

Directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators, Fall 2025



**OUTDOOR SCHOOL
FOR ALL**

**PROTECTING
GREEN SPACE**

**STRENGTH
IN CHANGE**

**ALLIED
INSTITUTIONS**



Chippewa Nature Center
Dennis Pilaske
Executive Director

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The *Directions* journal contains news and trends in the nature & environmental learning center profession, as well as relevant resources and stories of innovative leadership.

If you are part of the nature center profession and wish to receive more resources like *Directions*, see [ANCA membership levels](#).

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Cover photo: Migrating Sandhill Cranes at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska. Photo by Don Bruckmeier.

About ANCA

The Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers. Serving more than 700 members, ANCA is the leader in the profession.

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Don't want to read on a screen? Print this issue — and then pass it onto other nature center staff!

Making the Invisible Visible

Jen Levy, ANCA Executive Director

WHEN I STARTED WITH ANCA IN 2007, I thought the fundraising challenges I faced leading a local nature center would disappear. Surely, foundations would be eager to support a national organization serving hundreds of members across North America.

I quickly learned otherwise. Demonstrating the impact of a capacity-building organization is far more complex than showing the results of direct service. In my previous role, I could point to the number of schoolchildren who attended programs, the percentage of those who returned to summer camp, or the number of families who joined weekend events. Now, I'm tasked with showing how capacity building strengthens leadership and infrastructure — with results that multiply across organizations and communities.

Our outcomes are often two or three steps removed from the ultimate beneficiaries. Funders may struggle to see the connection between our work and tangible,

on-the-ground change. Our support is just one factor contributing to a leader's success, making it difficult to attribute specific outcomes solely to ANCA. And some of our most essential impacts are invisible: the crises that never happened, the staff who didn't burn out, the organizations that didn't falter — because an ANCA member attended a CONNECTS session, sought advice on the Discussion Forum, or reached out to a Mentor.

The challenge, then, is to make the invisible visible — to demonstrate how ANCA's work extends outward, enabling others to create a more effective, sustainable, and transformative impact. We do this by combining stories and data: blending the measurable outcomes of our programs with the lived experiences of leaders whose work has been shaped by their involvement in ANCA.

The ANCA Network thrives when ideas and solutions are shared, tested, and spread — sparking innovation and strengthening organizations across

STICK PARKING

A simple — yet effective — idea that has spread via the ANCA network. Some ANCA member organizations have a designated "stick parking" spot, which encourages visitors (especially kids) to leave sticks on-site. Visitors may then pick up a stick when entering the site, using it as a hiking stick or for whimsical play (no swords allowed).

From left to right: stick parking at Irvine Nature Center in Owings Mills, Maryland; Dillon Nature Center in Hutchinson, Kansas; and the Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach, California.



our community. Over the years, I've seen both simple, effective practices take root and more complex strategies emerge to meet evolving challenges.

In addition to sharing ideas and stories, ANCA provides leaders with the professional development that turns those ideas into action. Through programs like the Summits, ANCA CONNECTS, and Peer Consults, we help leaders develop the skills, confidence, and capacity to implement new approaches and strengthen their organizations. This combination of shared wisdom and leadership development is what makes the ANCA Network so powerful — and so enduring.

Our data tells part of this story. In the 2025 ANCA Annual Summit Impact Report, more than 125 leaders participated in the Summit, and 94% reported that the event strengthened their organization's capacity to fulfill its mission. We have similar data from more than 30 years of programming — but we also need stories to bring those numbers to life.

At the 2025 Annual Summit, host Bo Glover, executive director of the Environmental Nature Center (ENC), shared how ANCA has shaped his leadership over the past 30 years. He spoke about being inspired by early adopters of nature-based preschools and green building practices — ideas he encountered at ANCA Summits since his first Summit in 1998. As a result, the ENC earned LEED Platinum certification in 2008 for its new green building and, in 2019, opened its Nature Preschool, a 10,380-square-foot facility that provides nature-based education for children aged 2½ to 5.

Bo continues to inspire others through his leadership. He recently led ENC to achieve TRUE (Total Resource Use and Efficiency) Platinum Certification from Green Business Certification Inc. for outstanding zero-waste performance. At the Summit, he challenged leaders from across the country to prioritize waste reduction and resource conservation — and participants' feedback and social media posts made clear that many returned home determined to take action.

Bo's story is a perfect example of capacity building in motion. The outcomes take time, but they are lasting. His journey reflects the long-term impact of strong leadership, supported and inspired by the ANCA Network.

By sharing stories like Bo's — and yours — we can illuminate the human side of capacity building: the moments of change, resilience, and growth that data alone can't capture. Storytelling helps us show not just what we do, but why it matters, connecting our work to the real-world impact felt by communities across North America.

Your stories are the heart of ANCA's impact, and we want to hear them. Have a story? [Share photos of your story with us.](#)



ALL-TERRAIN WHEELCHAIRS

Many ANCA member organizations offer all-terrain wheelchairs for trail access. Lime Hollow Nature Center in Cortland, New York, partnered with the JM Murray Foundation to offer two Action TrackChairs — an all-terrain wheelchair — for visitor use, year-round and free of charge.

Lime Hollow lent one chair to a nearby ANCA member, Baltimore Woods Nature Center, to use for a week. Baltimore Woods now aims to acquire its own all-terrain wheelchair.

Below, three generations of a family explore Lime Hollow Nature Center trails, thanks to the use of both Action TrackChairs. Photos submitted by Lime Hollow Nature Center.



From the ANCA Team: Updates on ANCA Operations

ANCA's [Core Values](#) hold that we are a welcoming community and that we value learning and sharing. With these values in mind, we want to share operational updates to keep you informed about what's happening behind the scenes at ANCA and how we're working to support our mission. We hope this glimpse into our work helps you feel more connected — and maybe even gives you ideas for your own operations.

Updates to the ANCA Board of Directors

ANCA's Fiscal Year began July 1, and the new fiscal year brought updates to the Board of Directors.

We have multiple changes in Board officers, and we thank two departing members for their contributions to our organization.

Officer Changes

Kristin Smith, Supervisor of the Water Resources Education Center in Vancouver, Washington, has completed her two-year term as Board President. We thank Kristin for her leadership these past two years, and are grateful for her continued service on the Board for the next year as Past President.

We welcome John Myers, Executive Director of Indian Creek Nature Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, into the role of Board President. John has served on the Board since 2019, including two years of service as Treasurer. John is the 2016 recipient of the ANCA Outstanding New Leader Award.

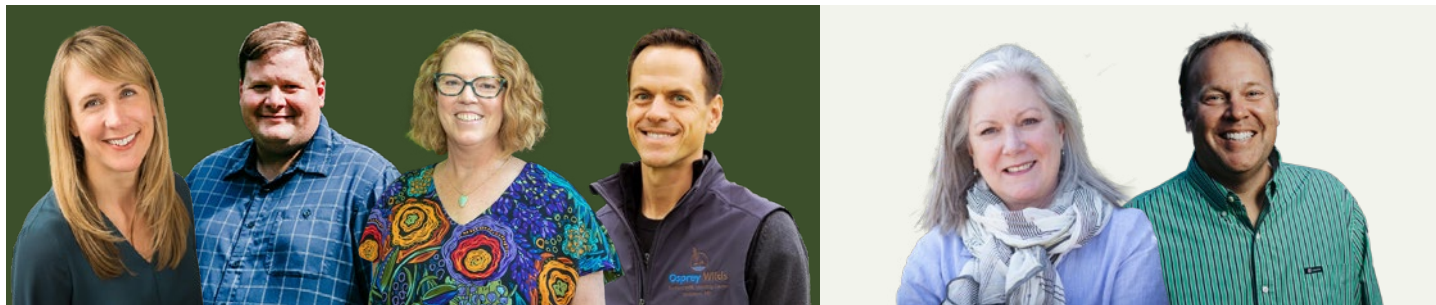
Kay Carlson, Retired President & CEO of the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes in Cleveland, Ohio, steps into the role of Secretary, previously filled by departing Board member Kitty Pochman.

