

# BECOMING OUTDOORS SMART IN SUMMER



BOSS Annual Newsletter — 2016

www.MiWildlife.org

A Michigan Wildlife Conservancy Publication

## Providing children with... **BOSS PROGRAM EXPANDS** ... a unique opportunity!

**T**he Michigan Wildlife Conservancy's innovative "Becoming Outdoors Smart in Summer (BOSS) program continues to gather momentum as it heads into its fourth year. BOSS was initiated and first-tested in 2014 to address a state and national problem—too many children are growing up without a basic understanding of nature and conservation practices. BOSS has since been revised and offered (free in areas where local sponsorships are available) to an increasing number of Michigan children. BOSS uses a self-study guidebook to help children develop outdoor observation and monitoring skills together with family members and friends. There are ten education units that teach skills like animal tracking, how to identify trees, birds, amphibians and reptiles,

and analyze habitat for Monarch butterflies, fish (in streams), and pollinators important to agriculture and wild plants.



The basic structure and content of BOSS remain similar to that first presented in 2014; however, MWC, its advisors, and sponsors have added new twists each year. The guidebook has been modified

to better serve children entering 4th-6th grades, and more information on natural resources found in the northern part of the state has been added. An education unit that families can work on while traveling in cars was introduced in the 2016 guidebook (see related article on page 2 of this newsletter).

"BOSS continues to emphasize outdoor activities that can typically be done within five miles of a child's home," says Dr. Patrick Rusz, MWC's director of wildlife programs and author of the BOSS guidebook. "But we are continuing to work with interested partners and sponsors to help Michigan's children learn about the state's incredible

ecological diversity and how we manage natural resources."

**See Boss Expands continued on Page 2**

### BOSS Education Units:

1. BE AN ANIMAL TRACKER
2. MICHIGAN TREES
3. WHAT BIRDS TELL US
4. MONARCHS ON THE MOVE
5. UNWANTED PLANTS
6. SOMETHING FISHY
7. ATTRACTING WILDLIFE
8. FROGS, SNAKES, AND MORE
9. THE BUZZ ABOUT BEES
10. THE BIG PICTURE

### Parents Love BOSS!

- ◆ "We had FUN, learned a lot and had some great 1:1 quality time... Thanks for letting us be a part of this fantastic program!"
- ◆ "My daughter is learning a lot...this is an awesome program...thanks for doing it."
- ◆ "My son loves the bird unit!"
- ◆ "I just want to let you know how wonderful I think this program is! The book is fantastic and my kids are motivated by it. Thanks so much— great work!!!!"
- ◆ "This program is just what I've been trying to find for my kids."



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## LEARNING ABOUT NATURE AND MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE:

# Farm Bureau Helps Kids BOSS

This year, a new education unit that families can work on while traveling in cars was added to the BOSS guidebook. Called "The Big Picture: Michigan Landscapes and Agriculture," it highlights forest cover types and the diversity of our state's agriculture and is supported by Michigan Farm Bureau, the Michigan Foundation for Agriculture, and Agriculture in the Classroom.

"The Big Picture" helps children discover how natural resources and agriculture tend to change as one travels through Michigan. If they are heading north or south on vacation, they can look for the "tension zone"



that is a sort of dividing "line" between southern and northern Michigan. They observe how the vegetation and types of agriculture change. The kids and other family members can also learn how to identify some of the more important forest cover types like Northern hardwoods, aspen, red pine, and Northern white cedar. The BOSS guidebook helps them spot different crops, and even water management systems with big irrigation rigs. A couple of activities focus on managed wetlands and even the

See Farm Bureau Helps Kids BOSS continued on page 4



MICHIGAN FOUNDATION FOR  
**AGRICULTURE**  
LEADERSHIP | PROMOTION | SCHOLARSHIP | EDUCATION



Michigan  
Agriculture in the Classroom

### Michigan Wildlife Conservancy

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy (originally called Michigan Wildlife Habitat Foundation) was founded in 1982 by the late Mr. Russel Bengel, of Jackson, Michigan. Mr. Bengel was a former mayor of Jackson, CEO of multiple companies and a nationally known and respected conservationist.

