

The Field Guide to the OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres

Registration is open
for Ontario
Curriculum-based
field trips to the
OCDSB Outdoor
Education Centres for
the 2025-2026 school
year.
Unfortunately spaces
and dates are limited!



Fall 2025

**BILL MASON AND MACSKIMMING OUTDOOR
EDUCATION CENTRE**



Io moth (*Automeris io*) @ MacSkimming Centre taken by Bill McMullen in June 2025

Open Trails Day at MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre!

On Saturday September 20th, 2025, MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre is having its annual **Open Trails** Day!

This free open house event is the only day during the entire school year where this Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) 425 acre classroom is open and everyone is welcome to come hike the trails and explore this natural learning space.

Gates open at 9:00am to 3:00pm and parking is available at 3685 Wilhaven Drive & 3640 Ottawa Regional Road#174.

Bring your hiking shoes, campfires will be available if you wish to bring marshmallows and dogs are welcomed but they must be kept on their leash. You, your friends and family are more than welcome to visit, stay just 45 minutes or stay the entire day.

Volunteer Bill McMullen receives the OCDSB Employee Innovative Award!

This school year, the *Ottawa Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB)* Outdoor Education Centres, OCDSB Continuing Education Department and Trillium Elementary nominated teacher **Bill McMullen** for the *OCDSB Employee Recognition's Innovation Award for all his volunteer work at the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre and he won the award!*

This award is for noteworthy contribution by an OCDSB staff member, to the development of innovative concepts, suggestions, actions or process improvements that result in immediate and significant ongoing benefit to the Board.

The award nominations were selected by the OCDSB Director's Executive Council and a ceremony took place on May 20th 2025 at the OCDSB's main administration office.

Bill's Nomination for the OCDSB Innovation Award:

Bill McMullen, a dedicated volunteer, has made significant contributions to the OCDSB and its Outdoor Education Centres. He generously shares his time and talents, demonstrating a passion for connecting young people with nature and enhancing their educational experiences. Bill has become invaluable in raising awareness of local biodiversity and improving the learning environment at the MacSkimming and Bill Mason Centres. Bill's extensive volunteer work includes maintaining bird nesting boxes built by students and preserving the Centres' ecological integrity by removing invasive plant species. He manages trail cameras that capture valuable data and designs interpretive signs that enhance understanding of nature. Beyond these practical efforts, Bill shares his knowledge through engaging presentations, such as a nighttime owl hike for secondary students. A key aspect of Bill's contribution is his exceptional photography, documenting the biodiversity of the MacSkimming Centre since 2015. Bill donates these stunning visuals to the OCDSB, where they are used in programs, displayed in OCDSB buildings and shared online, inspiring students to connect with the natural world.

The Centres owes much of its recent success to Bill, for his talents, strong work ethic, pride, loyalty to our students and the natural world. We are so lucky to have him!

The OCDSB's Shared Learning Space

What happened this Spring & Summer at the Centres?

On April 25th, Grade 7 students from **Henry Munro Middle School** sat in silence in the forest at MacSkimming Centre with instructor David Deyette, to watch a porcupine lumber by them and feed on plants during their *Interactions within the Environment* program. The porcupine even did a little dance with its quills for the students. So many great questions followed.

On May 14th, Grade 6 students from **Manordale Public School** found an orange Northern water snake during their *Biodiversity* program at the Bill Mason Centre. This program was funded by the **Ottawa Field Naturalist Club**.

On May 20th, Grade 3 students from **South March Public School** compared the flowers of red and white trilliums during their *Plants and Soils* program at the Bill Mason Centre.

On May 21st, Indigenous students from elementary schools across the **Ottawa Carleton District School Board** came to MacSkimming Centre for a day of learning on the land. Students went for a nature walk, made some beautiful art work, explored a vernal pond and spent some quality time around the camp fire with community members.

On May 22nd, kindergarten students from **Henry Larsen Public School** were excited to see a male scarlet tanager during their *Forest Explore* program with Instructor Gord Carter at MacSkimming Centre. Many students and volunteers thought it was a cardinal.

On May 26th, Grade 4 students from **Westwind Public School** caught a central mud minnow while pond dipping during their *Habitats and Communities* program with instructor Raven Nordstrand at the Bill Mason Centre. This individual catch of a fish now demotes this wetland classification from a vernal pond to a swamp wetland. No fish is the classification for a vernal pond.

