

## About ClearWater Conservancy

The mission of ClearWater Conservancy is to promote conservation and restoration of natural resources in central Pennsylvania through land protection, water resources protection, and environmental outreach to the community.

ClearWater has conserved over 600 acres of land with easements, and an additional 2,400 acres have been protected through conservation partnerships. Most of Millbrook Marsh is protected by an easement, but the rare calcareous fen at the heart of the Marsh is owned by ClearWater.

## About the Students ~ Communities ~ Streams ~ Connections Program

Since 1997, ClearWater Conservancy has been providing students in schools throughout Centre County with the opportunity for hands-on learning through outdoor watershed education. Each year, between 1,000 and 1,500 students have visited places like Millbrook Marsh Nature Center, Bald Eagle State Park, and Fisherman's Paradise for a day packed with information and fun. Because of its high-quality environmental education programs, Millbrook Marsh Nature Center was chosen by ClearWater Conservancy for the location of Connections student field trips.

This program grew out of the Spring Creek Watershed Community's goal of increasing public awareness of watershed issues through education and communication. By reaching out to the younger generation, we hope to instill a conservation ethic and inspire children to share what they learn with parents and friends.

Grant funding for field trips to the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center is available in both spring and fall. Nature Center program fees, bus transportation, and environmental education materials are all eligible for funding through the Connections program. A simple, two-page application and a post-field trip feedback form are available from ClearWater Conservancy by contacting Jennifer Shuey.

*Everyone working together to conserve natural beauty  
and the environment in the heart of Pennsylvania*

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# Stories of Land, Water, and People

## Elementary Exploration

### Discovering the Wonders of Millbrook Marsh

**On a cool, brisk October morning** a bus from Easterly Parkway Elementary lumbers into the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center's parking lot, unloading 24 exuberant fourth-graders all anxious to explore the marsh.

"Alright guys, can we get in a big circle?" calls out Becky McCutcheon, a Program Assistant at the Nature Center. The group marched quickly into a circle, their teachers in tow. The kids fidgeted while standing in the circle, shading their eyes from the early morning sun and whispering to their neighbors in excited, quiet voices.

Becky explained to the youngsters the many adventures the morning would hold: a pest patrol, a plant walk, and a station explaining the functions of the wetland. These three programs are designed to supplement the fourth grade students' curriculum in Integrated Pest Management



*Pastel of Millbrook Marsh Nature Center by Harriet Swanson, now in the collection of the Penn State Cooperative Wetlands Center.*

or IPM, which they had already begun studying prior to the trip. Many of the kids had visited the Nature Center in first and second grades for a different marsh exploration program. Millbrook Marsh Nature Center has curriculum developed for kindergarten, first & second grade, third & fourth grade, and middle school students that meets the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Ecology and the Environment, which is a big help to the teachers as well as a lot of fun for the kids.

ClearWater Conservancy sends several hundred students each semester to Millbrook Marsh Nature Center through its Students~Communities~Streams~Connections” Program. Scholarships are offered to local public, private, charter, and home schools to offset the costs the programs and of transportation to the marsh.

To start the programs, the class broke up into groups of 8 or 9 and began their exploration of the marsh. On this day, the stations were run by



three elementary education majors; teaching at the marsh was a requirement for their science education class.

The first station focused on the functions of the wetland. Sara Schlumpf, an elementary education major, started off her lesson with the reading of a story called Squish!, a book about the many animals and plants that call the wetland home. The children’s faces lit up at the chance to actually spot these creatures for themselves at the marsh.

After the story was finished, the experiment began. Each group of kids was given an aluminum tray with a clay “mountain” and a sponge below it. The kids were instructed to pour water down the mountain onto their “wetland.” Several were amazed by the sponge’s ability to soak up the water and protect the watershed.

Sara posed the question: “Now what do you think would happen if there was no wetland and your house was at the bottom of that hill?” “It would get pretty wet,” replied a student named Rhianna. The addition of food coloring on the sponge simulated pollution in the marsh.

“Eww,” said Mackenzie as she watched the blue dye stain the sponge, “the wetland is kind of a sponge and a cleaner,” she observed. Rowan explained her idea to further the experiment: “When I go home, I’m gonna put little houses on the other side of the sponge and see what happens.”

After the soggy wetland was

*“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”*

~ Rachel Carson

cleaned up, the children trekked off across the field and meadow, bound for the boardwalk and the marsh, where they would meet Erin McDonough and become part of the “plant police.” The students watched expectantly as Erin placed a piece of jewelweed in a container of water. “That’s where it gets its name. See how it sparkles.”

Ooohs and aaahs rose up as the jewelweed made its way around the group. “When we were here last time, we pretended that the goldenrod was popcorn and the cattails were hotdogs,” giggled Rowan as the group continued through the marsh.

Armed with a field guide and intent on being the best plant police officers they could be, the young detectives’ eyes were focused on the plants of the marsh, searching for native, non-native, and invasive plants.

Erin explained that people used to eat cattails. “Well, they are kinda soft,” exclaimed Christian. At the end of the walk, the kids sorted their finds in “America’s Least Wanted,” placing non-native and invasive plants high on the list as the leading culprits.



On the way to the next activity, the kids paused to look at fish under a bridge, but were soon attracted farther down the boardwalk towards small signs stuck in the ground and Amanda Henry. The site for the pest walk was riddled with questions about integrated pest management (IPM) methods. Amanda explained that there are lots of safe ways to get rid of pests. “For instance, if you have a problem with deer in your yard, you can plant marigolds.”

The pest walk concluded with a discussion of everyone’s favorite pest, the skunk. Amanda produced a stuffed skunk from her bag and showed how a skunk will signal when it feels threatened. “The skunk will stomp its front feet and then turn around and do a handstand. If you see a skunk do this, watch out!”

Amanda then led the group in a skunk dance; everyone stomped their feet, turned around, and shook their bums. The boardwalk shook, but the kids couldn’t stop smiling and laughing.

At the end of the morning’s activities, the class reunited in a big circle. Becky asked what their favorite part of the day was. Responses came from all around.

“Seeing the fish”, “The sponge station”, “The jewelweed changing colors”, “Learning how people used to eat cattails”, “Everything!”, “When can we come back again?”