The MWC, a non-profit 501 ©(3) organization, has a long history in improving habitat for wildlife and fish throughout the state. Visit our website at [www.miwildlife.org](http://www.miwildlife.org) for highlights of this important work.

#### Contact the BOSS Program:

Dr. Patrick Ruzs, Director of Wildlife Programs  
@ office: 517.641.7677 cell: 989.295.9609  
or E-mail: [PRuzs@MiWildlife.org](mailto:PRuzs@MiWildlife.org)

#### BOSS Advisory Committee Members:

- Kathy Bogar - active teacher
- Jan Derksen- retired teacher
- Douglas Holem- retired teacher
- Beth Moeller- active teacher
- Charles Hoover- retired historian
- Carol Johnson- retired teacher
- Torie Ray- active teacher

#### "Boss Expands," continued from page 1

In 2014, BOSS was offered only as a pilot project for just a couple of dozen families in three counties of southern Michigan. Responses of children, parents, and educators that used or reviewed the BOSS guidebook were very encouraging, so the program was offered in 12 areas the following year.

"By the end of 2015, it was obvious there was enough interest and value in BOSS to offer it on a more statewide basis," said Bill Taylor, MWC's Chairman of the Board. "We are developing the promotion and distribution systems to make that happen and look forward to a steadily-expanding network of participants, partners, and sponsors."

What sets BOSS apart from other nature-oriented education efforts is its emphasis on families working together at their own paces. BOSS has no requirements to travel to a specific site or follow a fixed schedule. Families can study nature one step at a time in areas around their homes or while on vacation without following an "expert." Parents that participate in BOSS can foster their child's interest in the outdoors by becoming model learners. BOSS is based on the notion that the family is an important educational resource, especially if parents and children share learning experiences.

"A lot of people wonder where the next generation of conservationists will come from," notes Taylor. "We hope BOSS can be part of the answer in Michigan."

**In 2017, MWC and its advisors, partners, and sponsors hope to add some Native American language and other cultural information to the guidebook, and a "Junior Version" of the guidebook is planned for use by children entering K-3rd grades.**



# THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL SPONSORS

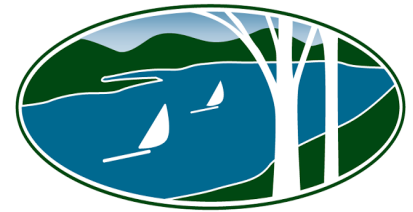
**B**ecoming Outdoors Smart In Summer is offered free or at low cost to participants because of a multi-level partnership/sponsorship program. The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy seeks “perfect-fit” partners and sponsors at both the state and local levels. Sponsors are sought for each of the 10 BOSS education units, as well as the overall program. Local sponsors can earmark donations for children in their communities or other areas of interest.

“Local sponsors can really make a difference in their communities,” said John Ropp, MWC’s Executive Director. “They can help jump-start participation in BOSS, sending a message that their organization strongly believes in conservation and family-oriented education.”

Some of the top local sponsors of BOSS have included the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Community Foundation, Wildlife Unlimited of Delta County, Meijer, Inc., the Chesaning Parks and Recreation Commission, smaller service organizations like International Lions Club chapters, and various local businesses and individuals.

“Meijer has always enjoyed supporting children’s activities – and the BOSS Program with its environmental and wildlife focus seemed to be a perfect fit with the Meijer philosophy, said Dana Beattie”, a Store Director in the Lansing area.

Organizations that have multiple chapters or clubs can assist the BOSS Program at several levels. For example, each chapter or club can provide earmarked donations of \$250 or more to support children participating in BOSS in their local areas. If other chapters make similar donations and the total reaches \$2,500 or more, the district, regional, or state parent organizations can be recognized as sponsors or partners at higher levels. The Conservancy recognizes BOSS Program partners



## Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area community foundation

and sponsors in a variety of ways—in the BOSS Guidebook, on its web-site, in newsletters, and press releases. Organizations that support BOSS can also use the program logo in conjunction with the MWC mark for their own purposes (e.g., membership drives).

For more information about assisting the BOSS Program, contact John Ropp at 517-641-7677 or JRopp@MiWildlife.org.