Bryan Wood, Executive Director at Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center in Sandstone, Minnesota, steps into the role of Treasurer, previously filled by departing Board member Jason Sanders.

Departing Board Members

Kitty Pochman, Executive Director of the Linda Loring Nature Foundation in Nantucket, Massachusetts, departs the ANCA Board after nine years of service, including two years as Board President and two years as Secretary. Kitty has also served on the Executive Committee, Governance Committee, Development Committee, and the Leadership Awards Committee. We deeply thank Kitty for her leadership within ANCA and our field more broadly.

Jason Sanders, former Executive Director at Dodge Nature Center in West St. Paul, Minnesota, departs the ANCA Board after two years of service, including one year as Treasurer. Jason has served on the Executive Committee and the Finance Committee. We are grateful to Jason for his contributions to ANCA and our profession, and wish him well on his new professional endeavors.



Left to right: Kristin Smith, John Myers, Kay Carlson, Bryan Wood, Kitty Pochman, and Jason Sanders.

About the Board

The Board supports ANCA's work and provides mission-based leadership and strategic governance. We welcome ANCA members to express interest in joining the Board of Directors and/or a Committee of the Board using [this interest form](#).

2025 ANCA Annual Summit: Impact Report

The Summit may be over, but the impact is just beginning. We're proud to share the impact of the 2025 ANCA Annual Summit, held at the Environmental Nature Center in Newport Beach, California.

More than 125 leaders gathered, and the results speak volumes: 94% say the Summit strengthened their organization's ability to fulfill its mission.

The professionals are returning to work with new ideas, skills, and connections. This has a significant ripple effect — based on the data from our evaluation, we estimate that Summit participants' organizations collectively:

- Serve over 9 million visitors annually
- Provide programs for over 1 million K-12 students annually
- Protect over 300,000 acres of land

All this combined, the Summit majorly contributes to healthier communities and a more sustainable future.

[See the full report here.](#)

ANCA Earns Credential in Fundraising

ANCA recently earned the Utah Nonprofits Association (UNA) credential badge in fundraising and development, demonstrating that we are dedicated to best practices in our fundraising.

To earn this badge, ANCA Director of Marketing & Communications Asa Duffee attended a two-day intensive training. Following the training, we submitted content for a communications expert to review, including our development policies and samples of ANCA fundraising. Asa also met one-on-one with the credential facilitator to discuss ANCA's unique fundraising position as a national capacity-building organization.

UNA offers nine credentials for nonprofits to strengthen operations and demonstrate commitment to organizational excellence. ANCA has previously earned the UNA credential badges in advocacy and civic engagement, marketing and communications, and human resources. 🌱

Planned Giving with ANCA

"I'm making a planned gift to ANCA because of what ANCA meant to my career and life. I attended the first ANCA Summit in 1995 when I was a newly minted nature center director and really felt that I had 'found my people.' This experience and many others confirmed how helpful and important ANCA was to me professionally and personally with many lifelong friends resulting. Giving a planned gift is a small way that I can thank ANCA for all that they did for me and thousands of other environmental leaders."

— Tim Sandsmark, ANCA Donor

[LEARN MORE](#)



Minnesota Enacts Outdoor School for All

Peter Smerud, Executive Director
Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center
in Finland, Minnesota

How outdoor school leaders successfully advocated for the state to fund multi-day, overnight environmental education programs.

We all likely share this feeling as we see the transformational impact that experiences in nature have on human beings: the learning experiences we facilitate are a *must-have* for our young people, not merely a *nice-to-have*. We no longer have the luxury of time. Our global issues require that we stop taking baby steps and begin leaping towards answers. We need to express the value for environmental education at the highest of levels. One might say, there is no greater expression of value than to establish that value as a law in our state or country. I'm proud to be a Minnesotan where that recently occurred.

LEARNING FROM OTHER STATES

This story begins in the throes of the pandemic when a group of national outdoor school leaders gathered weekly to commiserate, support each other, and search for creative ways for our organizations to survive the tragic consequences thrust upon us. Suddenly the outdoors had become the safe place to be, and that societal focus became a springboard for what became a dive into creation of outdoor school legislation in our states, even at a feder-

WHAT IS OUTDOOR SCHOOL FOR ALL?

Outdoor Schools are a unique type of organization in the nature center field. They offer immersive and overnight programs that connect participants to nature and each other. These programs are youth-based and academic, focused primarily on public school partnerships where students and classroom teachers participate for multiple days, sharing educational activities and meals.

Outdoor School for All (OSFA) is a movement to support access to an outdoor school experience for every student. Currently four states have some form of OSFA: Oregon, Washington, Maine, and now Minnesota.

al level. Months later ANCA joined the team and facilitated our group, where the staff and the board supported and helped coordinate action toward establishment of legislation that would manifest the values we all hold so dear.

We studied Oregon's passing of Outdoor School For All (OSFA) in 2015, learning that approximately 29% of the youth in Oregon were enabled that experience before the law was created, and by the close of the 2024-25 school year 90% of the kids annually experienced that coming of age in the outdoors. When Washington passed OSFA in 2021, we all watched in awe as funding flowed and the outdoor school industry took a huge leap forward.

By 2022, outdoor school leaders in Minnesota were lifted by the success in Washington and the historical achievements of Oregon. From previous advocacy work at the state Capitol I had learned, the hard way, there are many unwritten cultural norms and "rules" for lawmaking. Political advocacy to achieve passing of a law requires a coach, a skilled political strategist ... a lobbyist. That strategist needs to become a partner that cares as much as you do, for like our students, lawmakers won't begin to care until they know how much we care. The OSFA MN team hired the Solomon Strategies Group and the vision for OSFA in Minnesota was established.

FRAMING THE LEGISLATION

Both Maine and Oregon are states where the University Extension oversees the OSFA program. In Minnesota, the purveyor of public lands to the people is the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Commissioner of the DNR loved the idea of investing in the outdoor ethic development of our children. The DNR would

be the holder of the OSFA grant program where the outdoor school providers would serve as grant recipients, funds awarded when they have a contract for outdoor school services with a school of Minnesota students. A government agency loves the simplicity of a small number of grant recipients that serve tens of thousands of students, and the grant recipients are already experienced with grant administration and accountability.

Outdoor "School" for Minnesota became the way to define quality and excellence in the experience. Qualifying providers need to provide an overnight experience away from home, a minimum of three days and two nights, and yet they must be accredited as a school. This would enable the DNR to hold a high standard of rigor in the facilitated learning structure, along with an academic and standards aligned curricula, and an education team whose credentials meet high expectations. This easily grew out of the existing model in Minnesota where all the providers were already accredited by Cognia as nonpublic K-12 and post-secondary schools, an accreditation accepted by the Minnesota Department of Education.

INITIAL LEGISLATIVE ATTEMPTS

In the current political chaos of this country, I reflect more and more on the past few years in the Minnesota legislature. In this day and age, when do lawmakers, both Republican and Democrat agree, actually come together with a shared, almost equal value and voice regarding a piece of legislation?

The answer: when it is to ensure our future generations will maintain the outdoor ethic for which they are so proud in their state. And in 2023 a new champion had just been elected in the Minnesota

House, Representative Kristi Pursell, a Democrat and an alumna of Wolf Ridge ELC's naturalist training program, who taught for two years at Wolf Ridge ELC, then went to Oregon and Washington where she also served as an instructor in outdoor schools. But, a first-year Representative does not have a lot of influence — could she build the momentum needed? Could she pull together both sides of the political aisle?

Outdoor School is a great name that brings people together, both sides, and while perhaps different they each see outcomes that are valued and a hope for future generations. Little did we know how true those words would be.

