

Did You Know? Fall '23 LEEP Day

By Cris Neff with Craig Tanner

Did you know that since 2009, the Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area has partnered with the Drummond Area School District on the Lake Ecology Education Program (LEEP), a program that encourages students to learn about our area's natural resources, their interconnectedness, value, and vulnerability, and to become life-long stewards of the lakes.

The LEEP curriculum, taught by volunteer educators and science and language arts teachers, meets Wisconsin education standards and covers topics as varied as water quality, fisheries management, and shoreline restoration among others. The program includes hands-on classroom lessons plus two field trips a year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

The Fall 2023 LEEP Day, which took place on September 26, was a trip to FOECLA member Carol LeBreck's property on Bony Lake in Barnes, home to multiple, well established Critical Habitats. There, 28 7th grade students and 4 high school helpers were immersed in Lake Ecology through hands on activities. They were assisted by 16 volunteer Faculty and safety personnel, along with DNR and County Environmental Specialists, and their Science and ELA teachers. The low student-to-faculty ratio which contributes to a high level of student engagement throughout the program is a standard practice for LEEP.



The students learned canoe skills, participated in a wetland study and completed labs in Critical Habitat, Plankton, Water Quality, Aquatic Native Plants and Aquatic Invasive Species. The following are some of the students' key take aways from their LEEP experience, as expressed in their wrap-up day evaluations:

Isis: "LEEP made me realize the importance of the lakes."

Mahogany: "I have more respect for the people who try to keep our lakes clean. I will clean my boat after I use it to keep lakes clean."

Emma: "I will take more care of the lakes. I'm more aware of how Critical Habitats can be destroyed."

Jordyn: "I would like to volunteer now!"

Skylar: "Aquatic plants are very important in the nearshore zone." and "I especially liked looking at the plankton through the microscope."

Jaylin: "I'm much more aware of the damage I can cause to the lakes."

Ari: I will try to be a "Steward of the Future".



If you're curious to learn more, visit the [LEEP page on the Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area website](#). The site provides access to numerous resources including teacher guides, student labs, lesson plans, a pre/post assessment, student evaluations and a curriculum guide. We hope you enjoy exploring.

The LEEP content has something for the curious of all ages.



Fall 2023 LEEP Day photos courtesy of Phyllis Olson

Today's author, Cris Neff joined the FOECLA board in 2008. Soon after, the board began work to develop and fund an educational enrichment program focused on healthy lakes, which became LEEP. With Cris's leadership, the program continues to expand, and based on student and volunteer feedback, it thrives. In addition to her work with LEEP, Cris is a diver on the Barnes Area Invasive Species Suction (BAISS) pontoon boat project, which is dedicated to removing aquatic invasive plants from our lakes.