**Meijer Inc., through Store Director Dana Beattie , provided BOSS Guidebooks for 50 Lansing area kids.**



**Important BOSS guidebook distributors have included the Eaton County Science Adventure Camp (photo above), the Petoskey Area’s Camp Daggett, and numerous local libraries.**



**Ralph Lundquist, left, Project Chairman for Wildlife Unlimited of Delta County, presents a \$1,500 check to Mike Zuidema, representing the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy. The funds enabled the first 60 Delta County children that registered for the program to participate free.**  
Photo credit: Anne Okanek





# KIDS ARE ALL ABOUT TREES



**B**OSS participants have been finding lots of interesting plants and animals—from skinks (Michigan’s lizard) to beavers. But when asked what education unit they enjoy the most, the most common answer is “The Tree Unit.” They are referring to “Michigan Trees: Surveys In Modern Forestry,” a unit sponsored by the Michigan Association of Timbermen, a group based in Newberry in Chippewa County.

“We still love the tree unit,” said parent, Jennifer Dusek, of Saginaw County. “We were amazed that the majority (trees highlighted in BOSS) were growing on or near our property.” Several other parents have noted that because trees (unlike birds) don’t move around, parents and their children can take their time learning how to identify a species. They might even want to consult with grandparents if they are available. As the BOSS guidebook points out, “grandparents are pretty good at tree identification.”

Actually, there’s a lot more to the BOSS unit than identification of trees. The older kids can conduct basic tree surveys in urban areas along streets and in parks, and in forests and woodlots. Some “STEM” concepts—science, technology, engi-



**Jim Maeder (left), President of the Michigan Association of Timbermen, and the group’s Administrator, Anna Frampton, present a check to Dr. Patrick Rusz of the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy in support of the BOSS Program’s education unit, “Michigan Trees: Tree Surveys In Modern Forestry.”**



neering and math (not tree stems)—are introduced as kids learn to measure plots and individual trees. And they get a sense about why and how trees are managed.

“We are pleased to sponsor this education unit of the BOSS Program,” said the Timbermen’s Association president, Jim Maeder, of Weidman in Isabella County. “One of our important objectives is to educate people about Michigan trees and their uses. Fortunately, kids are very interested in learning about them.”

BOSS is also supported by the Michigan Forest Foundation of the Michigan Forest Association. The Eaton County-based non-profit organization is dedicated to education and natural resource stewardship. The Foundation promotes the understanding of the importance of Michigan’s forest resources including timber, wildlife, soil and water.

Long-time forester and former MFA director, Bill Botti, provided advice on the BOSS program’s guidebook when it was in its early stages. MFA’s members include many families that seek to incorporate the concept of long-term sustainable resource management on their own properties.

## “Farm Bureau Helps Kids BOSS,” continued from page 2

vegetation in highway rights-of-way.

“It’s a great alternative to having the kids play video games,” said BOSS parent and advisor, Torie Ray. “There are lots of things along Michigan highways that even young children will find interesting if they get a little help in understanding what they are seeing. BOSS’ Big Picture unit does that.”

Michigan’s agriculture plays a vital role in the daily lives of all of our state’s citizens. But according to the Michigan Foundation for Agriculture, two-thirds of Michigan’s citizens have not been on a farm in the last seven years. That startling statistic underscores the need for helping people, especially children, understand agriculture’s importance.

Similarly, although half of Michigan is forested, many people lack a basic understanding

of forestry and timber resources. Farm Bureau and groups like the Society of American Foresters think BOSS’ information on forest cover types can help kids develop an “eye” for the complexity of our state’s 20 million wooded acres. “A lot of people travel through Michigan all of their lives without knowing what kinds of trees they are seeing and how they might be managed,” said long-time SAF member Glenn Moll, of Newberry in Chippewa County. About 20 years ago, SAF developed



an “Upper Peninsula Forestry Auto Tour” that includes signs along some of the major highway sections. The Auto Tour is incorporated into one of the optional BOSS activities and points out the major forest cover types and the role of fire in forest growth.

“Strangely, most programs tend to separate “nature study” from agriculture and forestry education,” says Bill Taylor, MWC Board Chairman. “But BOSS seeks to focus on the connections.”



# Some Really BOSS Photos!!

There's no work to turn in for participants in Becoming Outdoors Smart In Summer (BOSS), but the program encourages documenting findings. A private Facebook Page where children and their families can share their findings is provided. Below are some of the great photos they have posted.



