMENT

Phase 03
REFINEMENT



PHASE 03

In Phase 03, emphasis is placed on refinement. The outdoor teaching spaces are expanded and improved for the specialties that are taught at each location. An outdoor amphitheater is constructed for teaching large groups outdoors, graduation ceremonies, and private events.

The nature center has been expanded and private office spaces are added. Collaboration is fostered with outside organizations, particularly with speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral therapists, bringing the outdoors to professional help.

The two final classrooms are built in the woods, bringing the total tally to 9. Programs are offered for students K-12.



Phase 01
BUILD-OUT

Phase 02
DEVELOPMENT

Phase 03
REFINEMENT

CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE

Phase 01 BUILD-OUT

- February 1, 2023: Apply for building permits.
- April 14, 2023: Close on the land, begin blazing trails.
- April 15–17, 2023: Build the gravel parking lot.
- April 17–20, 2023: Pour foundation & slab for the Nature Center.
- April 21–30, 2023: Drill well, install septic tank, get power on site.
- May 1–3, 2023: Erect the Nature Center.
- May 4, 2023: Trails complete.
- May 4–19, 2023: Interior build-out of Nature Center, clear classroom sites.
- May 22, 2023: Grand Opening!

Phase 02 DEVELOPMENT

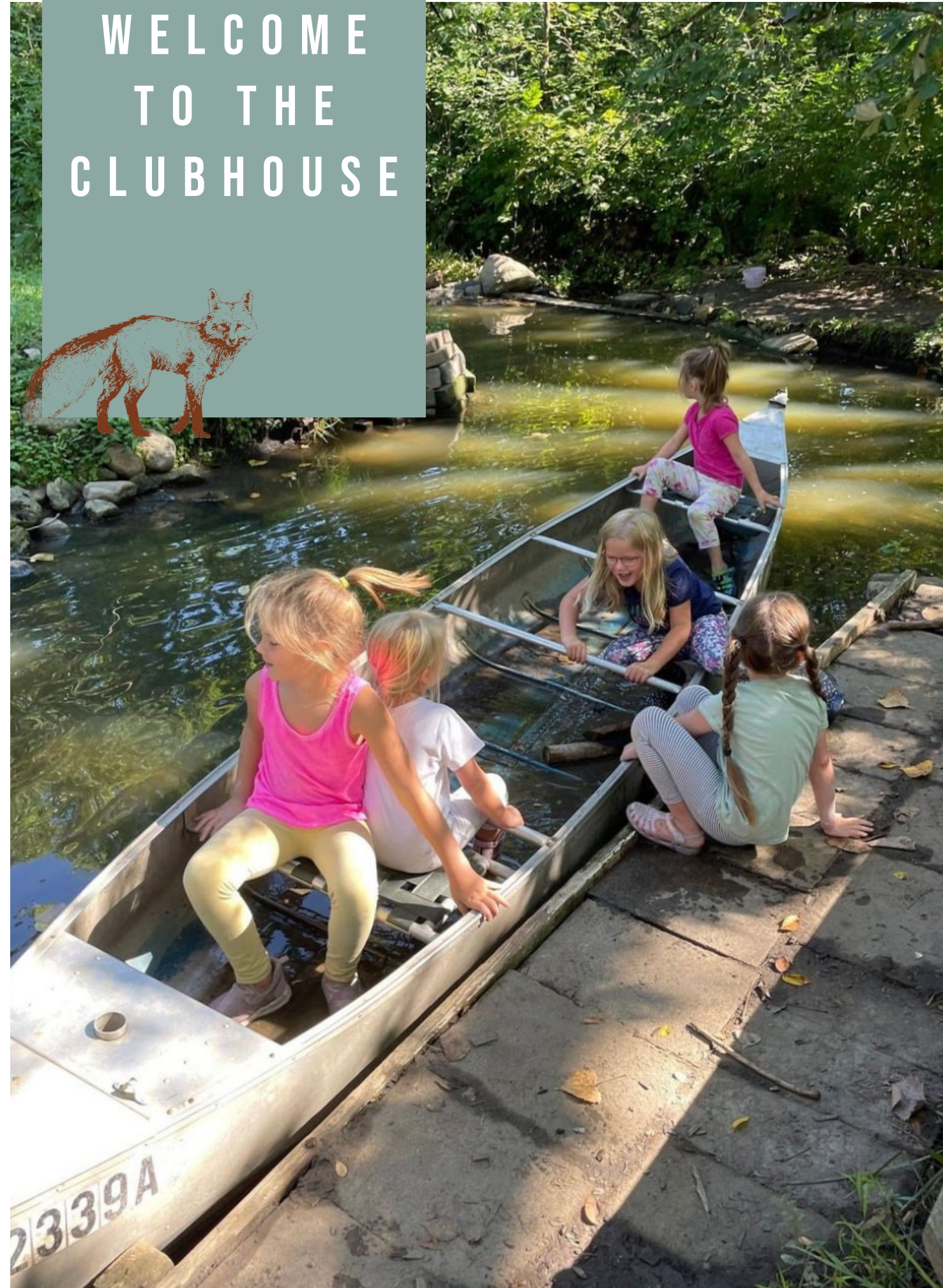
Spring, 2024.

Phase 03 REFINEMENT

Spring, 2026.



WELCOME TO THE CLUBHOUSE



What is The Clubhouse?

The clubhouse is an exclusive membership program for our donors who have gone above and beyond to help us take the Free Haven Forest School experience to the next level of growth. Benefits are valid for 1 year after the opening of the parking lot and trail expansion on the West Side of Marley Creek. ETA: Spring 2023.



At the \$2,500 donor level, perks include:

- VIP Priority Registration, available 1 week before Early Bird Registration and 2 weeks before the general public.
- Access to purchase our limited runs of site-made consumables like our raw honey, elderberry syrups, and maple syrup.
- Special Admittance to 4 special events a year like our seasonal family festivals.
- Exclusive Access to Clubhouse Merch.



At the \$5,000 donor level, perks include:

- All of the benefits of the Evergreen donor level plus...
- Exclusive access to our trail network & nature preserve 365 days a year, dawn to dusk. All trail users must pass a background check. Classroom spaces not included.
- Tree planted in our donor orchard, your gift today will bear fruit for generations!
- Membership in the VIP Advisory board, helping making decisions about future programming and events.



At the \$10,000 donor level, perks include:

- All of the benefits of the Silver Maple & Evergreen levels plus...
- Site feature named after the person, family, or company of your choice, such as a bench, classroom, or bridge across Marley Creek.
- One-of-a-kind access to our Nature Center Facility for birthday parties, special celebrations, and corporate events. One free rental of our entire site is included. An \$8,000 value!
- Tuition prices locked in at our 2023 rate for the next 4 years.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER JOINING OUR CLUBHOUSE?

We cannot grow without the help of generous donors like you. By investing in Free Haven Forest School, your gift will immediately help build a Nature Center, double our capacity for enrolment, and blaze an additional mile of trails. Allowing children to interact with nature will raise the next generation with greater empathy, curiosity, and self-confidence. By investing in Free Haven, you are investing in childhood.



Evergreen

TIER 1 - \$2,500



Silver Maple

TIER 2 - \$5,000



White Oak

TIER 3 - \$10,000+



PRESERVING CHILDHOOD.

Committed to educating in the outdoors
all year long.

For the current list of our programs, please look on our website.



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FOREST SCHOOL**

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