Rep. Pursell introduced Minnesota's first OSFA bill early in the 2023 legislative session and she passed that jacketed bill throughout the House, where to our amazement more and more authors signed on (Minnesota has no limit on the number of authors for a House bill. In the Senate the limit is five). Wolf Ridge ELC's Senator, Grant Hauschild, also a recently elected Democrat, joined the team and chief authored a mirrored bill in the Senate. Within a couple weeks there were more than 20 House authors and a full five authors in the Senate. The author numbers were nearly equal Democrats and Republicans!

One of my most memorable moments was standing outside the halls of the House chambers when a rural Senator literally tugged on my sport coat and stated, "Pete, I just love the OSFA bill, all my kids have been to Eagle Bluff ELC for outdoor school. It was one the most influential experiences of their life. I'm so bummed I didn't get to sign on as an author."

Didn't get to. That choice of words wasn't lost on me. Ensuring an outdoor ethic is maintained for our future generations is not a partisan

issue. This was Republican advocacy just as strongly expressed for the same legislation.

Two days later Senator Miller introduced a Republican-led OSFA bill in the Minnesota Senate, which quickly filled with co-authors. By the end of the 2023 session 70 authors had signed onto four bills, a Republican- and Democrat-introduced bill in each body. It was nearly equal, with just a couple more Democrats than Republicans. OSFA was the most bipartisan-authored legislation in the past 30 years of Minnesota lawmaking! Yet, there wasn't enough time — the session ended and the bill never made it out of committee.

REFINING THE APPROACH

Environmental education leaders make great lobbyists and political advocates. Team OSFA MN worked hard through the summer and fall of 2023, visiting with legislators, attending events, and awaiting the November election. By February of 2024 as the

LESSONS LEARNED: TAKEAWAYS FROM OSFA MINNESOTA

- **No matter what side of the political aisle your state may lean or even be dominated by, such legislation is possible in your state.**
- **This entire project can be conducted without a large grant or outside funding.** The outdoor school provider organizations of MN enabled this through the time of their leadership teams and expenses (primarily lobbyists) were paid in equal parts by the organizations.
- **The ultimate decisions in creation of a new law is really done by a small group of leaders** ... find those who chair or sit on the committees where your bill will be heard and facilitate that awareness-to-action continuum of learning. Get them to your facility.
- **One lawmaker, as chair of a key committee, can take you great places.**
- **Lawmakers care deeply about what opportunities and support is provided to their constituents and communities.** And they are competitive with what their neighboring districts or communities have or don't have. A map of MN senate and house districts where a darker shade of green indicated the higher the percentage of students getting outdoor school became a game changer in the conversations, as they compared how many of their children were getting the experience to other districts around the state.
- **Raise the tide and all boats float higher.** In communities where the tradition is entrenched and a high percentage of their children go to outdoor school, nature centers, nature preschools and other EE programs thrive.

session opened we were back in the halls of the Capitol executing the plays put forth by our lobbyist coach.

That second year a champion was clearly rising, Senator Foug Hawj, a man of Hmong heritage who cared desperately for the equity move of this legislation — nothing screams equity more than “for all.” The 2024 session had nearly the same bipartisan author support, and the bill was passed in the committee chaired by Senator Hawj. OSFA moved into an Omnibus bill, and at 1:37am in the last days of the session it was tossed out. (The funding originally allotted for OSFA went to actions benefitting the Clean Water Act ... if you're going to lose to a cause, that's a good cause).

A START TO FUNDING

In the 2025 spring session, legislation again originated from Republican and Democrat OSFA bills in the House and Senate, and among the total authors this time was a majority of Republican authors. Following a successful vote, on June 14, 2025, Governor Tim Walz signed the Outdoor School For All Act into Minnesota Law.

While early dreams and optimism strived to achieve funding at \$29 Million, levels similar to what Washington or Oregon had achieved, Minnesota's OSFA legislation passed with a meager \$848,000 for the first year. But it passed, and the policy has now been established.

In Minnesota we are in some ways pleased at the smaller amount as we will be able to build upon it, creating cultural

Below: OSFA MN representatives meet with Minnesota Senator Foug Hawj (third from right).



understanding and stability for the future. For comparison, in Washington challenges ensued from a massive leap into the legislation with millions allocated, then radical cuts occurred last year to their OSFA funding. In Oregon it was not near so dramatic but they are experiencing similar outcomes.

Minnesota's DNR will put the program into action by early 2026 and the \$848,000 will be quickly awarded to schools, in turn supporting several thousand more children to attend.

In three days I drive back to St. Paul to build relationships and help create new partners for the 2026 legislative session. With the policy established and no longer a debated subject, it's now incumbent on us to demonstrate who is getting Outdoor School and where the need remains in our stated value that all Minnesota young people are enabled by such an experience.

Currently 28% of Minnesota kids get the experience. A Twin Cities suburban House legislative district has 77% of their kids provided an outdoor school experience — but in 21 of 87 counties in Minnesota, no children go to outdoor school. I'm guessing you can envision the map we've prepared for our legislators.

CHANGE FOR THE FUTURE

People's well-being is inextricably linked to the well-being of natural systems. We face increasingly complex challenges as a

society. Outdoor school occurs at the intersection of economy, equity, environment, and education. The work we do equips people, communities, and lawmakers with knowledge, skills, and motivation to make informed decisions about how they address those challenges. Children need lived and learned experiences. They need to live in models, even if only for a week, for that week proves that what exists IS possible. The experience creates possibility for newly developed skills to interact responsibly and safeguard natural systems for future generations.

Our work is not about the planet, it's about people; people reconciling their relationship with the natural world. Real and profound change requires us to raise our expectations dramatically higher, turning that experience into law is the future value statement that we need. 🌱

outdoorschoolforallmn.org

With tremendous respect for my fellow team members of OSFA MN, outstanding leaders of environmental education, thank you: Bryan Wood, Colleen Foehrenbacher, Dave McMillan, Lindsay Bjorklund and the team at Solomon Strategies Group led by Jim Erickson.

WHAT THE BILL SAYS BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA: Section 1. LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.

(a) Minnesota is known for its rich outdoor heritage and ethic. The state prides itself on its close connection to nature through outdoor recreation, appreciation, and conservation. The state is viewed nationally as a leader for its stewardship of and strong relationship fostered with its natural resources. Yet the state children are losing their connection to the outdoors. Today, the state's children spend up to 44 hours per week in front of a screen and less than 10 minutes each day doing outdoor activities. The legislature finds that time outdoors helps children thrive physically, emotionally, and academically. Yet over the past few generations, childhood activities have largely moved indoors. In addition, access to the outdoors is too often determined by race, income, ability, and zip code. All children deserve equitable access to outdoor spaces where they can learn, play, and grow. But unfortunately today, access to outdoor opportunities is not equitable.

(b) Research shows participants in outdoor educational activities have higher graduation rates; improved school and peer relationships, higher academic achievement, enhanced critical thinking skills, more awareness of the relationship between science and nature; and improved leadership and collaboration skills. Outdoor educational programs also offer new opportunities for work integrated learning in science, natural resources, education, land management, agriculture, outdoor recreation, and other employment sectors. Outdoor-based learning activities can also be a key element in the larger system of regular outdoor instructional time and outdoor experiences that includes STEM fields, after-school programs, summer camps, 4-H, scouting, and related programs that can spark a lifelong appreciation for the natural world.

(c) The legislature intends to establish a statewide Outdoor School for All grant program to address these needs and opportunities. The program will support immersive multiday and accredited overnight educational experiences for students in grades 4 to 8. The program will also ensure that all Minnesota students have a chance to benefit from outdoor education.

Saving Joe Creason Park: Louisville Nature Center Advocates to Protect Green Space

*Rebecca Minnick, Executive Director,
Louisville Nature Center in Louisville, Kentucky*

In spring of 2025, the Louisville Nature Center staff, board, and community sent a loud and clear message to city leaders that nature and green space matter.

