

Thurston Nature Center Guide

Mission Statement

Land Use Policy

Thurston Nature Center Committee is a subordinate committee on the Thurston Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). It is responsible for the maintenance of the nature center and development of long range plans for the preservation of the land and water. The TNC should be managed as a natural environment for the benefit of the Ann Arbor Public School's Environmental Education Program and the local community. The Nature Center is open to all community members to use and enjoy on an equal basis.

The goal of the TNC is to maintain and preserve the natural communities in the nature center with plants, trees, shrubs, flowers, and animal species indigenous to the State of Michigan. The TNC Committee shall approve of all plants, introduction or removal of any animals, the care of the pond and wetlands, land use (trail maintenance, tree trimming, tree removal, grass mowing). Any changes in the nature center must have prior approval by the TNC Committee.

Nature Center Vision Statement

Thurston Nature Center is a nice spot for a walk, explore different ecosystems and watch wildlife. It's a unique space that bids everyone from all walks of life to enjoy together. The space connects generations over common sentiments of beauty, inspiration, peace, healing, discovery, enjoyment- in short overall health and wellness. It is in this, that committee members step into the great tradition of stewardship and cultivation, to create space for experiences to remember.

The Nature Center will maintain the native plant and wildlife indigenous to the state of Michigan and adjoining ecosystems to our south, while managing the land and water preservation long term for the benefit of the local public schools and neighborhood.

History of the TNC

The development of the pond behind Thurston Elementary School into a Nature Center was the dream of a hand full of Naturalists and like minded individuals from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Originally farm land, the low area became a natural swamp where the cows would drink before going up to the original oak/hickory woods to the north. The area was non-usable, and the school district hoped it could be drained and later used for a junior high. However, residents and conservationists/naturalists saw an opportunity. Spearheaded by William Stapp and a handful of neighborhood families in the Bromley and Orchard Hills subdivisions in 1965, along with the PTO, plans to create a nature center were born.

At the time, 1968, the center on the grounds of the school was one of the first of its kind-in the country! Their vision of a natural area on school grounds that could be used as an outdoor classroom to facilitate the education of Ann Arbor Public Students in areas such as the inter-relationships of plants and animals native to the state was extraordinary. They hoped that the non-textbook approach to the sciences would foster an appreciation and respect for the land that supports these ecosystems, as well as, the plant and animal communities.

As the project progressed the nature center was officially dedicated as an Outdoor Education Reserve by the State of Michigan in April of 1968. Later, the National Youth Conference on Beauty and Conservation, sponsored by Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, asked a film be created on what young people in various parts of the country were doing in relationship toward those efforts. Thurston Nature Center was one of seven locations to be chosen for that honor. "We're on our Way" premiered in Washington, D.C. in 1967.

This was just the beginning for the TNC which is celebrating over 50 years of operation. We were granted the distinction in 2010 to become a National Wildlife Federation Certified Wildlife Habitat and in 2017 a National Certified Monarch Waystation. We host multiple wildlife communities: Oak/Hickory Woods, Wetlands, Prairie, Pond, and Lower Town, including one of a kind, Oak Opening or Oak Savannah.

Policies

The TNC has guidelines for the following on the properties for the Thurston Nature Center land and Orchard Hills Athletic Club (OHAC) that is continuous with the Nature Center property.

The inter-relationships between land communities and animal species in the nature center is very delicate. *It is important that the land in the center and of the adjacent properties be treated with respect and care in order to maintain the biological diversity (especially its educational value) and enjoyment of the Nature Center.*

DO:

1. follow established trails and avoid wet areas where possible.
2. Pick up litter and dispose of properly.
3. Keep dogs on leash, clean up after your pet and dispose of waste properly.
4. Enjoy the flowers and animal life by observation, walking, photography and study.
5. Report any abuse, dangerous situations, unseemly behaviors to any TNC Committee Member, OHAC Board Member, Thurston Elementary School or call 911.

