



2023 Nature-Based Programming Family Guide

Who We Are, What We Do

Grand Traverse Conservation District

“Our Mission Is To Lead, Facilitate And Inspire Exploration, Appreciation, Conservation And Restoration Of Our Natural World.”

The Grand Traverse Conservation District is a community-serving organization that cares for the people and places that make Northwest Michigan so special. We’ve been working for over 80 years to provide gateways to the natural world, restore natural areas, train future generations of conservation leaders, and support sustainable, local agriculture.

Boardman River Nature Center

Built in 2008 on the banks of the Boardman River on the [Grand Traverse Natural Education Reserve](#), the Boardman River Nature Center is your gateway to the natural world. The Nature Center offers an interpretive gallery and rotating exhibits that change with the seasons. The displays encourage interaction and feature Michigan’s most interesting fauna and flora. Operated by the Grand Traverse Conservation District, the Nature Center allows us to deliver education programs right at the source, on the doorstep to a 505-acre living laboratory.

Preschool Programming

Nature-Based Preschool Programming was created at the Boardman River Nature Center in 2008 in response to a growing national concern for the disconnect between children and the natural world. The Boardman River Nature Center Preschool programs provide an ideal environment for those pivotal “first nature experiences” – the ones that last a lifetime and set children down a path of curiosity, empathy, and wonder. The goals of the programming are to:

- Provide children with a safe environment to grow, learn, and respect people and nature.
- Connect children to nature to develop a lifelong passion for the environment and its stewardship.
- Help children recognize the natural world as part of the urban environment.

Children explore, discover, observe, and experience the natural world using all their senses while developing an appreciation for nature. Structured and self-directed play nurtures children’s imagination, creativity, and self-esteem.

Registration, Tuition, & Attendance

Tuition:

Tuition payments will be handled through Square. Payments can be made in full or monthly. Please contact Rachel Straughen, Education Director, with any questions regarding payment: rstraughen@gtcd.org.

2023 Winter/Spring Calendar:

Knee-High Naturalist Preschool Program (Ages 3-6)

Winter/Spring- Week of February 13th – Week of April 24th

Monday and/or Wednesday 10:00am-12:00pm

\$27 per day, 10 weeks, *Naturalists are welcome to attend both the Monday and/or Wednesday session.

Homeschool Program (Ages 7-12)

Winter/Spring- Week of January 30th – Week of April 24th

Thursdays 1:00pm-3:00pm

\$35 per day, 12 weeks

Cancellation & Withdrawal:

If you cancel or withdraw for any reason:

- 30 days or more prior to the program date, you will receive a full refund.
- Less than 30 days prior to the program date, no refund will be issued.
- No Partial refunds will be issued for mid-program cancellations.

If you need to cancel or withdraw your enrollment, please contact Education Director, Rachel Straughen at rstraughen@gtcd.org.

If cancellation occurs via the following, there will be no refund issued:

- School closings or delays
- Weather emergencies
- Covid-19/pandemic/illness related cancellation

Absence:

If your child will be absent from class for any reason, please notify us by calling (231) 941-0960 x17, or emailing Rachel Straughen at: rstraughen@gtcd.org. No refund will be issued for program absence.

Discharge Policy:

Grand Traverse Conservation District reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of a child for any of the following reasons:

- Physical or verbal abuse of children or staff by a parent or family member
- Failure of the family to observe the rules of the program, as outlined in the Family Guide

- Failure of the family to complete and return all required forms
- Failure of the family to adequately outfit their child with the necessary clothing to safely participate in outdoor programming
- Upon the discretion of the Education Director and after reasonable efforts on the part of Grand Traverse Conservation District staff and the child's parents or caregivers to integrate the child into the program, the child's participation may be terminated if there are behavioral or developmental concerns beyond the scope of what the program is able to manage

Daily Logistics

Pick up and drop off:

Pick up and drop off will take place at the Boardman River Nature Center located at 1450 Cass Road, Traverse City, Michigan 49685. A staff member will greet you at the end of the sidewalk or inside the Nature Center at the front desk and the child can be dropped off there. We require that you keep your child home for at minimum, a full 24 hours following any sign of illness. Our goal with every family is to have a smooth and easy transition and allow every child to join the group ***independently***.

Check in and check out:

Families must always check in and check out their students with one of the teachers. If someone who is not listed on your child's enrollment forms will be picking them up after their program, please inform Grand Traverse Conservation District ahead of time (via email, call, text, or at drop off). Additionally, anyone who is not a parent or guardian of your child **MUST PROVIDE IDENTIFICATION** when picking them up for the first time.

