



A Bemidji Legacy in Science & Outdoors Education

The Elwell's decades-long impact will continue for years to come.

It was with both sorrow, and thoughtful reflection, that leadership of both the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society and the Headwaters Science Center learned of the recent passing of Jim Elwell.

Together, Jim and Laddie were instrumental to the founding of both of our organizations. Their passion and professional experience in science and outdoors education, combined with their deep commitment to the Bemidji community, left an impact that continues to benefit both students and adults.

In the 1970's, Jim and Laddie moved to Bemidji to teach geology and biology at Bemidji State University. In 1976, they founded the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society (MHAS). Soon they were helping develop the Neilson Spearhead Center, a 466-acre nature preserve southwest of Bemidji, under MHAS management.

Not ones to slow down, in the early 1990s the Elwells dreamed of a science center. Their dedication to make this a reality included many trips to seek funding from the Minnesota legislature and private foundations. They rallied the Bemidji community to the cause, and celebrated the Headwaters Science Center opening in 1994.

To put numbers to the Elwells' impact through our organizations, over the past 35 years 3,000 nature-loving kids have attended the Young Naturalist Program at the Neilson Spearhead Center. They wade in streams and cattail swamps, hike and forage on the trails, canoe, swim, and listen wide-eyed to fireside mysteries. Hundreds more visitors enjoy solitude and unspoiled wilderness hiking or paddling around Spearhead Lake each year. The Headwaters Science Center serves more than 30,000 guests per year. Of these, 20,000 people experience the Science Center exhibits while 6,000 students and teachers explore HSC on field trips. Another 5,000 are reached by off-site science demonstrations led by HSC staff.

"Jim and Laddie enthusiastically engaged young people in pursuing a love of nature and scientific interests", says George-Ann Maxson, MHAS longtime board member.

"Science You Can Touch", a phrase coined by the Elwells, became the shortened version of the Headwaters Science Center mission statement. Lee Furuseth, the current Executive Director for HSC, says, *"It is a joy to continue the legacy started by Jim and Laddie now almost thirty years after they established HSC."*

If you would like to honor the legacy of Jim and Laddie Elwell in our Bemidji community, we encourage you to explore the outdoors, take part in a science learning activity, or support an organization that helps connect you to the natural world. Jim and Laddie ensured that we all have ample opportunities to engage in these ways, and we are grateful to them for it.



Jim and Laddie Elwell in front of the Headwaters Science Center

NSC Fall Work Party Volunteers Make an Impact



A big thank you to each of the volunteers who made our October 14th Fall Work Party at the Neilson Spearhead Center a success!

Thanks to their efforts, the following was accomplished:

- General trail maintenance / brush clearing
- Needles cleared off Lehmann Lab roof
- Lehmann Lab's screened porch area cleaned out
- Picnic tables leaned up for winter
- Fire pit overhaul (it looks so much more welcoming!)



We are grateful to all volunteers who invest their time and talents at Spearhead! We want people to feel comfortable hiking, paddeling, and snowshoeing here.

Core to this vision is having people come out and experience the trails at Spearhead first hand. Projects like those tackled at the Fall Work Party help make Spearhead a safer and more welcoming experience for those who will visit in the season ahead.



Would you like to make a difference as a volunteer? To learn about volunteer needs, visit spearheadmhas.org/volunteer or email mhas@spearheadmhas.org to sign up!

A Summer of Wonder

The 2023 Young Naturalist Program was a great success!

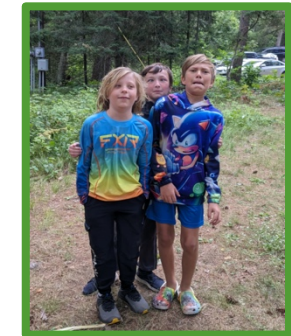
New traditions and new naturalist leaders marked the 38th year of summer explorations at the Neilson Spearhead Center. Longtime naturalist Dan Bera retired from the program last year so instructors Karen Lavine and Samantha White created new experiences for nature-loving kids. Campers still hiked to “Top of the World,” greedily harvested juneberries, blueberries and raspberries from Berry Heaven, tasted cattails and lemonade ants, and canoed, swam, and waded in Spearhead Lake and Revoir Creek. A typical day started with songs and games, then a hike or wetland exploration, a rousing game of Fox and Squirrel, and finally lunch. Afternoons usually ended in the lake with diaper bobbing, T rescues, and slip n’ slide on an overturned canoe. Friday afternoons concluded with the delicious new tradition of s’mores around a campfire.