On May 27th, **Carleton University's** Biology Department's bat research team caught over 50 little brown myotis during one night at MacSkimming Centre. Many of these endangered bats caught on this date were recaptures from the past four years of monitoring and tagging.

On May 30th, Grade 6 students from **Huntley Centennial Public School** sat on the boardwalk within the wetland and tried to call in a Virginia rail during their *Biodiversity* program at the Bill Mason Centre. They were successful and two Virginia rails climbed out of the wetland, onto the boardwalk near the students, teacher Angelika Skevington and Instructor Brandon Burda.

June 2nd, kindergarten students from **St. Cecilia School** found a massive Blanding's turtle during their *Forest Explore* program at the Bill Mason Centre.

On June 4th, Grade 3 students from **Castlefrank Elementary School** discovered a pair of blooming yellow lady's slipper orchids in the forest and were taken to the secret wild strawberry patch to pollinate the strawberry flowers during their *Plants and Soils* program at Bill Mason Centre.

On June 10th, Grade 6 students from **Heritage Public School** got a great opportunity to see a fisher while they were exploring the forest during their *Biodiversity* program at MacSkimming Centre. The students had so many good questions after this observation.

While playing the bird nest game on June 12th, Grade 2 students from **Mary Honeywell Elementary School** were brought over in pairs by Instructor Christine Bull to look at a killdeer nest during their *Growth and Changes in Animals* program at the Bill Mason Centre. Some students even got to see the killdeer's broken wing display which was followed by huge wave of questions and concerns.

On June 19th, after playing a food chain simulation, Grade 7 students from **Sir Robert Borden High School** came across a painted turtle in the meadow during their *Interactions in the Environment* program at the Bill Mason Centre. They also gorged on wild ripe strawberries in the meadow.

On June 19th, Grade 1 students from **Severn Avenue Public School** found a northern two-lined salamander, a spring peeper, wood frogs and an American toad while exploring the forest during their *Needs of Living Things* program at MacSkimming Centre. They were also greeted by a male wild turkey when they returned to the classroom.

On June 23rd, Grade 7s from **Queen Elizabeth Public School** braved the heat & came to MacSkimming for their *Interactions within the Environment* program. They were so excited to explore the forest & found two spotted salamanders & a luna moth.

On June 25th, two of 3 classes of Grade 2 students from **Agincourt Road Public School** spotted two young barred owls while hiking to their classroom during their *Growth and Changes in Animals* program at MacSkimming Centre.

On July 4th, students in the **OCDSB Indigenous Summer Learning Program** spent the morning picking and eating wild black raspberries within MacSkimming Centre as part of their reading comprehension of the book "*Braiding Sweetgrass*".

As of July 11th 2025, **20,950 students** are scheduled to attend the OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres for 2025-2026!

OCDSB's 502 acre Classroom!

This Spring's OCDSB Tree Planting Project !

Cairine Wilson Secondary School, Longfield-Davidson Heights Secondary School, Nepean High School and South Carleton High School planted **2000 trees** between May 5th and May 13th, 2025 at MacSkimming Centre (3734 Old Montreal Road).

Eighty four OCDSB students planted the following native bare-root trees: 1200 Eastern white pines, 200 black walnuts, 200 black cherries, 200 shagbark hickories and 200 tamaracks.

This project was funded by the **Ottawa Carleton District School Board's Environmental Services Department** which to date has sponsored 3120 trees planted by OCDSB secondary school students within the OCDSB's 425 acre classroom.

Trees were from the *Rideau Valley Conservation Authority* and *Ferguson Forest Centre Corporation* and planted within a 7,062.96 meter squared area (1.74 acres).

The objective of the tree planting project is to sequester carbon, retain ground water and top soil, shade out invasive plant species, decrease ground temperatures, enhance fungi biodiversity, create shelter and a corridor for local wildlife, construct a wind and sound barrier and provide a positive learning space for generations of students. This project will continue for the 2025-2026 school year, with the hope for four OCDSB secondary schools to plant another 2000 trees at the Centre!



The Planters of the 2000 Trees!