LOUISVILLE NATURE CENTER (LNC) is situated in an 80 acre forest surrounded by urban neighborhoods and bordered by Joe Creason Park. In March 2024, two representatives from the Kentucky Tennis and Pickleball Center (KYTPC) informed LNC of plans to build a massive, indoor-outdoor tennis and pickleball facility at Joe Creason Park. This development, a “public-private partnership,” was to include a three story, warehouse-style building extending on pillars across an access road, jutting into the edge of our forest, replacing greenspace in the upper portion of Joe Creason Park with courts and parking lots.

We were asked to keep the plans confidential (which was a huge red flag), but I quietly shared the plans with the LNC Board and a few neighbors. Together we reached out repeatedly to elected officials, only to be

told, “It’s premature for public input,” if we received any response at all. The site plans we were given seemed developed enough for the public to know and have an opportunity for input. LNC offered to host a public meeting, but we were continually brushed off. Neighbors were infuriated, as they were by and large ignored by public officials when they repeatedly asked for more information over the following year.

In April 2025, the local press broke the story about the Tennis Center proposal, now even further along in its development. LNC hosted a meeting for neighbors who wanted to organize in opposition to the proposal. Sixty people showed up to this meeting, which was not publicized, but rather spread through word of mouth! Even more impressive were how many hands went up when various volunteer opportunities were presented.

Below: Community members show up to a public meeting about the KYTPC facility — but hundreds were not allowed to enter the building, which had reached capacity. A community member pulled up a truck with a microphone and speaker for organizers of the Save Joe Creason Park movement to address the crowd.



With a combination of luck, passion, and talent, neighbors came forward with skills in graphic design, video production and editing, organizing, and in the legal side of things such as navigating public records requests. The campaign coalesced quickly, with very professional-looking graphics on yard signs and social media, and high-quality video reels showcasing the beauty of the park and featuring interviews of many neighbors who use the park regularly. Because this unified look lent legitimacy and professionalism to the campaign from the very beginning, people from all over Louisville felt comfortable following these pages. Yard signs proliferated in surrounding neighborhoods and beyond, bearing messages such as “Nature Over Nets” and “Parks Over Pavement” on one side, and “Save Joe Creason” on the other. An online petition amassed 7,494 signatures within a month.

In addition to petitions, yard signs, and social media, the neighbors activated the park. An arborist who lives across the street led free guided tree walks. Neighbors organized picnics, parties, Easter egg hunts, group runs, and more, to both show the city how important the park is and to bring a sense of joy and connection to the affected community. Volunteers regularly walked the park paths, handing out fliers and talking to community members about the proposed development. They also canvassed at farmers markets and public events at other parks.

LNC Board, staff, and community members discussed the proposal, and felt strongly that it would have a very negative impact on the experience of our visitors, students, and campers, as well as on the wildlife who call our Preserve home. We decided to take a resolute stance, publishing an op-ed in the *Courier-Journal*, writing a letter to the Mayor and Metro Council, and doing many interviews with local news channels. We encouraged staff and the community to get involved and make their voices heard, and we continued to provide space for neighbors to meet, plan, and pick up and drop off signs and t-shirts. We received assistance from partner nonprofits such as the Louisville Audubon Society, Beckham Bird Club, and Wild Ones Louisville, who helped us gather data about the potential impacts to wildlife and the watershed of such a development.

An environmental lawyer and a former Metro Council Legislative Assistant live close to the park, and helped with public records requests for information such as how long the project had actually been in the works, who was on the team, and the (continually denied) connection between the proposed development

and a nearby private university. Some of the public record requests were denied, which led to even more press coverage about the issues.

The KYTPC and the city scheduled two public meetings. About 1000 people from all over the city showed up to the first meeting at a nearby community center, but hundreds were not allowed to enter the building, which had reached capacity. With no opportunity for authentic public engagement, tensions were high. There was neither an open mic nor an opportunity for public comment. What happens when people feel unheard? They get louder! A community member pulled up a truck with a microphone and speaker for key organizers of the Save Joe Creason Park movement to address the crowd, who responded with loud cheers of support.

The Louisville Metro Council office said that they were overwhelmed with calls and emails regarding this issue, almost all opposing the proposed development in the park. Because of the swift, organized, community-wide response, Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg made a public announcement much sooner than expected that the proposed development would not be moving forward in Joe Creason Park.

There were several aspects of this win being a “right place at the right time” occasion. First, I think in April 2025, people needed a win! This felt like it could be a potential victory. It was so promising to see the momentum of yard signs popping up all over town, or the signature numbers hitting new milestones on the petition, or the growing social media presence of the Save Joe Creason movement. Second, people in Louisville had grown very disillusioned with the public input process around other city developments. The press was quick to jump on this story, and the public record requests’ denials fueled this fire. Third, people in Louisville are aware that our Parks are often neglected and underfunded, but that does not mean that we do not love our Parks!

Privatization of public parks seems to be a growing trend across the country, and this was not the first time it had happened in Louisville. Personally, I had just unsuccessfully tried to negotiate with a developer of public land on behalf of my neighborhood, so I fully expected this to be a big challenge. I remembered a tidbit from an ANCA Summit workshop about organizing, and how you basically need to make friends with people on both sides so that they will listen to you and give you information when you need them to. It was helpful to go into this having a relationship with several Metro Council members and their legislative

aides, Parks employees and leadership, similar non-profits, several reporters, and many neighbors. At LNC, we decided that our message regarding this proposal was connected to our mission of conservation and access to nature, and we stayed on message at all times. Nature and greenspace are not necessarily partisan issues, as public parks benefit everyone!

In the end, we won, the Louisville Nature Center received an enormous amount of free press, and we strengthened relationships with local partner organizations and many members of the community, who expressed gratitude for our work. We continue to make sure we also express gratitude, for example, we honored some of the key players of the movement at our Gala in October. And we continue to promote our message that nature and greenspace are essential!

An excerpt from our op-ed: “Louisville is a city that prides itself on world class parks and greenspaces. We would be doing a disservice to ourselves, our neighbors, and our children to give up the sanctuary that LNC and Joe Creason Park currently provide



LNC’s Swallowtail Forest School graduates and campers Truman and Atlas at the community meeting. “Kevin Bacon” is the resident wild turkey — named by LNC’s preschoolers — and Chocolate is a special needs turtle, cared for at LNC.

to the community. This proposal also creates a dangerous precedent for future development. Will all of the city’s parks and greenspaces be up for sale to the highest bidder? Does every piece of land have a price tag? Will we, in a city with the fastest-rising urban heat island effect in the country and ever-increasing flood events, trade precious neighborhood parks for dollars?” The community answered, a resounding “NO!” 🌿

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Finding Strength in Change: NorthBay's Journey

Jennifer Foy, Executive Director
NorthBay in North East, Maryland



Students kayak off NorthBay's shore on the Chesapeake Bay.

In a post-COVID world, change has become the one constant we can count on. Schools, staff, funding structures, and even the students themselves are evolving faster than ever. At NorthBay, an Outdoor School located in North East, Maryland, we've long believed in the power of immersive environmental education to transform lives. For nearly two decades, our five-day overnight program has welcomed more than 10,000 students annually, helping young people connect with nature, each other, and themselves.

But by early 2025, we faced a hard truth: if we wanted to continue our mission, we would have to change too.

A MODEL IN QUESTION

For most of our 20-year history, NorthBay operated without a traditional fundraising arm. Our financial model relied on a balance between school tuition and facility rentals; weekends, summers, and other off-season events filled in the financial gaps. That model worked for years, until the pandemic disrupted everything.

In 2020, like many of our peers, we were forced to temporarily close our programs, furlough staff, and confront an uncertain future. Although we managed to survive, the pandemic left a lasting financial scar. When schools began returning, we quickly realized the challenges ran deeper than dollars and cents. Students were less resilient. Teachers and parents were hesitant to commit to overnight programs. Inflation pushed salaries and operational costs up by 10–20%.

By January 2025, we found ourselves at an inflection point: could NorthBay continue to exist in its current form, or would we need to reinvent our program entirely to remain sustainable?

