



Tales from the Field
PLACE-BASED EDUCATION IN ACTION

*Tale #4: Wildlife Habitat
Restoration*



Students in this fifth grade teacher's two science classes had participated in various field trips throughout the school year, including to nature preserves and other science-rich sites in the area. Some were walking field trips in the school neighborhood and to nearby parks, including a city shoreline park. These field trips were integrated into her curriculum and supported various learning standards and benchmarks, but especially those related to "human impact on the environment." Her goal was to expose students to the natural world and help them better understand how "nature works." She also wanted them to realize that they can play a role in preserving nature and open space. She has been developing the idea of "sustainable development" with her students. This goal led her to partnering with a local organization that is focused on helping birds by saving and restoring habitat. She and previous students had done small projects with this group in the past. This would be an opportunity for students to be involved in a "big" project.

This nature preservation organization was working with individuals and local agencies to restore a former sand mining site in a nearby county. Work had already been done to restore the general landscape, but now it would be necessary to restore the "meadow" habitat to encourage ground-dwelling birds to return to the area. Seeding the area with native plants would be a first-step. Working with the director of the nature preservation group the previous fall, students helped harvest seeds from various locations for later reseeded at the mine site.

In Spring 2006, a "planting" day was organized, during which students and others helped reseed the meadow with seeds they had gathered in the fall. The teacher said that, "too often, students think there is nothing they can do to help the environment. It is difficult to engage students in activities that really show an immediate improvement." She wanted her students to be involved in this restoration project, because it would show them that they could "make a difference." She indicates students are enthusiastic about this project and "in the process are learning a lot about birds, wildlife, wildlife conservation, and environmental stewardship." Although organizing field trips and partnering with community organizations "takes a lot of time" and includes complicated logistics, "It is worth it for my students. I plan to do similar projects in the future."

This is one of several *Tales from the Field* prepared by the external evaluators of the DTE Freshwater Institute, Science and Mathematics Program Improvement (SAMPI) at Western Michigan University. This vignette is based on an interview with the teacher. It is part of a comprehensive evaluation that was conducted during the 2005-06 school year of the entire DTE Energy Freshwater Institute. For more information about the evaluation, contact Dr. Mark Jenness, SAMPI—Western Michigan University (269-387-3791 or mark.jenness@wmich.edu). For more information about the DTE Freshwater Institute, contact Becky Ewing, Great Lakes Water Studies Institute, Northwestern Michigan College (231-995-1787 or beewing@message.nmc.edu). Prepared 12-06.