Family Communication:

Communication between staff and families is an essential part of our student's success. There are several ways we will communicate with you:

- *Website Blog:* When able, we will post to our website blog after each class explaining what we did for the day and including pictures where possible.
- *All-class emails:* We will send out an all-class email when any important information, gear updates, reminders of upcoming school breaks, et cetera need to be communicated.
- *One-on-one:* If you ever have concerns that you would like to address one-on-one, please don't hesitate to reach out to us and we will schedule a time to do so. While pick up and drop off are good for quick check-ins, they aren't always the best for longer chats, so please feel free to ask for a longer time to talk if you need to.

Confidentiality:

Teachers will not discuss private and confidential information regarding the programs, employees, families, or children with anyone outside of Grand Traverse Conservation District's Nature-based programming. Furthermore, teachers will not discuss your child's development or situation with any other parents or caregivers in the program. The only exception to this is authorized personnel on a need-to-know basis, particularly as it relates to mandated reporting laws.

Discipline:

Much of the daily work that children do is in learning how to communicate effectively with one another. As educators, we aspire to help children learn to communicate their thoughts, needs, wants, and feelings so that they can engage fully with those around them. As children learn about how they want to act in a group, they sometimes try new behaviors that they have observed, either in the media, at home, or in one another. Preschool-aged children are also learning to manage their energy. They are in the early stages of learning about who they are, how they act, and the fabric of their character. They actively reflect about what they have seen and how they have behaved. With all of these developmental activities interwoven in a child's outward behavior, we find that punishment is not an appropriate way to manage behavior. Instead, we use a discipline model that includes modeling, communication, boundary setting, reflection, preparation, and practice. The goal of our discipline style is to help children develop self-regulation so that they are in control of how they would like to behave.

Ratio:

We believe that a low ratio is key to creating a safe, meaningful, and high-quality experience for our students.

Toileting:

All students must be potty trained prior to starting programs. Potty trained is defined as the student independently asks to go to the bathroom when needed. In addition, being able to wipe themselves, flush and wash hands. We understand that occasionally, even the "fully potty trained" child will have an accident. Please make sure your child has extra clothes packed, we recommend 2-3 sets in the event of an accident.

Food:

Please make sure your child has a packed snack for every day of class! Your child's snack should be something that they can open and serve themselves.

Knee-High Naturalist Preschool Program (Ages 3-6)

Please pack 1-2 snacks.

Please avoid Peanuts and Tree-Nuts

Homeschool Program (Ages 7-12)

Please pack 1-2 snacks.

Please avoid Peanuts and Tree-Nuts

Drinking Water:

Drinking A LOT of water is one of the most important ways to stay healthy and happy while outside! All children must come to all programs with a full water bottle labeled with their name. We will always carry plenty of extra drinking water with us and will take regular water breaks to keep students hydrated.

Hand Washing:

All students and staff will wash their hands with soap and water before eating, after using the bathroom, after sneezing or blowing their nose, after touching insects/animals, and

before/after using shared materials. When hand washing supplies are unavailable, we will use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Bugs:

Dealing with insects is one of the realities of outdoor life. To give all our students as bug-free of an experience as possible, we will carry and use bug spray throughout the day. If you have a specific bug spray preference for your child, please feel free to send it with them in their backpack and we will happily use it. If you are looking for another way to keep bugs away, we recommend treating your child’s clothing with permethrin, which can be bought in spray form and applied directly to clothing instead of onto the skin. We understand that ticks are a concern. We recommend doing a full tick check of your child at the end of any day they are in the woods. Generally, ticks must be implanted on a person for 36-48 hours to transmit any diseases.

Appropriate Clothing:

Dressing your child appropriately is one of the best things you can do to set them up for success at school. While we know that buying clothing for children can be expensive, a few good sets of hardy outdoor gear can last a very long time and will allow your child to fully enjoy their outdoor program experience. Here is an overview of what your child might wear on a given day at one of our outdoor programs:

Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm, comfortable layers • Closed-toe shoes/boots (no Crocs/Natives, Keen-style shoes are fine) • Sun hat/warm hat, depending on weather • Fleece jacket • Rain suit (even in dry weather) • Wool socks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light, comfortable layers • Closed-toe shoes or closed-toe sandals (no Crocs/Natives, Keen-style shoes are fine) • Sun hat • Long sleeves and long pants recommended for children who are susceptible to insect bites/sun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm, comfortable layers • Closed-toe shoes/boots (no Crocs/Natives, Keen-style shoes are fine) • Sun hat/warm hat, depending on weather • Fleece jacket • Rain suit (even in dry weather) • Wool socks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthetic or wool long underwear base layer • Fleece jacket and fleece pants • Warm hat & gloves • Neck warmer • Snow pants and snow jacket • Warm winter boots • Wool socks • Rain suit in muddy conditions (worn over snow suit)

A full rain suit (either one piece or two pieces, depending on size) is provided if desired, free of charge, for all Knee High Naturalist students to use for the duration of the time your student is with us. They will be kept at the Nature Center.

