



WOLF RIDGESM
ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

Graduate Naturalist Training Program

Program Overview

Wolf Ridge offers work experience combined with regular evaluation and graduate level coursework in collaboration with Antioch University New England - designed to help you grow as an experiential educator and naturalist. Wolf Ridge alumni continue to teach and lead the field of environmental education all over the world in formal classrooms, national parks, nature centers, zoos, museums, farms, and as artists and adventurers. Since 1974, the program has served almost 1000 graduate students with diverse backgrounds who come to this learning community to sharpen their skills in environmental education and sustainability.



This is a 10-month program from August to June that culminates in a graduate-level Certificate in Environmental Education and Sustainability, with 12 transferable graduate credits. Graduate naturalists teach an average of 6 half-day classes a week, attend graduate seminars, live and learn in our sustainable staff housing, and explore our 2,000 acre campus while learning how to be better educators and co-teach with the natural world.



Teach at Wolf Ridge

After the initial two weeks of staff training, you begin teaching. Teaching includes exploring our 2,000 acre campus with students during 3-hour long classes, giving evening program presentations to 200+ students, doing virtual field trips, and acting as a liaison to visiting schools to make sure they feel welcome on campus. An average week consists of teaching six half-day classes from Monday through Friday, plus an average of one weekend of teaching a month. The classes you teach cover topics in cultural history, natural history, and adventure education. Your students from visiting schools will typically range from 4th to 12th grade.



You will teach from a diverse array of content and participate in training for key competencies. You will work daily with participants of all ages, social backgrounds, physical and mental abilities, and personal interests. You will learn how to foster nature connection through hands-on experiential learning and engage in potentially controversial issues such as hunting, development, and climate change.



This is a residential (total immersion) learning program designed so that you will learn from practice - teaching, exploring, and living in community. Our teaching community consists of 6 professional naturalists, 3-5 graduates remaining for a second year of learning how to run the business of Wolf Ridge and acting as mentors for incoming graduates, and 16-18 new graduate naturalists (like yourself) with experiences from all over the map.

Earn Graduate Credits

The graduate-level Certificate of Environmental Education and Sustainability, managed by both Wolf Ridge and Antioch University New England, serves as the core of our program. At the end of your time at Wolf Ridge, you'll leave with 12 graduate credits that can be applied toward a Master's program at Antioch University New England or any other program in the nation that accepts transfer credit. The graduate courses include:

- ESC 5501 - Community Ecology of the Lake Superior Region
- ESE 5470 - Environmental Education Methods
- ES 6960 - Environmental Education and Sustainability Internship
- ESE 5020 - Foundations of Environmental Education

Everything you do here is connected to a credit. Whether you're teaching, attending a seminar, or walking through the woods looking at plants, you're receiving credit. Seminars and course work may include bird banding, plant identification hikes, discussing equitable learning environments, tapping maple trees, practicing place-based education, lynx tracking in the national forest, and exploring local food systems. You will explore both theory and practice combining a rich understanding of the psychological needs of students and theoretical aspects of pedagogy with real-life experience. The entire program is interdisciplinary and will put you in direct contact with professionals in education, wildlife management, storytelling, business administration, organic farming and more.



Naturalists are routinely described as generalists. Though we continue to embrace that aspect of how naturalists engage with the world, leaders in this field are also experts with deep knowledge in something that truly sets them apart. You will learn about everything here, but you will also focus and receive mentoring in some narrow aspect related to your professional dreams. Mentored study projects may include a focus on work with adventure education, organic farming, environmental research, business administration, storytelling, and more.

Evaluations of your teaching, observing natural phenomena, discussions with peers, creating lesson plans, going on field trips to explore other organizations, attending seminars, adventuring in the woods, and participating in a mentored study of your choice related to environmental and sustainability education will all help you learn about the field of environmental education and how to be effective as an educator. There are also numerous optional activities that are curated to help you explore

your passions and further your career goals. Our most successful students are those that take advantage of the many opportunities we have, and are able to take charge and direct their own learning.



Live in Community

Community development is at the heart of our program. Since moving to the Finland, MN campus in 1988, we have been focused on the intention of building housing that supports development of our human community while also connecting us to natural communities.



Lakeview Staff House was designed to Living Building Challenge standards - a building certification program, advocacy tool and philosophy that defines the most advanced measure of sustainability in the built environment possible today. Features include a solar photovoltaic array for electricity, solar hot water heater, automatic light sensors, and locally sourced materials. The building was also designed to facilitate community building and create spaces for intentional interactions.

Housing amenities:

- Private room with a twin bed, desk, and dresser with hanging storage.
- Large shared kitchen with 3 stoves and a commercial fridge.
- Multiple common areas with a pellet stove and projector for movie nights.
- Full laundry facility in the building.
- Large basement with extra furniture and ample storage space.
- A back deck with an amazing view of Lake Superior!





Your housemates will include 16-18 other graduate naturalists, 4-5 mentor naturalists who are staying for a second year. This community of housemates along with Wolf Ridge staff members will serve as your friends, mentors, and co-learners during the program. We also create connections with the local community of Finland, MN, the broader North Shore community, and the worldwide community of environmental educators.

Meals are provided in our dining hall when schools are on campus, and some food pantry items are supplied for the house for community meals on weekends. In the fall this includes fresh veggies from our organic farm, and in the spring we start to grow microgreens as we wait for the snow to melt.

Other Details

The program runs from late August to early June. Your total out-of-pocket cost for the graduate naturalist tuition is \$3,000. Naturalists receive a private dormitory room, meals when schools are in residence, all necessary materials for teaching and learning, and scholarships from Wolf Ridge and Antioch University New England. Our campus is located in a very rural area. Having a personal vehicle is nice, but is not required. Interviews begin in Late February for the following fall, but applications are accepted all year.



Minimum Qualifications & Skills

- B.A. or B.S. degree (required to receive graduate credit)
- Must live on-site in shared staff housing (private room)
- Current CPR and First Aid certification
- Enthusiasm for working with youth
- Growth mindset and adaptability
- Community oriented
- Excited about working outdoors year-round

Working Conditions

- Most teaching time is spent outdoors in all conditions possible in northeastern MN, at all times of the year (below freezing temperatures, snow/ice, rain, heat, humidity, bugs)
- Frequent traversing of 3+ miles on uneven terrain and up/down hills
- Frequent communication over email, phone, and in-person
- Facilitation of indoor rock climbing walls and outdoor high ropes course in all conditions utilizing harnesses and belay systems
- Movement and use of limbs including but not limited to typing, hauling, bending, pushing, and pulling
- Frequent interaction with living and nonliving creatures

Additional Benefits

- Scholarships through Wolf Ridge and Antioch University New England to reduce the cost of tuition (\$9,770 value)
- Private room in sustainable staff housing with kitchen, laundry, and shared living spaces
- Meals in the dining hall when groups are on campus and some food pantry items provided
- Access to educational resources including an on campus library and research room
- Access to recreational equipment like canoes, camping gear, snowshoes, and skis
- 2-week winter break and 5 flex days off
- Professional purchase discounts

To apply visit: wolf-ridge.org/programs/educators/naturalist/

Or contact naturalistprogram@wolf-ridge.org for more information or any questions you have.

We look forward to meeting you!