Red Fox on Hay Bale



Blue-Spotted Salamander



Green Frog



Thirteen-Lined Ground Squirrel



Cecropia Moth Caterpillar



Plaster Casts of Raccoon Tracks



Common Loon



Spiny Softshell Turtle



Kirkland's Warbler

# Creating BOSS Sites

**S**ome local sponsors of BOSS are beginning to help participating families by opening their grounds as well as their wallets. A good example is the Saginaw Field & Stream Club, one of the state's largest and oldest conservation clubs. SFS has a new clubhouse on 158 acres in rural Saginaw County and a long-standing commitment to educating the public about conservation. In addition to providing funds



for BOSS guidebooks for their members and local families, SFS is developing areas where those families can work on the different education units.

"We have a series of projects in the works that match up with the BOSS education units, explained Charles Hoover, SFS's education chairman and a BOSS advisor. "We're working on a concrete slab with outlines of animal tracks, trails with signs, and a pollinator-attracting garden. A pamphlet will let parents and their children check to see if they are correctly identifying the various trees and invasive exotic species like Autumn olive."

"Self-guided trails like that are great for boosting the confidence of parents helping their children in BOSS," says Nora Howlett, an MWC intern who along with fellow intern, Anna Wright, is helping develop a similar trail system at the 259-acre Bengel Wildlife Center in Clinton County, home of the MWC.

"A simple education trail doesn't cost much, especially if there are existing paths in place," added Wright. The main tasks are sign-making and copying, since related information is already provided in the BOSS guidebook."



*The Saginaw Field and Stream Club is including a pollinator attracting garden in its BOSS site.*



*Barry Shafer, who heads up part of the Saginaw Field and Stream Club's trail for Becoming Outdoors Smart In Summer participants, puts the finishing touches on an area focusing on identification of animal tracks. Photo by Tom Heriter, Saginaw Field and Stream Club*

Hoover, a former Boy Scout administrator and historian, sees BOSS as a natural fit for the SFS's grounds and the organization's purpose. "If our trails can save families time in BOSS and promote

conservation education, it's a great use of part of the club property," he noted.



*Sampling aquatic insect populations in an area suggested for BOSS work by the Chesaning Parks and Recreation Commission .*



# SCHOOLS MAKE CHOICES

The Becoming Outdoors Smart In Summer (BOSS) program can be used by schools in many different ways. Some simply promote BOSS to parents through newsletters or fliers; others distribute BOSS guidebooks funded by local sponsors. And teachers can use BOSS education units in their classrooms year-round.

The St. Charles Public School System in Saginaw County started making BOSS one of two options for a formal summer program beginning in 2015. "We've had a structured summer program for our elementary school children for several years," explained Kathy Bogar, a veteran 4th-grade teacher. "We decided BOSS would be a good fit. Our parents and students are enjoying it and learning a lot."

The school lets parents and children opt for BOSS with the cost of guidebooks picked up by the St. Charles chapter of the International Lions Club and other local sponsors. Mrs. Bogar serves in three roles—as coordinator of the summer program, as a BOSS program advisor and advocate, and as President of the local Lions Club chapter.

Although the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy does



Some of the St. Charles Schools' students who participated in BOSS in 2016.

not require BOSS participants to turn in any work, St. Charles Schools does ask the children to submit notes and other BOSS related material at the end of the summer. The BOSS guidebook includes a system of "point-earning" with a chart to help keep track of the points. In both 2015 and 2016, several St. Charles students topped the 600 point mark—which takes a lot of effort—and this summer, one student became the first BOSS participant to reach the maximum 1,000 point level!

the opportunity BOSS provides at no cost to the school district."

Some teachers throughout the state see BOSS as more than just a summer program. "Some of the education units can be used during the school year to teach whole classes about nature and conservation issues," said Jeff Wright, a 4th-grade teacher in the Escanaba School System. "Individual teachers can choose to use it in a variety of ways."