School Backpack:

All students are encouraged to bring a backpack that they are capable of carrying independently with them to our program each day. Their backpack should have:

- A full water bottle with their name on it
- A snack or two
- A change of base layers, in case of accidents. (*We recommend 2-3 sets*)

- Extra layers/hats/gloves/etc.
- A rain suit or jacket & pant set, we recommend Oaki brand
- *Optional:* sunblock and bug spray, if you have specific brands/formulas you prefer

Lastly, please note the following are **NOT** acceptable at program:

- Flip flops (children in flip flops will not be permitted to participate in any activity)
- Umbrellas
- Clothing that needs to stay “clean”
- Electronics (including game devices, cell phones, etc.)
- Toys from home

Inclement Weather

On days when the weather is unsafe to be outside for extended periods of time we will utilize our heated pavilion with ventilated sides. Under severe or emergency weather conditions we will utilize the Nature Center building and encourage masking until parents and caregivers are able to safely pick up each student.

- If TCAPS schools experience a snow day, programming will also experience a snow day.
- If NMC is closed, Grand Traverse Conservation District offices and the Boardman River Nature Center will be closed. All programming will be canceled.

Safety, Accidents, & Illness

Parks & Public Spaces:

Our programs take place on the Natural Education Reserve which are open to the public. The reserve is quiet and safe, but we cannot guarantee that we will never come across another person while in class. It is our policy to always keep our group together, and to keep our group away from other groups/individuals using the park as much as possible. If someone approaches our group, one of our teachers will take that person aside and explain that we are a private group. If there is ever a concern about an individual’s behavior and the safety of our group, law enforcement will be called immediately.

Risks and Hazards:

What is the difference between a risk and a hazard? A risk is a situation that provides a challenge, in which the child has some control. A hazard is a situation in which there is no control.

Examples of risks include climbing a log or low tree, handling sticks, playing in the grass and leaves, picking up insects, using hand tools.

Examples of hazards include a sharp branch at eye-level, dangerous weather, unstable ice.

It is always our goal to eliminate hazards as much as we can. We do this by hiring skilled staff, relocating programs when necessary, and providing clear and enforceable boundaries for play. However, we do believe that engaging in age-appropriate risk is an essential part of healthy childhood development. Learning to take appropriate risks allows children to develop confidence, build their gross motor skills, and help them build their creative problem solving and executive functioning skills as they learn to assess challenging situations.

Illness:

Masks:

We will not be requiring children to wear masks. If it is your preference that your child wears a mask during class, that is not a problem! If they are going to wear a mask, they must be able to take their mask on and off independently and must be able to communicate effectively while wearing a mask.

Illness among students:

We are continuing to take our illness policy very seriously. Overall, we encourage consistent attendance for our outdoor programming. Consistency is key to getting the full benefits of our programming. Please be aware that:

- In regards to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases we recognize the times when it is NOT appropriate for a child to attend our programming out of an abundance of caution. If your child has one or more of the following symptoms, please do not send him/her to programming:
 - A temperature of 100°+
 - Fever or chills
 - You cannot send your child to class if anyone in your household is running a fever over 100.4 degrees
 - Persistent cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Fatigue
 - Muscle or body aches
 - Headache
 - New loss of taste or smell
 - Sore throat
 - Congestion or runny nose
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Diarrhea
- You are required to inform the Grand Traverse Conservation District if anyone in your household has had exposure to someone who is exhibiting symptoms of Covid-19, who is undergoing testing for Covid-19, or who has tested positive for Covid-19.
- You will be notified if your child has been exposed to an infectious disease. If a child shows symptoms of illness during class, they will be kept physically separate from the group and will be required to be picked up as soon as possible.

Allergies and Food Restrictions:

The Grand Traverse Conservation District should be made aware of all allergies and food restrictions prior to your child's first day of classes, so that we can devise a plan to best accommodate your child's needs. If your child has nut allergies, we will happily accommodate them and require all families to bring nut-free snacks.

Medications:

If requested, we will administer medication. Prescriptions and over-the-counter medication will only be given to children if the family has requested it, and only in the amount indicated. We will not exceed the regulated dosage on the label of any medication without a written doctor's authorization.

Accidents & Emergencies:

Small bumps and bruises are a basic tenet of being a kid, but we will make every effort to keep our students safe through active supervision and teaching our students about proper risk assessment. Teachers are certified in CPR and First Aid, and we always carry a robust first aid kit with us. Minor injuries will receive appropriate first aid and an incident report will be written. If an emergent injury or illness occurs, parents are contacted immediately, and a plan will be made to get the child to medical care as quickly as possible. Because of this, we need to have up-to-date contact information for our families, so please let us know of any changes in your contact information or if you will be unavailable during class. If emergency transportation and care become necessary, families will be responsible for all medical and related costs.

Incident Reports:

An incident report will be filled out any time an accident or illness occurs. The teacher who was the primary caregiver of the hurt or sick child will be responsible for completing the report and will also be responsible for delivering the report to the family at the end of the day.