

The Ridges Sanctuary

Number of employees:

16 (5 full-time, 11 part-time)

Number of volunteers:

200+

What is your Mission Statement?

The mission of The Ridges is to promote positive environmental behaviors through impactful educational experiences, land management and protection, and ecological research.

What is the main source of your funding and what percent of your funding does that source provide?

Individual undesignated donations and memberships provide roughly 50% of our revenue. Other sources include our endowment, designated contributions, program fees, grants for our research programs and our nature store.

What is the geographic scope of your services throughout Door County?

The Ridges Sanctuary protects and preserves over 1,600 acres of critical habitat in Baileys Harbor and Jacksonport, with over 10 miles of hiking trails to explore. In addition to the lands protected, The Ridges Sanctuary collaborates extensively with Gibraltar and Sevastopol Public Schools for regularly scheduled, place-based environmental education programming in their local school forests. The Ridges also partners with the Door County Land Trust and Crossroads at Big Creek for county-wide citizen science and research initiatives such as WAV Stream Monitoring, Great Backyard Bird Count, and MOTUS, in addition to a number of county wide citizen science initiatives hosted directly by The Ridges.

Explanation of how you serve Door County including primary programs your organization offers to the community.

Our goal is to connect adults, children, and families with nature, inspiring a way of life that is in harmony with the environment. The Ridges serves the Door Peninsula through:

Youth Learning Opportunities

Forest Days

Forest Days is a program hosted in partnership with Gibraltar and Sevastopol Public Schools. The program is designed to engage students in their local forest and connect with nature to increase their knowledge and appreciation of the natural world. Our team prepares monthly, 90-minute sessions and takes each classroom out into their local forest. Gibraltar Public School, with 19 classes for Grades 4K*-6, and Sevastopol Public School, with 6 classes for Grades K-2, participate in these monthly forest explorations. The ongoing nature of this program presents a unique

opportunity for students to learn about forest ecology, change and adaptations throughout all four seasons.

*The Ridges also offers a unique learning opportunity for the Gibraltar Public Schools 4K classroom hosted at Northern Door Childcare Center. Because they do not have the proximity to the forest like Gibraltar School, the 4k class comes to The Ridges Sanctuary to explore and learn in the same capacity, just like the rest of the 4k program.

Ridges Forest School

In 2022, we launched an ongoing learning opportunity for homeschooled students ages 6-9. Every Tuesday and Thursday, students from all over the Door Peninsula come to The Ridges from 9:15am-12:15pm for outdoor, hands-on learning. This program is guided by our professionally trained educator. Students hike through diverse ecosystems, learn to journal, engage in hands-on investigations with their peers, and make personal connections with the natural world. Curriculum is child-centered and aligned with the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE). This program is scholarship supported by our generous donors and community. The value of the program is underscored by this testimonial from a program participant: "The Ridges Forest School has been just what we were looking for as a homeschooling family. Hiking, playing, and learning, immersed in a natural setting, with excellent teachers gives our daughter an appreciation for our unique ecology, time with friends her age to play outside, and opportunities to learn about the land and animals that interest her. We can't recommend it enough!"

Tiny Trekkers

Open to children from the time they can walk up to 3 years of age, this program is designed to create a foundation of love and respect for the natural world. Active play in nature between caregivers and children provides lasting impressions. Classes consist of gentle hiking, songs, nature art, and endless possibilities for exploration and experimentation. This program serves many Door County families and experiences high demand.

NEW and UPCOMING IN 2024

Dragonfly Nature Preschool – Part of the Gibraltar Area School District Community Collaborative 4K. We are delighted to be partnering with the Gibraltar Area School District to offer a nature-based, 4K program as a part of their Community Collaborative 4K. Students participating in this exciting opportunity will learn in The Ridges' primary classroom – Nature! Dragonfly Nature Preschool will provide high-quality early childhood experiences that meet young children's developmental needs while initiating them into a life-long, meaningful relationship with the natural world. The curriculum for this program is nature-based, play-based, child-centered and aligns with the National Association of the Education of Young Children and Wisconsin Models of Early Learning Standards as well as best practices in Environmental Education (as outlined by NAAEE).

Adult Learning Opportunities

Festival of Nature

Now entering its 22nd year in operation, the Door County Festival of Nature is a robust learning and engagement opportunity for learners interested in exploring our wild spaces and celebrating the natural beauty of the Door Peninsula. Held every year during Memorial Day Weekend, 65-75 field trips are offered to our community in partnership with our volunteers, staff and other not-for-profit partners in conservation.

Other community programs offered

- Summer Backpack Adventure Camps for age groups 4 - 6 and 7 - 11 (annually since the 1980s)
- School Field Trips
- Owl-O-Rama
- Bluebird Nesting Workshops
- Crane Symposium
- Monarch Madness
- Natural Christmas at The Ridges Sanctuary
- Citizen Science Projects
- Lake Lessons (summer guest speaker series)
- Stewardship Workshops

How would you define the impact your organization is making in Door County?

The Ridges works diligently every single day to inspire the conservation of Nature through our primary program areas of Preservation, Education and Research. In 1937, our founder Albert Fuller once said, "This land belongs to the people of Door County but most importantly it belongs to future generations." The actions we take today, the commitments we make to this special place, and the community we empower to protect and preserve the natural beauty of the Door Peninsula help ensure that future generations can love, appreciate and experience this wild place as we do today.

We are proud that our important work in preservation, education and research positively impacts our Door County community as a strong economic center, as a place for respite, curiosity and growth, and as a leader in land stewardship and preservation. We are surrounded by some of the most biologically diverse and ecologically sensitive lands in the entire Midwest, and together with our partners in conservation, our work keeps Door County beautiful, wild, and pristine.

In a recent public engagement activity, we asked our community – What impact does The Ridges Sanctuary have on our community? and What do you think of when you think about The Ridges?

We heard the following:

"The Ridges is a place that inspires all generations with enthusiasm, curiosity, respect and action through experience and education."

"The Ridges is a leader in encouraging sustainability and is a leading voice on climate change and other environmental issues."

"It is a place that inspires future generations to get involved and become stewards of our unique natural spaces."

"A communion of people and the environment. Being a respite / connection to nature. Inspire stewardship by connecting with nature."

These answers articulate who we are. We work hard every day to provide a safe, welcoming place for our local community, visitors, and learners of all ages to engage with nature. Whether it is through active hands-on programming, or a simple walk through the boreal forest with friends, The Sanctuary offers respite and knowledge.

As an organization we are honored to be stewards of this special place and we will continue to be an institution for curiosity, engagement, stewardship, and growth that positively impacts our Door County community.

What is your annual budget?

Our annual budget is roughly \$950,000. Program services account for roughly 62% of our operating expenses.

If you were to receive a donation from 100+ WWC, how would that donation be used?

We would use these impactful funds to help ensure our programming and education experiences remain financially accessible to our community. We rely on the support of our community to help us minimize costs for programs not only for the general public but also for students interested in participating in our educational experiences. These funds will help us continue to break down barriers by offering robust scholarship opportunities for local families and students to participate in our youth education programs, and by offering free access days to Ridges learning programs at the Nature Center for our local community and visitors.