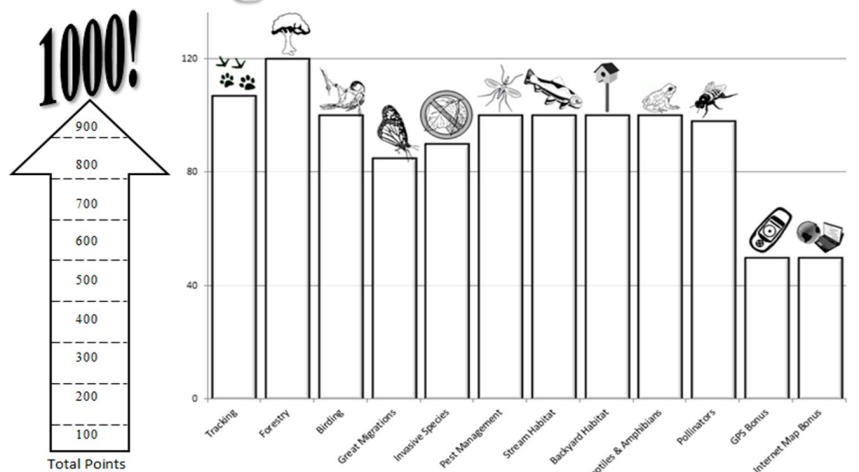
"We recognize all our summer program participants that complete certain standards for reading, writing and math," said Mrs. Bogar. "Students receive special recognition and we have a celebration for them at school in the fall. BOSS gives students, who are in 4th through 6th grades, and their families the opportunity to stretch their brains by reading, observing nature, and conducting experiments, as well as collecting and analyzing data."

"The BOSS program ties in with the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) emphasis in education," noted Mike Decker, superintendent of St. Charles Schools. "We're glad our parents and students can take advantage of



Some schools, like the Clarkston System in Oakland County, distributed BOSS guidebooks in 2016.

## Charting Your BOSS Points

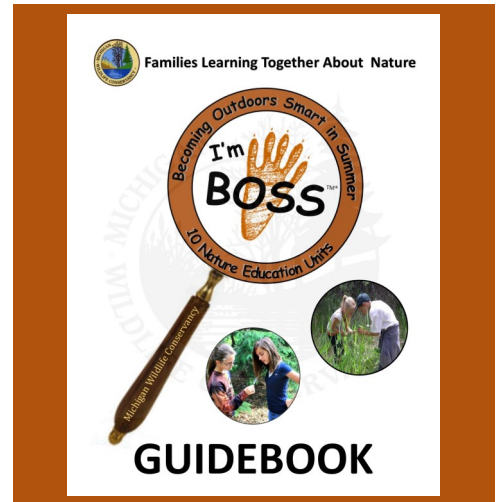


BOSS participants can earn points for work on each education unit.



# Quick Facts About the *BOSS Program*

- ⇒ **Age Groups Targeted:** 4th-6th graders
- ⇒ **Cost:** Free, subject to availability of local sponsorships.
- ⇒ **Schedule:** None
- ⇒ **Time Required:** It's up to you! Approximately 30-40 hours spread over the whole summer, or less if you decide not to complete all the education units.
- ⇒ **Teachers:** Yourself, your parents or grandparents, your friends, and the staff of the Michigan Wildlife Conservancy .
- ⇒ **What You'll Learn:** Animal tracking, identification of birds, trees and other plants, solutions to conservation problems, and much, much more.



**A 35-year-old organization dedicated to our state's fish and wildlife resources.**

## Michigan Wildlife Conservancy's *Becoming Outdoors Smart in Summer...* The *BOSS* Program—is off and running!

BOSS is supported by “perfect fit” partners and sponsors like Michigan Farm Bureau, the Saginaw Field and Stream Club, the Michigan Association of Timbermen, and a host of community organizations. If you believe in the value of conservation and environmental education, and think that family is a vital component in education – YOU ARE A PERFECT FIT FOR BOSS!



**The future of BOSS depends on a steadily-expanding network of participants, partners, and sponsors. Please HELP US KEEP BOSS MOVING FULL SPEED AHEAD.**

If you would like to explore how your company/organization may become a *BOSS Partner*, please contact John Ropp to discuss a host of options at all levels: [JRopp@MiWildlife.org](mailto:JRopp@MiWildlife.org) – or – 517-641-7677.

## Families Learning About the Outdoors Together

