A 46-Year History

1969  The first Earth Day. A school teacher in Cloquet, Minn., Jack Pichotta, organizes an entire week of school focused on the environment and conceives the idea that a site should be created where schools can take their students for coursework that engages them “in” the natural environment they study in their classroom.

1970  The State of MN creates a $275,000 grant to create the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) and fund operations for three years.

1971  The ELC opens in Isabella, Minn., on the site of a previous Job Corps Camp. Twenty-eight schools attend. (More than half of those schools still attend.)

1974  The Naturalist Training Program begins. College students from around the country enroll for one or two semesters.

1975  The ELC incorporates as a 501(c)3 non-profit. More than 80 schools visit the center.

1976  The ELC opens a youth camp program focused upon ecology and the environment.

1980  The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools accredits the ELC as a school – the first program of its kind to be accredited.

1984  The Naturalist Training Program expands into a post baccalaureate graduate student program.

1986  With partial funding in hand, construction of the Wolf Ridge campus begins in Finland, Minn. More than 140 schools attend the ELC.

1987  The ELC conducts the first Elderhostel (now "Road Scholar") Grandparent Grandchild program in the country, a "Grand Adventure in Intergenerational Learning”.

1988  The Wolf Ridge Campus is completed with the help of a $1.7 million loan.
1988  Wolf Ridge ELC opens in its permanent location atop a ridgeline overlooking Lake Superior in Finland. The capacity of the facility is 130 people, less than the Isabella site, resulting in 23 schools being turned away.

1991  Wolf Ridge Trustees began “Wolf Ridge 2000”, a $7 million fund raising effort to increase capacity equal to what was available at the Isabella site.

1996  The Naturalist Training Program partners with the University of Minnesota Duluth to create a post-baccalaureate Certificate of Environmental Education program for master’s degree level students.

2000  The Wolf Ridge 2000 campaign comes to a successful close. Wolf Ridge returns to the size of the original site in Isabella at 380 beds.

2002  Wolf Ridge partners with community members near Duluth to sponsor the state’s first environmental education-focused charter school, the North Shore Community School. The school’s current enrollment is 325.

2004  The Naturalist Training Program offers the first opportunity for undergraduates who have completed all their coursework to do their student teaching practicum at Wolf Ridge. The program began in partnership with Gustavus Adolphus College and currently includes partnerships with Winona State University and University of Minnesota Duluth.

2006  Wolf Ridge begins an Ecology Credit Summer Camp, where students attend for four weeks and gain a year of high school science credit. The Camp continues with the Minneapolis Public Schools offering the program to underserved youth of north Minneapolis.

2012  Wolf Ridge breaks ground for an organic vegetable farm and garden on campus. Students help grow and harvest food for the center’s cafeteria.

2015  Wolf Ridge secures a decades long lease from a generous donor of 65 acres of land on Lake Superior, where future students and adults will develop an inspired sense of connection and understanding for Lake Superior and freshwater.