

**Ottumwa RAC Schoolyard Habitat**

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**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS  
WILDLIFE DIVISION**

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by Jenna Finn

for Haakon County Conservation District

The Outdoor Learning Center (OLC) has been a project designed to enhance environmental, biological and land management education for the students and residents of Haakon County, as well as travelers and nearby residents and schools. We believe that the Outdoor Learning Center can serve the students and teachers well, while enhancing the community and providing a destination for residents and visitors. The project received tremendous support from the staff, students, parents, and county residents.

As part of the OLC project, we completed our goal of establishing an OLC at the Ottumwa Rural Attendance Center. The students had completed the inventory, brainstorming, and planning processes prior to receiving the grant, and were enthusiastic to get started. Each student was eager to learn, whether it was about rocks or species of grasses growing in their schoolyard. Every activity was met with excitement and determination. Chad Tussing, Education Services Coordinator for South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, gave a presentation in December of 2000, making the students even more anxious to begin the project. Tussing spoke about bird adaptations, such as differences in beaks and feet in different species of birds.

In 2002 the Haakon County Conservation District was awarded a South Dakota Wildlife Diversity Small Grant in the amount of \$2062 by the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks. We used the funding to build birdhouses, provide birdfeeders, and baths, to plant a perennial butterfly garden, install a pond, and plant trees, shrubs, and vines. All of these activities together gave the students hands-on learning experience and a better understanding of the world around them. Although all of the students live in the country, some of them don't get the chance to see conservation in practice.

The implementation of the project, using the funding, began in April of 2002, with the help of Tanya McIlravy. One of the top priorities of the students at the Ottumwa School was to house and feed the birds in their area. The students, along with their parents, constructed four birdhouses, with the purpose to house four different species of birds, the American kestrel, bluebirds, wrens, and flicker woodpeckers. They were placed on fenceposts in the schoolyard at heights appropriate for the species selected. Each student also made a birdhouse of their choice to take home. Four birdfeeders were hung, two of which were platform feeders and two were tube feeders. Birds were fed thistle, mixed seeds, millet, and suet, using the feeders placed around the schoolyard. A heated birdbath with a mister was installed to provide water for the birds year-round.

The students helped plant a variety of trees, shrubs, and vines to attract wildlife and insects, and beautify their surroundings. Some examples of these are green ash, plum, chokecherry, lilac, Peking cotoneaster, Dropmore honeysuckle, and raspberry. Vines were planted near poles to climb up, lilacs planted along the driveway, and others were planted around the yard. Students took turns watering the trees every week.

The next big project was the creation of a perennial butterfly garden. Students and parents outlined a large butterfly with flags, using a pattern made out of tarpaper. They then dug out the area within the flags, to a depth of approximately one foot. The native soil and compost were mixed together to enrich the soil. Perennial flowers that attract butterflies were planted in groups to create a wing-like pattern. Pea gravel was applied as mulch to help control weeds and conserve moisture. A butterfly bush, which attracts butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees, was planted at the top, "head," of the garden. The students made two round concrete butterfly baths, adding stained glass/plastic and marbles to the concrete to add color and attract butterflies. Stepping stones were also made from concrete, and placed at the bottom of the butterfly garden to aid in daily maintenance of the baths and add to the effect of a butterfly with eyespots. The students collected rocks throughout the year to outline the garden. They were anxious to observe what their hard work might draw in, whether it might be a butterfly or a honeybee.

With the help of a parent, a large hole was dug with a Bobcat, and a pond with a submersible pump was installed. The students used rocks to create a waterfall. The pond was designed to attract amphibians to the habitat. A student volunteered to maintain the pond during the summer of 2002.

During the 2002-2003 school year, Mrs. One Skunk and Ms. Puhlman, the teachers at the Ottumwa School, incorporated their Outdoor Classroom into the curriculum. Students identified native grasses, researched butterflies and rocks, and gathered flower petals and seed for art projects. They planted flower seeds to transplant into the butterfly garden to replace those that died. Bird sightings were recorded in a daily journal, with different students assigned each day. We were able to provide "Birds of South Dakota," by Dan Tallman, David Swanson, and Jeffrey Palmer, to help the students identify the birds they observed. Parents donated a large variety of perennial bulbs and flowers to make a flower garden in front of the school building. Students learned to identify the flowers in the perennial garden.

To celebrate Arbor Day 2003, Jenna Finn visited the Ottumwa Outdoor Classroom to plant additional trees and shrubs. They had fun digging the holes, planting using proper techniques, and watering them afterwards. A family volunteered to water the trees during the summer. Each student received a tall tree of their choice, and could hardly wait to get home and plant them. Students were excited to show off their birdhouses, butterfly garden, perennial garden, and trees. They exhibited pride in their accomplishments and were eager to talk about all the projects they had completed. We toured the schoolyard while the students created a map to pinpoint the location and identification of each species they planted.

We believe that as a result of the OLC the students at the Ottumwa Rural Attendance Center have a better awareness and appreciation for their surroundings. Because of the project the students now have an area for observing the habits of birds and other small animals, including reptiles and insects. The aesthetics of the area have been improved. I have no doubt that the students' academic performance has also been enhanced.