THE BOLD DECISION TO REBUILD

In April 2025, our leadership team began developing a new financial and programmatic model, one that would balance mission and sustainability. A month later, we presented a proposal to our Board of Directors: transform our signature five-day Outdoor School into a three-day experience, maintain the same pricing structure for schools, and expand our fundraising efforts.

It was a bold and risky idea. A shorter program meant we would need to distill our curriculum without sacrificing impact. It also meant convincing partner schools that the NorthBay experience would remain just as powerful, if not more so, in fewer days while costing the same as the five-day.

In mid-May, with the board's blessing, the countdown began. We had just three months to completely redesign our program, rebuild the schedule, write new curriculum, train staff, and fill the fall calendar.

FROM GRIEF TO CREATIVITY

The first phase was emotional. Staff, partners, and board members grieved the loss of the five-day model that had shaped NorthBay's identity. That longer week allowed for deeper relationships, more reflection, and the kind of transformative growth that takes time.

But grief soon gave way to creativity. Starting with a blank slate, our education and operations teams began brainstorming with renewed purpose. Every minute of the student experience was redesigned with intentionality, from the moment of arrival on campus to the way adventure was integrated directly into the curriculum, rather than treated as recreation. The team ensured that every student, no matter how short their stay, would still experience the bay, the forest, and the farm, three environments at the heart of the NorthBay story.

THE SUMMER SPRINT

By August, the exhaustion was real. The education team had spent the summer writing lessons, building a more complex daily schedule, and finding creative ways to repurpose existing resources. Meanwhile, our sales and outreach teams worked tirelessly behind the scenes, speaking to every partner school, communicating the vision, and filling a fall calendar that would bring us closer to meeting our financial goals.

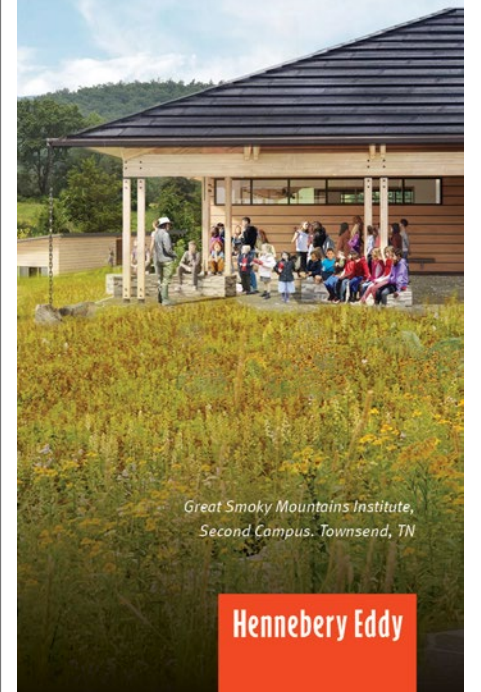
The transformation came with trade-offs. To make the new model viable, we reduced the overall program budget by nearly 20%. Some educator positions were eliminated, and a portion of the team shifted to seasonal roles to align staffing with enrollment peaks. We also had to say goodbye to a few beloved traditions, including a long-standing evening comedy program that had been part of the NorthBay experience for 19 years.

Change was painful — but necessary. Each decision was made with one goal in mind: to protect the future of the program and the students it serves.

LAUNCHING THE NEW NORTHBAY

As August arrived, our educators returned for two weeks of intensive training on the new curriculum and schedule. When the first

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group of students arrived for the reimagined three-day experience, everyone — staff and leadership alike — waited anxiously for feedback.

Behind the scenes, our team was stretched thin, operating on adrenaline and hope. We saw every gap and every place where our ambitions exceeded our time and resources. Yet when the evaluations came in, we were deeply moved. Teachers and partners alike praised the intentionality of the program, the integration of adventure and learning, and the unwavering dedication of our staff.

The message was clear: while shorter in duration, the new NorthBay experience still carried the same power to inspire growth, connection, and wonder.

Evaluating and Evolving

As we close out October, the numbers tell a story of cautious optimism. Instructional days are up by 20% this fall, and our financial model is more sustainable. But this transformation is not a finish line; it's being responsive to the needs of partners and the needs of our students to ensure more students receive an outdoor school experience.

NorthBay maintains an ongoing partnership with an external research team from Virginia Tech, which typically evaluates our programs on an annual basis. This year, however, the partnership is taking on a new significance. Instead of a single annual review, evaluators will visit three times, offering feedback and recommendations for iterative changes throughout

the year. The first visit has already taken place, and we look forward to implementing their insights over the winter months, ensuring the program continues to grow stronger and more effective for every student we serve.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Our journey of transformation is far from over. We know it will take two to three years to realize the full benefits of this new model, financially, operationally, and educationally. We still need to fill more weeks with students, expand our fundraising program, and refine our staffing model to balance sustainability with staff well-being.

But even amid uncertainty, we're proud of what we've accomplished. We embraced change, addressed barriers to participation, and reimagined what Outdoor School can look like in a post-pandemic world. Most importantly, we rediscovered the spirit of innovation and collaboration that has always been at the heart of NorthBay's mission.

This new chapter is about more than adaptation—it's about resilience, creativity, and an unwavering belief in the power of transformative outdoor education. Our work continues, and our commitment remains the same: to help every student who steps onto our campus see the best version of themselves and the world around them. 🌱

A group of students in a NorthBay program.



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The Paradox of Glass at Nature Centers: Where Conservation Meets Collision

Courtney Belew, Marketing Manager
Decorative Films

How one Baltimore landmark found an elegant solution to save birds and energy alike.

At nature centers across the country, glass architecture offers beauty and light — but it also poses an invisible threat to the wildlife these spaces aim to protect.

And just like that, autumn arrives — ushering in a season of transformation. Trees exchange their vibrant greens for a palette of amber, rust, and gold, while a new season settles into the air, carrying the earthy fragrance of cooling rains and fallen leaves. With these signs of fall comes one of nature’s grand finales: the great migration south, as countless birds take to the skies, tracing time-worn routes toward warmer horizons.

But as these travelers embark on their instinctual journeys, the landscape below bears the unmistakable mark of human design. Birds and people have always shared the same environment, but today those shared spaces are increasingly shaped by glass — skyscrapers, shopping centers, and homes that cut across migratory flyways. To humans, glass offers a way to experience nature from within, blurring the boundary between inside and out. But for birds, that transparency can be fatal, transforming reflections of sky and trees into invisible barriers.

THE UNSEEN COST OF CLEAR VIEWS

At Cylburn Arboretum, an ANCA member whose grounds serve as a resource-rich flyway for more than 170 native and migratory bird species, this bird strike challenge became an opportunity for innovation.

Nestled in Baltimore City, the 200-acre nature preserve is a forested oasis in a densely populated metropolis — and one of the city’s most beloved recreational spots. With 50 acres of cultivated gardens and nearly 150 acres of mature forest, Cylburn’s landscape offers food, shelter, and water for migrating populations, making it a haven for both birds and birdwatchers.

“Our community may not see a lot of the birds they see here in their yards; they may see birds here that they’ve never seen before,” said Melissa Grim, Baltimore City’s Chief Horticulturist. “If you’re a city resident, you don’t have to hike all the way to somewhere else to birdwatch. The birds bring value to individuals, but they also bring value to our park by attracting people to our gardens.”

As visitors enter the park, they’re greeted by the Vollmer Center — Cylburn’s headquarters for operations and primary event venue, which accounts for nearly half of all on-site rentals. Trailblazing in its original design, the Vollmer Center was one of the city’s first “green buildings,” featuring composting toilets, green roofs, and geothermal heating and cooling. Constructed with nearly 4,000 square feet of glass, it offered panoramic views of the park’s lush, diverse landscape — an architectural masterpiece that proved lethal to local and migratory birds.