DO NOT

1. Litter
2. No motorized vehicles of any kind on the trails or in the pond.
3. Collect flowers, other fauna or wildlife.
4. Take wood chips, wood or build fires on the property.

5. Dump your yard waste or personal garbage on the Nature Center property.
6. Store any of your personal items on the Nature Center
7. Alter any of the Nature Center Land beyond your own personal property if it abuts the Nature Center.
8. Use any fertilizers or pesticides or herbicides on or near Nature Center Property.
9. Cut any trees, flowers, or shrubs. NOR plant any trees, flowers or shrubs. Many of the flowers are endangered species and therefore protected by state law.
10. Dump contents of any aquarium (plants or animals) in the Nature Center, Pond.
11. Disturb nesting birds
12. Fish anything out of the pond.

Controlled Burns

Forest fire experts occasionally will plan fires. These prescribed burns help control invasive species, create critical habitat for wildlife and help Michigan's forests grow. They also remove natural materials that, left unchecked, could provide fuels for bigger wildfires.

History:

In Michigan, plants and animals are adapted to co-exist with fire. Some species, like Jack Pine Trees, even depend on fire for survival. Burned areas regrow quickly, providing abundant food and shelter for animals. Before European settlement in Michigan, fires were ignited by Native Americans or lightning strikes.

Today, fires are quickly suppressed for safety reasons, but certain landscapes like pine forests, grasslands and prairies can still benefit from fire. That's where prescribed burns come in.

Prescribed Fire is Safe

The prescribed burn is done carefully and deliberately, with safety equipment on hand to monitor and control its spread. The burn is planned and executed to minimize the amount of smoke produced and to direct it away from smoke-sensitive areas as much as possible.

The burn is done with the cooperation and approval of local fire department, and occasionally, county fire department authorities, who issue permits for burns to be conducted. Weather conditions, personnel, equipment, and other parameters needed for the burn to be conducted safely are outlined beforehand. Prior to burning, temporary "burn breaks" are created around the area to be burned to help manage the fire and delineate the exact boundaries of the burn site.

Here's how it works:

Burns can take place any time of the year but are usually are conducted in spring or fall. Foresters, wildlife biologists and other natural resources professionals evaluate the area and write a plan to help them achieve their goals. Trained fire staff uses specialized equipment to light and control the fire. Throughout the burn, they monitor safety, site conditions and the weather. A site may require multiple burns before it reaches desired conditions.

Prescribed burns also provide an opportunity for Michigan firefighters to receive valuable training. DNR fire staff as well as local fire departments can learn about wildfire behavior in a controlled environment.

In the Nature Center our Land Stewards coordinate the controlled burns. When needed working with David Borneman, LLC or Plantwise Restoration.

**information taken from the DNR and David Borneman, LLC
websites. https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79136_79237_81031-55955--,00.html
http://restoringnaturewithfire.com/prescribed_fire*

Gentle Reminders for Animal Owners:

For those who enjoy bringing your dog into the TNC for a walk or run. The following are a general courtesy that will make the nature center pleasant for all who use it. We sincerely appreciate your help on this effort! ***In emergency situations, call 9-1-1. For non-emergencies call 734.994.2911.***

Reasonable Control (Leash Laws)

Dogs must be secured by a leash held by the owner or the owner's agent when walking in and around TNC property. Sidewalks and lawn extensions (the curb) are public. Dogs should not be left alone for any length of time. All animal control regulations (leash laws) also apply to the TNC.

Nuisances

Noise nuisances are defined as an animal that is barking, howling, meowing, squawking or making other sounds, frequently or for a continued duration, which annoys, endangers, injures or disturbs a person of normal sensitivities on premises other than that occupied by the owner of the animal.

Sanitation nuisances are any unsanitary conditions resulting from animal droppings, food waste, debris, or anything else which causes vermin infestation, odors or disease hazards.

