



Joy is found in a hollow log and dozens of hands-on activities at the expo.

MOHEE, Yippee!

STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND CONSERVATION PARTNER ENTHUSIASM FOR MIDWEST OUTDOOR HERITAGE EDUCATION EXPO 2015 MEANS RECORD SUCCESS AT MACKENZIE CENTER.

Story by Mark LaBarbera, photos by Chico La Barbera

“Events like this put dreams in young hearts,” Ray Howell told the media at his Kicking Bear Foundation’s tomahawk-throwing station at the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo.

Ruth Ann Lee and Chrystal Seeley-Schreck, education co-leads at DNR’s MacKenzie Center agreed, adding, “If you want to know how well your youth event is connecting students and teachers to conservation and outdoor skills, listen to them at the end of the day as they talk among themselves while waiting for their bus.”

We did.

What we heard exceeded expectations of event partners. It bodes well for skills training at the DNR’s 500-acre Columbia County property and

throughout Wisconsin.

After the two-day May event, letters and drawings arrived from students and teachers, adding to the positive feedback.

“There was truly something for everyone,” wrote Cuba City teachers, noting, “The only thing more impressive than the variety of activities was the enthusiastic and knowledgeable professionals who went above and beyond to make sure our students felt safe, comfortable and excited.”

Teacher Gina Rollins said, “For many

of our students, this was the first time they had been exposed to Wisconsin’s outdoor heritage and related activities. The stations provoked an interest and sense of appreciation for Wisconsin’s natural resources. Those students left wanting to learn more about a world they would not have had the opportunity to explore without attending this year’s expo.”

A Fall River student, wrote, “My favorite parts were shooting the BB guns, climbing the tower, holding the baby pheasants and the animal mounts. I also liked the dog demo.”

“This was our all-time best field trip ever,” was the most frequent comment from students, along with, “Can we come back next year?”

A record 2,380 students, chaperones and teachers enjoyed a touch of the wild at this year’s MOHEE (mo’-hee), or MO-HEXPO (mo-hex’-po), as some call it.

The total included 1,967 mostly fourth through sixth graders who tried their hand at outdoor skills with help from volunteer mentors and DNR staff. Last year’s inaugural event was a success with 1,435 students. This year’s event

not only had more students, but also more schools, more partners and more skills training and other activities, as well as more adults. Some of the 413 chaperones and teachers also discovered new activities.

"Even I tried shooting for the first time," said Rollins.

Schools attended from as far away as Appleton, Fond du Lac and Marshfield, often funded by local conservation clubs and county sporting alliances, to see the live animals and try hands-on experiential learning in archery, airgun, birding, fisheries, forestry, parks, wildlife, natural heritage conservation, safety training and more.

At one station, DNR's Davin Lopez and the Natural Heritage Conservation team identified living organisms that students netted in the pond. At another station, Bob Haase and Trout Unlimited volunteers showed those youngsters how to tie fishing flies that match those organisms that fish will eat.

More than 30 groups from the Wisconsin Trappers Association to Madison Audubon, Manitowoc County Fish and Game Alliance, Wings Over Wisconsin, Dane County Conservation League, Wisconsin Muzzle Loaders Association and the Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs, teamed up with three Safari Club International chapters, Wisconsin Friends of NRA, the Department of Natural Resources and the Outdoor Heritage Education Center charitable nonprofit, which organized the event.

OHEC's goal for the annual event is to introduce youth, families and educators to outdoor activities, conservation and safety training programs so they can choose which ones to explore further. Teachers are given information about where students and their families can go to find more information about ongoing programs.

Admission is free thanks to support from many groups, including large donations from the Southeast Wisconsin Bow Hunters Chapter of Safari Club International, SCI Wisconsin and SCI Badgerland chapters plus Wisconsin Friends of NRA and Dane County Conservation League. Next tier donors include National Wild Turkey Federation, Wisconsin Conservation Congress, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Wings Over Wisconsin.

The event introduces the MacKenzie Center to groups that can then help support it year-round as the department uses the property to connect youth with



The "net result" of sampling aquatic education activities at MOHEE is that more students have begun to look more closely at water resources.



Lou George uses cow calls and bugles to attract students to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's activity area where they learn about elk in Wisconsin.



Helping students get hooked on fishing, Trout Unlimited's Bob Haase starts tying the fly that this student completes and takes home.



Simple first-time experiences, like holding a live fish, connect students with resources and leave lasting impressions.

nature, including increasing outdoor skills training and learn to hunt for food programs on the property. Event supporters and natural resources professionals see it as the wide top of a recruitment funnel that can feed the various other opportunities and mentored programs creating conservation-minded citizens, license buyers and informed and engaged future leaders.

Talking about MOHEE again choosing MacKenzie as its venue, JD Smith, the center's director said, "The DNR is a supporting partner at many other expos and we are happy to continue that support by providing an ideal location for schools to bring students for this outdoor experience."

In on-camera interviews during the event, other DNR professionals, like Deputy Secretary Kurt Thiede, mentioned that MacKenzie is a great location for the event. Other DNR staff pointed to the property's unique mix of prairie, pond and forest; bison, wolves and other live wildlife; plus trails, fire tower, syrup-finishing house, logging museum and other facilities.

Dan Schroeder of DNR's law enforcement program said it's cost effective to have the students and teachers discover archery programs and DNR resources available to them while also showcasing the MacKenzie property.

Rob Bohmann, chair of the Wisconsin

Conservation Congress, said, "Friends of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress will donate funds and offer transportation grants again next year (2016) for schools planning to attend the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo, May 18-19."

WCC's Dale Maas told media that he had been involved in other youth expos and sees how good MacKenzie is for such events.

Some funding comes from WCC affiliates, plus individuals and other groups across the state that want their local schools and students to connect with natural resources and healthy outdoor activities.

Columbia County Sporting Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, Dodge County Sporting Conservation Alliance, Columbia/Marquette counties Chapter of Pheasants Forever, North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association, Wisconsin Bowhunters and Whitetails Unlimited are among the groups adding support.

Neil Bishop, president of the Friends of MacKenzie, said, "We're glad to support this event, feed the volunteers and showcase MacKenzie Center, just 25 miles north of Madison. With interpretive trails, live wildlife, plus museums and education programs for school and youth groups, MacKenzie is a wonderful place to visit and learn about the natural world."

The State Game Farm is connected to the MacKenzie Center and is adjacent to the arboretum on the western half of the property. The facility raises 75,000 pheasants that the Department of Natural Resources releases on more than 90 properties open to the public in Wisconsin.

"Wisconsin conservation is rooted at this place," said Vic Connors, president of the Friends of Poynette Game Farm. "We see this education expo as a valuable way to share this history and build upon our outdoor heritage." 

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Visit outdoorheritageeducationcenter.com or dnr.wi.gov and search keyword "MacKenzie."