“The doors to this building opened in 2010. By 2011, we were starting to collect data on the bird strike issue here,” said Christina Nutile, Park Administrator at Cylburn Arboretum. “During migration season, I was hearing and seeing between six and ten birds strike the glass within the eight hours that I was here each day. Protecting birds is high on our list of conservation goals that we need to be focused on.”

The Vollmer Center’s design embodied the paradox perfectly — its transparency celebrated the surrounding landscape even as it endangered it.

Tragically, Cylburn’s bird strike problem is far from unique. Recent studies suggest that glass collisions cause more than one billion bird deaths every year in the United States alone (American Bird Conservancy, 2024). This toll is second only to domestic cats. Nearly 40% of these deaths occur at low-rise buildings five stories or less, with residential homes accounting for almost half (Loss et al., *The Condor*, 2014).

“The most common myth is that all birds are hitting skyscrapers,” said Lindsay Jacks, Executive Director of Lights Out Baltimore, a volunteer-run nonprofit

that records strike frequency in the city. “In reality, the majority strike low-rise buildings and residential homes. If everyone took steps to treat just one or two windows, we could make a drastic difference.”

And while preventing collisions is essential to protecting bird populations, the impact extends far beyond biodiversity loss. “Birds are kind of like a canary in the mine,” said Joe Corcoran, President of the Baltimore Bird Club, a local non-profit with offices at Cylburn Arboretum. “You start losing enough population of birds, and that becomes an indicator that our whole ecosystem is falling apart. A weak population of birds is a sign of a poor ecosystem. And eventually that’s going to affect humans through air pollution, water pollution, and crop-killing insects.”

WHY DO BIRDS STRIKE GLASS?

Fly-Through: Birds see the landscape beyond glass but don’t perceive the barrier.

Reflection: Glass mirrors trees and sky, creating the illusion of open space.

Distraction: Night-migrating birds navigate by moonlight; artificial lights draw them off course.

AN UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCE

With nearly 70% of the building constructed of glass, the Vollmer Center is celebrated for its sweeping views of the surrounding park from almost every room — a feature that has made it one of Baltimore’s most sought-after event venues. “People love be-

Below, left: Windows at the Vollmer Center, without film. Below, right: The same windows with Solyx® BSF-DB35 Solar Bird Safety Film applied. Pictures submitted by Decorative Films.



Above: Entrance to the Vollmer Center. Picture submitted by Decorative Films.

ing in this building because of that indoor-outdoor experience,” said Nutile.

But the same glass that connects guests so beautifully to nature also created unforeseen environmental challenges: glass collisions and soaring energy bills from solar heat gain.

Early efforts to prevent strikes included installing corded curtains outside the windows and planting trees along the façade to create visual barriers. When collisions persisted, film solutions were explored — but securing funding for a newly constructed facility proved difficult. “The building was cutting-edge and designed to be ecologically in tune with its surroundings, but it was before bird strike glass was popular, or even a possibility,” said Brooke Fritz, Executive Director of Cylburn Arboretum Friends.

Cylburn’s team had already seen how patterned glass could dramatically reduce collisions; their new Nature Education Center, completed in 2024, featured fritted glass that performed exceptionally well. But the Vollmer Center couldn’t be rebuilt — it needed a retrofit. “We learned from the Vollmer Center that we needed to do bird protection with the glass, and that was really high on the list of priorities for the Nature Center,” said Grim. “We needed to retrofit this building in a way that would serve the same purpose and look virtually the same.”

SOLAR HEAT GAIN: A HOT TOPIC

Although the Vollmer Center’s glass was engineered to reduce solar heat gain, its extensive exposure and limited shade made temperature control a constant challenge. Sitting at the edge of a manicured meadow, with three sides exposed to open fields, the building absorbed heat faster than it could reject it. During the summer months, the HVAC system strained to keep up — driving up costs and

maintenance demands while undermining the building’s sustainable design goals.

While the issue of bird strikes reflected the park’s conservation values, it wasn’t enough on its own to secure funding. What ultimately caught the city’s attention were the building’s steep energy bills and HVAC maintenance costs.

“We analyze buildings with high utility bills, and when we see buildings like the Vollmer Center at the top of the list, we say, ‘Something’s wrong here,’” said Frank Lee, Architect and Building Energy Auditor for Baltimore’s Department of General Services (DGS). “Buildings with glass walls get solar heat gain in the summer, which contributes to peak loads in July and August when residents are using the most electricity. We look for opportunities to cut peak load and reduce vulnerability in the grid by making the building more efficient.”

Recognizing an opportunity to lower costs and reinvest taxpayer dollars, DGS contacted Cylburn about installing solar film with available energy grant funding — but Cylburn’s focus had already turned to bird strike film. As retold by Nutile, “DGS reached out to me initially, asking if I wanted solar heat gain film on the building; they had a contract and some funding available. I said, ‘I do... but what I really want is some bird strike film.’ Then I got a call from Decorative Films about a product that had both.”

DECORATIVE FILMS’ BREAKTHROUGH: SOLAR BIRD SAFETY FILM

The challenge of funding bird safety film wasn’t new to Decorative Films. “The conversation often starts with good intentions,” said Aaron Lotinsky, Director of Sales and Product Strategy at Decorative Films, “but when funding becomes the barrier, projects stall before they can make an impact. While funding for energy-saving solutions like solar rejecting film is common, there just aren’t many funding opportunities for bird strike prevention as a standalone problem.”



Cylburn Arboretum staff examine a sample of Solar Bird Safety Film. Picture submitted by Decorative Films.

Seeing an opportunity to merge two needs, the company developed an innovative solution: a patterned solar control window film that reduces strikes by making glass visible to birds while simultaneously lowering energy bills. The pattern, subtle from the inside yet visible to birds, maintained the Vollmer Center’s hallmark panoramic views.

Being based just 40 miles away in Frederick, Maryland, Decorative Films had long been aware of Cylburn’s challenges — and saw a perfect fit for their new product. Now, after years of searching for a solution, the park found its answer in **Solyx® BSF-DB35 Solar Bird Safety Film**, an energy-saving solar film that delivers measurable ROI while significantly reducing bird collisions.

“To protect birds, we have to be mindful of the dangers we’re creating for them,” said Lotinsky. “We know glass collisions are a leading cause of bird fatalities, yet the problem is not widely addressed in standard building practices. Our solar bird safety film is the only product on the market that empowers existing buildings to protect birds by covering exterior glass while improving building performance and sustainability. It’s a true win for birds and tenants alike.”

The film’s dotted TruEtch™ pattern — tested and approved by the American Bird Conservancy (TF Rating 20; learn more at abcbirds.org) — provides critical visual markers for birds while remaining virtually invisible from the interior. “The day after the film was installed, I drove by and couldn’t even see it,” said Grim. “Sitting in the lobby, I didn’t notice the dots — it didn’t take away from the big vista of glass windows. While I wish we’d been able to put bird-safe film up sooner, I think waiting until the right product came along worked out really well.”

FINDING FUNDING: A SOLUTION WITH TRUE ROI

Within months, Cylburn secured over \$47,500 in funding — 83% from city and state solar energy grants and assistance programs, including Baltimore City Departments of General Services and Recreation and Parks, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and the Maryland Environmental Administration, with the rest from the Baltimore Bird Club Memorial Fund. More than 3,000 square feet of glass was retrofitted with solar bird safety film, with immediate results.

In the first three months following the June 2024 installation, the building experienced zero bird strikes — a drastic decline from the dozens of strikes experienced in the same period the previous year. The HVAC system ran efficiently all summer, eliminating the need for the three to four maintenance calls it typically required. “I’ve seen it and felt it work. Just putting my hand next to the glass, the temperature is noticeably about a quarter of what it used to be,” said Nutile.

Though the film will save hundreds of birds each migratory season, the true ROI lies in the taxpayer dollars now redi-

HOW TO FUND SOLAR BIRD SAFETY FILM

Partner locally: Seek funding from birding advocacy groups and nonprofits focused on sustainability and energy efficiency.