Waste Clean-up Penalties

If a dog (except for leader dogs for the blind) discharges it's feces on TNC property and the owner does not immediately remove such feces, a ticket can be issued.

Animal Bites

- All wounds should be washed immediately with soap and water.
- The victim should contact their doctor or medical facility as soon as possible.
A report should be made with the Ann Arbor Police Department if it occurred within the city limits.
- Obtain owner information or contain the animal if possible.
- Note: There is a bite inspection fee of \$30.

***information sourced from the City of Ann Arbor*

Ordinances. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/police/about/traffic-enforcement/Pages/Animal-Control.aspx>

Pond Rules

The TNC maintains a NO FISHING, NO MOTORIZED VEHICLES and NO SWIMMING policy. In winter months, local residents will clear snow to create ice rinks. These are utilized AT YOUR OWN RISK

The Nature Center is part of the Miller's Creek Watershed which feeds into the Huron River and down towards Lake Huron. It is very important for our community to protect this body of water from pesticides, herbicides, gases, oils and the like. When these toxic chemicals flow into the pond it disturbs life in the pond, causing disease, sickness and death. There are a host of plants and animals that rely on the habitats and ecosystems that the pond provides, year round, seasonally and migratory.

The quality of Millers Creek affects our lives in many ways including but not limited to:

1. Basement flooding
2. Lack of diverse wildlife in and along the creek
3. Poor water quality
4. Property erosion
5. Access

There are several ways that the Nature Center is helping to create clean water was to create Rain Gardens on the property. We now host three Rain Gardens: The Turtle, The Heron, and The Butterfly. Another large project was the Pond Restoration Project, building berms

Trail Use

Please be good stewards of the trails and pathways in the Nature Center. These are maintained by volunteers of the community. If the trails are water logged, as is frequent during the spring months, please wait until the water has drained or soaked down into the ground/pond. When the

trails are used in unfavorable conditions it causes undue wear and tear, rendering the trails to poor condition.

The Executive Committee will upon inspection and recommendation temporarily close portions of trails when necessary. The trails will be re-opened when the conditions are favorable.

Contact a member of the Executive Committee for trail concerns or issues.

Kiosks

These informational kiosks are designed to allow people to view information pertinent to the Nature Center. Including maps, rules, events, recognitions and etc, they are a one source stop for anyone visiting the Nature Center.

The kiosks line up with the long term vision and planning for the Nature Center.

***If you notice vandalism or any issues with the kiosks please contact Thurston Elementary School or any member of the Nature Center Executive Board.*

Partners and Networking Allies

1. AAPS
2. AAPS Outdoor Educational Department
3. Orchard Hills Athletic Club
4. Ann Arbor Ecology Center
5. Sierra Club
6. REI
7. Washtenaw County Audubon Society
8. UM School of Natural Resources
9. Huron River Watershed Council
10. Washtenaw County Rain Gardens
11. Bromley Neighborhood
12. Orchard Hills/Maplewood Homeowners Association
13. City of Ann Arbor-
 - a. Engineering Departments
 - b. Ward 2 City Council Representatives
14. National Sanitation Foundation
15. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
16. Institute for Fisheries Research
17. Leslie Science Center
18. Eastern Michigan University
19. Natural Area Preservation of Ann Arbor

20. Plantwise, Inc.
21. David Borneman, LLC
22. Local Boy and Girl Scout Troops

Newsletter

A newsletter will be available upon request by email, please see our website to subscribe to our newsletter and other notices. The newsletters will coincide with the four seasons, spring, summer, fall and winter.

Anyone wishing to submit articles relating or other information pertaining to the Nature Center may do so at any time, which may be submitted and considered for addition by the TNC Chair or Newsletter Director.

Media Connecting Points

www.FACEBOOK.com like us @ThurstonNatureCenter, BromleyBuzz, A2ontheNorthside
www.thurstonnaturecenter.info
<https://www.a2schools.org/Page/49>

Contact Information:

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