According to YNP camper James he said, “The best things about camp are seeing friends, capture the flag, picking and eating berries after verifying they were edible.” He was very surprised to learn from camp stories that there is an actual sunken ship in Spearhead Lake!



Planning is underway for the 2024 Young Naturalist Program – check the MHAS website next March to register your child or grandchild for a memorable week at Spearhead!



How Well Do You Know Some of Minnesota’s Largest Birds?*



Give the Gift of Membership!

Looking for last minute gift ideas? Membership in the MHAS is a great gift for your family and friends who care about conservation!



Give the gift of MHAS membership and recognize your loved one's care for wild places, access to unspoiled wilderness, and outdoors education. They will receive this newsletter and invitations to events with like-minded nature lovers, year-round.

Your gift will support the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society's work, including managing the 466- acre Neilson Spearhead Center nature preserve, hosting the "Young Naturalist Program" each summer, and advocating for conservation of vital local habitats and ecosystems.

To gift a MHAS membership, visit spearheadmhas.org/join-mhas and select the membership level. Next, simply fill out the Contact Info with the gift recipient's details and enter your information under Payment.

You're Invited – Winter Events at Spearhead

Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

Help us gather data on bird populations in Bemidji! The CBC builds on over 120 years of data, which is used by conservationists to monitor bird populations and ecosystem health. Long-term datasets like this are extremely rare - they are gold for scientists!

Do we really count birds? YES! Audubon CBC takes place across the globe. The CBC was invented as an alternative to a holiday bird and wildlife hunting competition. In 1900 an ornithologist, Frank Chapman, proposed a competitive bird census, instead. The CBC is a great way to get out and enjoy winter in our northern woods!

Bemidji, Dec. 16

Meet at the Country Kitchen in Bemidji from 7:30 a.m. to 8am for assignment of survey area or pairing of teams. Beginners are welcome but expect to be paired with a more experienced birder. Contact Jaime Thibodeaux at 218-308-6853 (text or call) or jaimethib@hotmail.com for more information. Heads-up text or email to Jaime is helpful if you're a beginner to coordinate pairing.

Itasca State Park, Dec. 19th

Meet at the Jacob V. Brower Visitor Center lobby between 7:30 and 8 a.m. for assignment of count areas or contact Connie Cox to get an assigned area. For registration, questions, and further details, call 218-699-7259 or email constance.cox@state.mn.us.



If you are unable to attend a counting event, we also invite people who live within the census area to count birds in their own yard. To see all of the CBC census areas, visit www.christmasbirdcount.org.

Winter Solstice Gathering - Thursday, December 21st, 4pm - 6pm

Join us for a family-friendly solstice event marking the longest night of the year! We'll go for a snowy winter hike or snow shoe at 4pm, followed by a bonfire with hot chocolate and spiced cider. Enjoy Spearhead after dark and take in the night sky!

Great Backyard Bird Count - February 17th (tentative)

Visit www.audubon.org/conservation/about-great-backyard-bird-count for information, and keep your eyes peeled for details on our chapter's participation!

The Source

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Your Membership Makes Our Work Possible!

Your membership makes our work possible! Renew now to support local conservation and environmental education programs in 2024. Scan the code or visit spearheadmhas.org/join-mhas.html.

Please consider renewing your annual MHAS chapter membership for 2024.

Welcoming New Spearhead Staff



Welcome to Josh and Amelia Kaiser, the new Resident Caretakers at the Neilson Spearhead Center!

The Kaisers come to us from Washington State, where they developed a deep love and respect for the outdoors. Prior to their move to Bemidji, Josh and Amelia traveled the USA for 13 months in a camper van, giving them an even greater appreciation for the natural beauty of our country.

Josh is an Airframe & Powerplant Mechanic who is working for AirCorps Aviation as a Restoration Specialist. Amelia is an artist who also brings 11 years of non-profit experience (including marketing, volunteer management, fundraising and more) to her new role with MHAS as our Resident Outreach Coordinator.

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The mission of the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society is to foster personal connections to and stewardship of our natural world.

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