Engage your community: Host events or fundraisers to build support for bird-safe upgrades.

Reach out to local leaders: Contact councilmembers or representatives who can connect you with municipal offices overseeing energy, facilities, or sustainability initiatives.

Search smart: Look for local, county, and state grants using keywords like efficiency, sustainability, climate action, retrofit, clean energy, or building improvement.

rected toward other city programs. The tally: an estimated 10,500 kWh saved annually — roughly \$1,500 in energy costs — plus \$2,100 in rebates from utility provider BGE. If rates hold, the film could potentially return more than \$36,000 over the next decade.

THE FUTURE IS BIRD SAFETY FILM

The success of the Vollmer Center retrofit is more than a local achievement — it’s a glimpse into the future of sustainable design. What began as an urgent need to protect birds and reduce energy costs has become a model for how cities, conservationists, and innovators can create buildings that truly coexist with nature. Across the industry, awareness is growing that these challenges are deeply interconnected — and that the path forward demands both creativity and accountability.

“We’ve dramatically improved the longevity and operating costs of the building by making the glass more resilient, while also saving birds and reducing summer peak loads. This was a permanent solution for the whole building,” said Lee.

Lotinsky agrees: “Architects and building owners are realizing bird strike prevention is no longer optional. It’s becoming a required consideration for new and retrofit glass buildings.”

The Myths and Truths of Leadership

Corky McReynolds, PhD, CPF

Uncovering the myths and mysteries of leadership can assist our development as leaders. Perhaps this article will raise some eyebrows, generate questions, and inspire “but what about” discussions.

Leaders focus on the future (what can be) and then find the path to that future. Leaders build the capacity of people to accomplish the strategic direction. Leaders share, collaborate, empower, communicate, and inspire. Leaders assess themselves, find their role, and continue to learn. There are many definitions of leadership; simply put:

Leadership is the act of learning and using one's attributes and skills to develop and align human and other resources to accomplish extraordinary things.

Attributes are internal characteristics we bring to or develop and apply to leadership. Essential examples include service, integrity, compassion, transparency, inquiry, balance, courage, passion, collaboration, communication, and awareness. (Kouzes & Posner 2007).

Skills we learn and include people management, business acumen, time and tasking, planning, evaluation, meeting management, systems perspective, culture building, and other skills depending on the leadership position, responsibilities, and organization. (Locke 1991, McReynolds 1994).

Grounded in the above definitions, let's explore and interpret a variety of common myths and truths of leadership.

1) There are born leaders — False

There are only born wannabe leaders. There are personality styles that see themselves as natural leaders, but it does not mean they have the attributes and/or skills to be leaders. There is a personality type with the motto, “I cannot *not* lead.” Often charismatic individuals are mistakenly identified and embraced as leaders solely based on their charisma. All personality types can become leaders, but none are born as leaders. Leadership is a developmental process, not an inherited trait or right. (Antonakis 2004, Conger 1992, Locke 1991).

2) Once a leader, always a leader — True

This is a trick question because being a leader does not always mean taking the upfront or visible leadership role. Sometimes leaders need to be followers, which means a leader is not always in a leadership role. There are times when it is appropriate to step back and let other leaders emerge. Knowing when to step back, develop, and support others rather than being *the* leader, is in fact, evidence of leadership. A leader understands their limitations or sees opportunities for others to grow.

Years ago, I was facilitating a team workshop and Alex always stepped up to lead the team activity. At the start of the third activity Alex stepped up and began to lead the group, suddenly paused and exclaimed, “Wait, I have no idea how to solve this challenge, someone else should lead.” Others quickly stepped in and the team succeeded. In the debrief Alex shared they had learned that they should not always be the leader. If Alex continued from that point in their job with that awareness, then they are practicing leadership without always having to be the person in front of the room. (Bennis & Nanus 1978, Schmitz 2012, Straw 2013).



This article was previously published in the National Association for Interpretation's Legacy magazine.

3) Leaders seek power — True

At a professional workshop, a panel of leaders discussed the concept of power. The male leaders explained they avoided using power while the women leaders explained that they sought power. Avoid power, seek power? There are two different kinds of power in organizations. (McReynolds 2019.) The men had defined selfish power and the women had defined social power. Both are correct. In organizations individuals that seek and gain selfish power use that power for aggrandizement, positioning, and personal advancement. That power, which is usually the gain of knowledge and control of resources and not sharing either of those. In organizations, social power is sought and immediately shared to build the human capacity, and then is used for the mission of the organization, its values, and strategic direction. Leaders seek social power to empower others, which is the definition of empowerment. (Greenleaf, 1991, Kouzes & Posner 2007, McReynolds 2019, Sashkin 1997, Schein 2017).

4) Leaders take risks — True

Leaders do take risks but not foolhardy “jump off the cliff without knowledge of what is below” risks. While hiking in the Tetons we watched a hang glider with an instructor prepare to jump off the cliff. After several minutes of quiet words, the pair ran to the edge, jumped and began gliding to the valley below. Risky? Yes, but not foolhardy. There was at least an hour of preparing the equipment, orientation, safety protocols, and mental preparation before the gondola ride up the mountain. The preparation just before the launch was followed by a guided activity. This is the type of risk leaders take to advance the organization. Leaders mitigate risk and know in advance the success of the venture is all but guaranteed. (Kouzes & Posner 2007, Locke 1991).

5) Leaders always have the Vision — False

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality” (Bennis). Vision is a desired image of the future, its outcomes, and its impact. Leaders know that vision is vital, but leaders should not feel pressure to magically and independently create the vision. It can be a team effort with the leader championing the action for the vision to become reality. (McReynolds 1994, Straw 2013).

6) There is a best leadership style — False

There is no such thing as a leadership style, there are styles of management. The fundamental attributes and skills of a leader remain functional in that leader regardless of position or change in organizations. Developing leaders should focus on the core principles of leadership over trying to figure out a style. Discover yourself and your passion and then learn the attributes and skills. (Locke, 1991, Hersey 1984, Menkes 2005).

7) There are many types of leadership — False

There is a continual publication of books on leadership describing a type of leadership as if it is a new, better, and previously unknown type of leadership. Some leadership titles on my bookcase include: Servant, Adaptive, Collaborative, Enlightened, Super, Moral, Visionary, Principle-Centered, Possibilities, Situational, and Strengths. None of these titles represents anything that is not already included in the theory and practice of leadership. Each are valuable to understand that component of leadership, but none represent a separate type or theory. (Antonakis 2004, Locke 1991).

8) There is good and bad leadership — False

By definition there is only leadership. “Bad leadership” is non-leadership. Often the term bad leadership can be attributed to bad management or someone in authority who is responsible for leadership but does not demonstrate a leader's attributes and/or skills. All leaders have great days and bad days, and leaders can make great decisions and sometimes horrible decisions. There has never been and never will be a perfect leader, but rather, just leaders embracing their attributes and practicing their skills. (Antonakis 2004, Menkes 2005).

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9) Leadership requires both personal attributes and skills — True

A leader must have an understanding and awareness of both. One can have a graduate degree in leadership and practice all of the fundamental skills, but without the core personal attributes their leadership may fail. One can have all of the core personal attributes, but without skills, their leadership will be unsuccessful. (Kouzes & Posner 2007, Locke, 1991).

10) Shared leadership is a new concept — False

By definition, the theory and practice of leadership is already, a shared experience. There are trends using the term “shared leadership” for the structure of an organization whereby two or more people share the same position title. This is a style of organizational structure that has its merits but does not guarantee shared leadership in practice. (Schmitz 2012, Straw 2013).

11) Leadership is never just about an individual — True

“It’s tough being a leader when no one is following.” Sometimes we attribute special emphasis on individuals and their special abilities. We see this demonstrated in pop culture books that are usually written by corporate leaders describing their special approach. This brings too much focus on one person and forgets that leadership does not happen in a vacuum. Everyone working with the leader is as important to the success of leadership as the leader themselves. Leaders do have a passion for people to be successful. This does not mean the leader is all hugs, smiles, and warm fuzzies, but rather it means the leader appreciates, develops, embraces the diversity and talents of all others in the organization. (Burns 1978, Covey 1991, McReynolds 1995).