A summary of the expenditure for this project and photos are attached. Receipts are available upon request. Below is a summary of in-kind work.

<u>Activity</u>	<u>People Involved</u>	<u>Time Spent on Activity</u>
Project Administration	Tanya McIlravy, Jenna Finn	30 hours
Birdhouses/Water/Feeders	5 parents, 2 teachers, 2 staff, 10 students	45 hours
Pond	3 parents, 2 teachers, 2 staff, 10 students	40 hours
Butterfly Garden	3 parents, 2 teachers, 2 staff, 10 students	90 hours
Planting Trees	3 parents, 2 teachers, 2 staff, students	40 hours

We would like to express our thanks to the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks and all the volunteers who helped improved the schoolyard habitat at the Ottumwa Rural Attendance Center. The grant provided a learning environment that made an immense impact on the Ottumwa students' education.

Ottumwa RAC Outdoor Classroom  
Budget

Item	Budget	Actual 8/22/02
Stipend	\$ 112.00	\$ -
Travel	\$ 75.00	\$ -
Registration	\$ 50.00	\$ -
Birdfeeding	\$ 1,150.00	\$ 587.98
Pond	\$ 400.00	\$ 509.46
Plants	\$ 150.00	\$ 786.02
Tracks Tubes	\$ 25.00	\$ 8.37
Hydrant	\$ -	\$ 112.72
References	\$ 100.00	\$ 57.45
	<u>\$ 2,062.00</u>	<u>\$ 2,062.00</u>

Balance: \$ -

# OTTUMWA OUTDOOR CLASSROOM



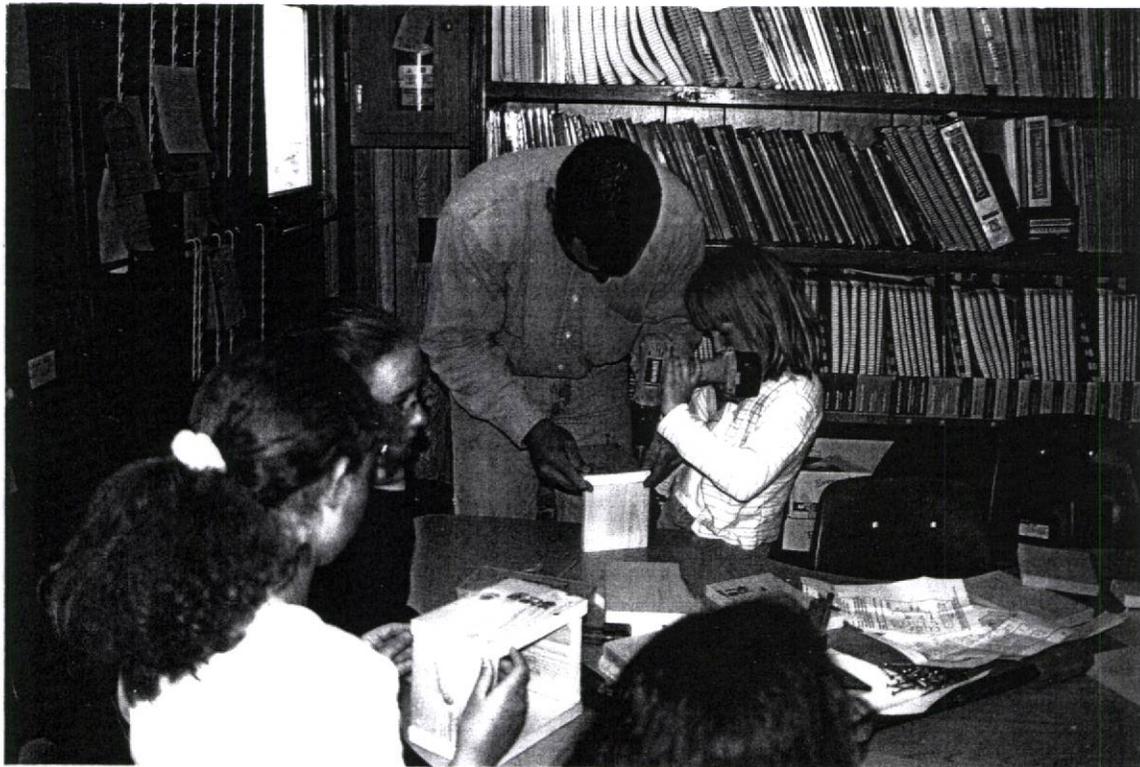
Parents and students at the Ottumwa School digging a hole for the perennial butterfly garden. Soil and compost were mixed together to enrich the soil before being deposited back in the hole.



Busily planting flowers in the butterfly garden. Perennial flowers were planted in groups to create a wing-like pattern.



Students creating concrete butterfly baths and stepping stones. Glass and marbles were added to the concrete to add color and attract butterflies.



A parent helping his daughter make a birdhouse. The students constructed 4 different kinds of birdhouses for the schoolyard and a birdhouse of their choice to take home.