Sana Al Mohamed
Olivia Gu
Zaynab Almalki
Iris Ibrahim
Sienna James
Avery Minifie
Drew Kowaluk
Ben Frederick
Olivia Hansen
Sophie Poirier
Huda Manna
Arale Wongteerasupaya
Minahil Nasir
Caden Phaneuf-Imbeault
Evenda Po
Inez Chung
Sebastian Oursien
Anoop Gill
Tony Liu
Drake Charbonneau
Jermiah Soloman

Zoe House
Lexi Sample
Robert Bui
Alexia O'Neil
Sophie Whittington
Katie Hoek
Allison Kiesewalter
Kate Charpentier
Grace Wen
Emma Hajdu
Galoriel Dixon
Erik Gumley
Sam McMullen
Connor O'Meara
Crewe Hennebury
Macallan Somers
Austin Tierney
Lukas Blick
Sara Alomari
Xander Roberts
Daniel Ten Oever

Tess Burnett
Clara Davis
Keely Geoffrion
Eden Ramunas
Hayden McBride
Brayden Saxe
Ella Moseley-Williams
Bailey Whittington
Abby Carter
Silo Donald-Clarke
Aidan Spencer
Ben Newman
Benjamin Tunney
Neil Duncan
Miina Wallner
Lily Bondy
Chloe Campbell-Doidge
Tara Topping
Noah Hough
Paul Sungura
Youcef Selai

Bailey McShane
Jake Bennett
Meika Dearing
Oliver Guardado
Guy MacDougall
Justin Tran
Zain Chummun
Megan Hollingsworth
Jahada Denis
Ava-Lynn Lefebvre
Sophia Moore
Mikey Rubino
Ebby Smith
Foster Nelson
Rihanna Javad
Ayla Martin
Reem Hann
Sophia Perala
Lily Hawley
Shammah Kibwa
Alexis Currie

This past school year, 22,060 students attended the OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres for educational programming.

A special thank you to the Centres' causal educational instructors: Raven Nordstrand, Violaine Archambault, Simona Wagner and Megan McGarrrity for their enthusiasm and providing so many learning opportunities for our students!

Woodroffe High School Students' Bird Nesting Boxes in the Bird Sanctuary!



These **Woodroffe High School** students listed below with teacher **Mike Kroeker**, installed eight wood duck & five Eastern blue bird nesting boxes this spring, within MacSkimming Centre which is part of the **Environment & Climate Change Canada's Beckett Creek Migratory Bird Sanctuary**. During the school year, students built the cavity nesting boxes in their *Technology and Skills Trade Course* at Woodroffe High School. This project was funded by the **OCDSB Environmental Services Department** & the transportation covered by the **Ottawa Field Naturalist Club**.

Within minutes of installation, tree swallows started flying in & claiming the boxes.

Joshua Kosabek	Carter Hutchinson	Rowland Stewart	Rio St-Arnaud-Da Silva
Evan Milson	Mayar Al-Qubtan	Oliver Moriarity	Rhys Mah-Adamowski
Dmitriv Moisseyeu	Liza Moskalyuk	Latisha Pasishnek	Isaac Scott
Calvin Alawi	Toba Hasanat	Acey Morphy	Andrew Prior
Siddhant Ghalley	Aysha Azizi	Xavier Jung	Dayvon Levett-Mignott
Amal Abbara	Seth Hanson	Mike Kroeker	Gonzalez Montserrat

Principal Ginette Thibeault and Principal Bruce Whitehead

Congratulations to Continuing Education Department principal **Ginette Thibeault** on her well earned retirement from the OCDSB and welcome back to principal **Bruce Whitehead** who will return to take on the leading position of this OCDSB department.

Both OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres are stationed within the OCDSB Continuing Education Department. Since September 2022, Ginette Thibeault has held this position with professional style, grace and humour.

Ginette will be greatly missed, especially her positive hands-on leadership & regular snack delivery to the Centres!

Editorial from the Ottawa Citizen on "All Kids Deserve Outdoor Learning!"

A editorial written by **Fenja Brodo** published in the April 25th 2025 Ottawa Citizen regarding the April 17th, 2025 article on "Public school inequality is made worse by private funding", written by Josiah Frith.

Because of these inequalities mentioned by Josiah Frith, the Ottawa Field Naturalist's Club (OFNC) has been giving the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre several thousand dollars a year to arrange bus transportation for children from those public schools that otherwise would not be able to send their pupils to this superb outdoor learning centre.

Each year, our club receives a beautifully put-together book of pictures, thank you and delightful comments from children telling us what they saw or did and what made an impression on them. Outdoor education should be for every child, everywhere.

With great sadness to inform the passing of **Wendy Sauve**. Wendy passed away peacefully on July 31st, 2025.



Three moose caught on trail camera, exploring within MacSkimming Centre on May 2025



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Video collected by Bill McMullen