

New ecological restoration school for adults opening at Door County nature preserve

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DOOR COUNTY

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STURGEON BAY - A new, eight-week school at Crossroads at Big Creek will teach ecological restoration of degraded lands to a handful of adults each summer, starting in about a month.

The Land Restoration School is an initiative of Crossroads, a 200-acre nature preserve in Sturgeon Bay that "offers education, conducts research and provides outdoor experiences to inspire environmental stewardship in learners of all ages," according to its website.



The school is designed to provide an educational immersion for six to 12 students of college age or older in the principles, practices and planning of restoring degraded lands.

Prospective students should aim to work in ecological restoration or a similar field and could include those adding to or enhancing their college experiences, following a non-college learning path or seeking a career change. Lodging and a paid fellowship stipend are part of the experience to allow students to fully concentrate on their classwork.

Studies will take place in the classroom and in the field. Among the subjects to be covered are geology, soils, ecology, human/land history and relationships, plant communities, taxonomy, restoration planning and methods, team building and entrepreneurial skills.

Dan Collins and Nancy Aten, owners of landscape architectural and restoration firm Landscapes of Place and well-known conservationists in Door County, are the founding directors of Land Restoration School. Aten said the skills students will learn are needed with the growing concerns over land conservation and climate change in today's world.

“The Land Restoration School responds to a need in Door County and beyond,” Aten said in a press release. “For the well-being of our communities and the earth and to combat climate change and habitat destruction, we need to teach and share the knowledge of how to reclaim and restore degraded lands, and we need skilled people doing this critical work.”

“Our goal is to help develop critical thinking and build comfort in ongoing learning beyond LRS,” Collins said. “On completion, participants should expect to have the knowledge and skills to be employed in the ecological restoration field or start their own operation as a budding entrepreneur.”

Crossroads executive director Laurel Hauser said interest in such a school from potential students is strong.

“This opportunity taps into a groundswell of interest on the part of young people in the sciences to be involved in work that benefits the earth,” Hauser said to the Advocate. “There has also been a lot of interest from landowners, retired people and just the general public.”

Collins said in the release that the variety of landscapes at Crossroads, which include upland forest, swamp, creek, estuary and wet and upland meadows, make it an ideal location for a school like LRS. Some of those lands have been altered and challenged.

“This mix creates an ideal teaching ground with decades of restoration work ahead,” Collins said.

“We have a long history of environmental stewardship and education,” Hauser said. “The Land Restoration School represents our aspirations for sharing this ethic in a deeper and more inclusive way. We are excited to be taking these next steps.”

The school will be staffed with visiting guest faculty from across Wisconsin. Dr. Chris Young of the Urban Ecology Center Institute, Alverno College and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, is the curriculum chair and will guide the faculty in developing learning objectives and assessment processes.

The first session for LRS, running from June 15 to Aug. 5, will have seven students — three from Door County and four from outside the area, according to Hauser — who were invited to take part based on recommendations from Crossroads board members, staff and colleagues. Starting in 2023, it is expected prospective students will be able to apply to the school. As it becomes more established, the staff hopes to look into ways to educate people who may not be able to attend the full eight-week session.

For more information, visit landrestorationschool.org.

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