Embrace your passion, discover your personal attributes, develop your professional skills with and for the people around you. This is neither a myth nor mystery; it’s just the path to becoming a leader and practicing leadership. 🌱

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12) Learning leadership is a life-long process — True

Leadership development is continuous so there is no final academic degree or decree by experience that defines the end point. Leaders know that living is learning and transfer all kinds of life experiences into their leadership. One must have the core attributes but may never have expertise in all the skills, so leaders build support networks to attain the vision. (Brown 2018, McReynolds 1994, Vaill 1996).

13) Leaders develop leaders — True

A leader takes heart and action to develop other leaders as part of their life-long role. Leaders don’t wait until late in their career but become mentors for the profession (not a specific position), as soon as they begin serving in a leadership capacity. In our profession we do not often do this well, not because of avoidance but we often lack time, duty assignment, or skills. A leader’s role mentors the next age of leadership.

- Encourage emerging leaders to **discover** a variety of interests.
- Help emerging leaders **explore** their own interests and passions.
- **Involve** emerging leaders to practice their strengths and limitations.
- **Engage** emerging leaders into meaningful and developmental roles.

With more attention to developing future leaders we can assure quality from within our profession. (Antonakis 2004, Burns, 1978, Schmitz 2012).



Lessons Learned from Allied Institutions

Reflections from the 2025 ANCA Annual Summit Panel, moderated by Studio Outside.

Sahana Ashwathanarayana, Project Leader
Studio Outside in Dallas, Texas

In August, Andrew Duggan, Principal at Studio Outside Landscape Architecture, moderated a panel at the ANCA Annual Summit. Titled “*Lessons Learned from Allied Institutions – Botanical Gardens, Federal Agencies, and Camps*,” the discussion convened leaders who shape how people experience the outdoors: Lee Clipper, Executive Director of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; Travis Mason, Forest Recreation Program Manager with the USDA Forest Service; Stephen B. MacAller, District Vice President at YMCA Los Angeles; and Brian Halsell, Principal at Studio Outside Landscape Architecture.

The conversation traced the evolving role of allied institutions — botanical gardens, forests, and camps — in defining public access to nature. These organizations, united in catering to outdoor experiences are varied in their mission — they engage the public in different ways. As landscape architects, we intersect deeply with these organizations, creating spaces that translate that mission into experience. This article delves deeper into the insights shared during the panel, exploring the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these diverse institutions and what we can learn from each other in shaping our outdoor spaces.

*Migrating Sandhill Cranes at the
Iain Nicolson Audubon Center.
Photo by Don Bruckmeier.*

NATURE IS AN ACCESSIBLE RESOURCE

The panel framed its discussion around a single core principle: nature *must* be an accessible resource.

To make nature accessible is to acknowledge that every visitor carries a different comfort level, curiosity, and capacity for connection. Our responsibility as designers, educators, and stewards is to craft spaces that invite both the casual and the committed, the curious and the cautious.

At the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, accessibility is intentional and layered. A family might arrive for a simple walk or a photo among Texas bluebonnets, but leave with a deeper understanding of native ecosystems, fire ecology, or the fragility of karst landscapes. Studio Outside recently partnered with architectural firm Lake Flato and the center to develop a comprehensive plan that would expand gardens, build educational spaces and research labs, and enhance accessible-for-all trails, creating a physical framework that supports inclusive learning.

Accessibility also extends beyond the physical. The USDA Forest Service implements a Language Access Plan across its informational material. Embedding QR codes, visual wayfinding, and multilingual materials are powerful tools across outreach platforms. Clear communication and thoughtful design together ensure that learning, reflection, and participation are available to all visitors.

By centering accessibility, institutions not only welcome more visitors — they create the conditions for curiosity to flourish, engagement to deepen, and stewardship to emerge as a shared responsibility.

ENGAGEMENT IS MULTIGENERATIONAL

Nature education has traditionally been structured by age — programs for children, teens, adults, and seniors neatly divided by developmental stage. While effective, this approach is evolving. Allied institutions increasingly create spaces and programs where families, peers, and community members of all ages learn together, recognizing that environmental understanding deepens through shared experience.

Lee Clippard elaborates on this at the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center, “We’ve found that families value time to play and explore together in natural settings more and more, and our nature play programs and outdoor exhibitions continue to grow in popularity. Our community members of all ages are very interested in supporting pollinators and specifi-

cally helping declining bird populations. These are all topics that we were thinking about as we developed our long-range master plan, and in fact, we’re designing a new pollinator garden now to help inspire our guests more in that area.”

The YMCA’s multigenerational family camps also exemplify this shift. These camps are more than retreats; they are immersive environments where curiosity, connection, and learning are shared across generations. Families canoe together, collaborate on art projects inspired by the landscape, and participate in conservation projects. Each camp session becomes a space for intergenerational dialogue, where children and adults alike develop ecological literacy and a sense of shared responsibility.

At the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, public programs and summer camps offer families hands-on experiences, from birding and habitat walks to interactive workshops. By designing for all ages simultaneously, these programs foster an enduring, communal relationship with the natural world.

STORYTELLING IS INFRASTRUCTURE

Every visitor carries a unique image of what nature is and what it means to belong within it. Allied institutions navigate this multiplicity: their work is not just to enable their missions but to interpret them, to tell stories that make ecosystems legible, approachable, and loved.

At the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center, the story begins with the cranes. For decades, the spring migration of Sandhill Cranes along the Platte River has drawn thousands of visitors. The center’s narrative that once centered on this singular event has now expanded beyond the river to the surrounding prairie and to the people engaging year-round.

Studio Outside’s redesign supports this layered storytelling. Trails, viewing blinds, and outdoor classrooms create immersive opportunities for participants to engage with the land. The experience of walking the river trail becomes a progression through time: from the immediate rhythm of birds in flight to the slower, more subtle processes of soil, water, and habitat.

Programming complements design. “Crane Season” tours are paired with prairie ecology walks, youth discovery camps, and community restoration days. Year-round, bird banding workshops, art-and-nature residencies, and guided night-sky observations broaden acces-



Karsts at Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Photo from Studio Outside.

sibility and deepen understanding. Storytelling here is a living system of paths, programs, and people.

STEWARDSHIP IS A MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Every institution represented on the panel is rethinking what success means. Visitor counts and revenue still matter, but ecological and social metrics are gaining equal weight. Success is measured in the care and resilience of the landscapes themselves - and in the ways communities participate in that care. The USDA Forest Service models this principle on a national scale.

At the San Bernardino National Forest, programs like *National Public Lands Day (2024)* at the Front Country Ranger District and *National Trails Day (2025)* at the Pacific Crest Trail engaged volunteers in stream restoration, trail tread work, drainage repair, and graffiti removal. Each activity serves dual purposes: improving infrastructure and teaching the work behind maintaining public lands.

Operational challenges — vandalism, trail degradation, logistical constraints — underscore that stewardship is inseparable from engagement. Every repaired trail, restored stream, and cleaned facility reflects the interdependence of human care and ecological resilience. These programs demonstrate that stewardship is recursive: participation fosters understanding, understanding encourages care, and care sustains the land.

A BALANCING ACT

The Summit panel highlighted how mission-driven institutions balance accessibility, engagement, narrative, and stewardship to shape public experience of nature. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the YMCA, and the USDA

Forest Service demonstrate strategies that make landscapes legible, approachable, and meaningful.

“Our practice has evolved through the years to include state parks, nature centers, botanical gardens, and youth camps. We thrive on the diversity of each and how the complimentary missions of each are still very distinct and extremely site specific. How might all of us continue to best learn from each other as stewards of nature and providers of immersive experiences to the audiences we serve?”

— Andrew Duggan, Moderator

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