

THE RIDGES

2023 Annual Report
Coming Together as a Community



Preservation | Education | Research

Coming together as a community. Our impact is because of you.

I believe in the power of people. In the power of community. Every day, we are surrounded by individuals that care deeply about the preservation of our natural environments, as well as individuals that are exploring and establishing deep connections with nature for the first time. These two communities collide to create a whole host of opportunities. I am continuously inspired by each person that chooses to engage with our magical Sanctuary.

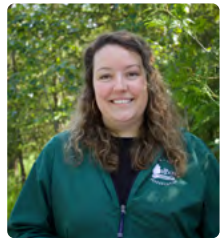
I was introduced to an activity recently titled: I am from..., an activity inspired by the children's book, *Momma, Where Are You From?* by Marie Bradby. The activity focuses not only on where you are from physically, but the experiences and opportunities that have built the person you are today. We all evolve from unique origins but share an important common interest in our mission and this activity really had me thinking about my own experiences. I did not originally plan to work in the environmental space. In fact, I went to school to be a physician's assistant (PA). But being the "bad" PA student I was, I chose environmental biology and limnology courses throughout college to engage my curious mind. There was a point when I realized that although I knew I would be a good PA, I wouldn't fuel my personal passion to make a difference, have an impact, support a mission. That realization took me to the Indian Ocean where I participated in important coral reef research and discovered the true value of organizational mission/vision. When I returned from my travels, I needed to find a mission that I felt aligned to and that I felt I could truly make an impact within. That brings me here, to The Ridges, where I get to work alongside an incredible community of staff, board, volunteers, members, donors, visitors, and neighbors to **inspire the conservation of Nature.**

In piecing together my "I am from" story, I couldn't help but think about the diversity in stories of the individuals connected to this organization. I am amazed by the complexities of the backgrounds of our staff, board, and volunteers who collectively share a deep passion for the mission of The Ridges. And beyond our board and staff, the amazing community full of diverse and unique backgrounds. Each story has been perfectly crafted to join us all together to further the mission of The Ridges Sanctuary.

Collectively, we contributed to the position The Ridges is in today. We continue to be an organization that leads with innovation, investment, and wisdom, supported by the strength of our community. It is a wonder that our stories have landed us all in this special place, and I am so honored to continue to work alongside each and every one of you to further deliver on our mission.

In 2023, our achievements were astounding. Among our achievements, we approved a robust and comprehensive master plan, established a concrete relationship with the Gibraltar Area School District to begin developing an accessible Nature Preschool, and received grant funding to build a necessary Dwarf Lake Iris Restoration Project. We have so much to be proud of, and so much to celebrate thanks to you, our community. I can't wait to continue to deliver on our vision with your support.

Together in conservation,



Katie Krouse
Katie Krouse
 Executive Director

Cover/Back photo: Baileys Harbor Upper Range Light by Luke Collins Photography

2023 Audited Financials

	2023	2022
REVENUES		
Contributions - Undesignated	\$682,827	\$718,798
Contributions - Designated & Endowment	\$778,068	\$405,513
Memberships	\$103,398	\$99,785
Net Special Events	\$24,576	\$53,471
Net Nature Store Sales	\$80,837	\$82,551
Trail Fees, Tours & Guided Hikes	\$86,408	\$97,904
Workshops & Camps	\$76,637	\$57,631
Other Support and Revenue	\$176,502	\$103,997
TOTAL REVENUES, SUPPORT AND GAINS	\$2,009,253	\$1,619,650

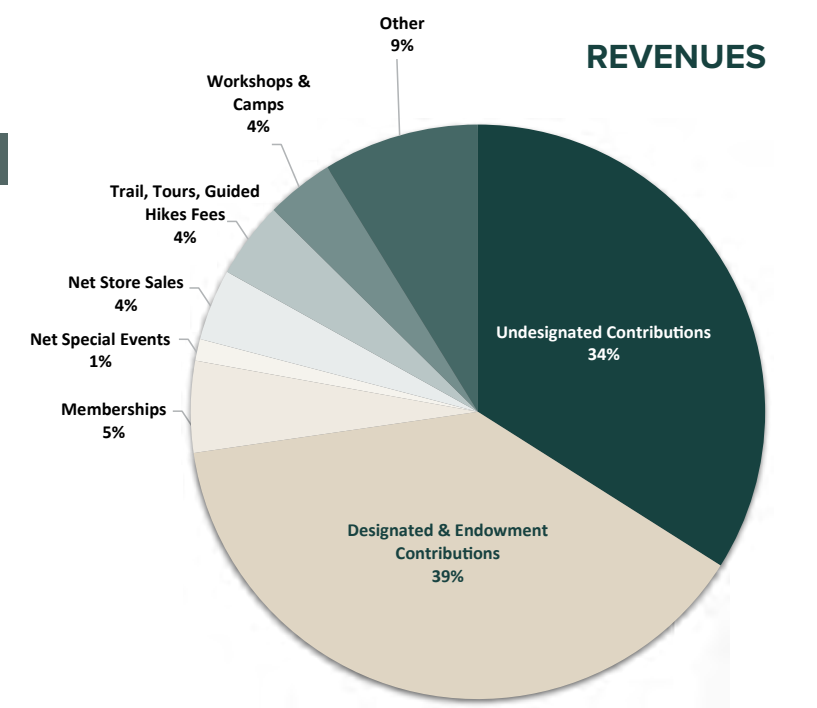
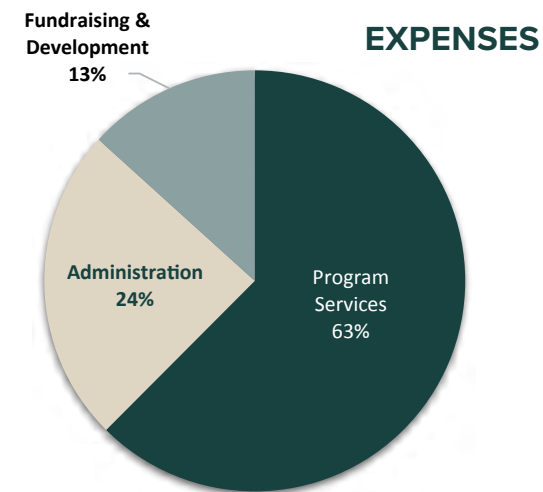
	2023	2022
EXPENSES		
Program Services	\$830,565	\$644,201
Administration	\$322,214	\$291,799
Fundraising & Development	\$176,708	\$104,038
EXPENSES	\$1,329,487	\$1,040,038

	2023	2022
CHANGE IN NET ASSETS		
Change in Net Assets Before	\$679,766	\$579,612
Gains & Losses on Investments		
Net Realized & Unrealized Gains on Investment	\$374,824	-\$445,757
Change in Beneficial Interest in Perpetual Trust	\$10,482	-\$29,782
Change in Net Assets	\$1,065,072	\$104,073
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	\$13,465,268	\$13,361,195
NET ASSETS - END OF YEAR	\$14,530,340	\$13,465,268

	2023	2022
ASSETS		
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$981,728	\$1,470,257
Accounts Receivable	\$15,341	\$14,456
Grants Receivable	-	-
Prepaid Expense	\$14,014	\$11,249
Nature Store Inventory	\$30,029	\$25,201
Land & Fixed Assets - Net of depreciation	\$8,991,968	\$9,109,067
Cash Restricted for Long Term Purposes	\$627,118	\$599,350
Ridges Endowment Investments	\$3,776,920	\$3,277,609
Other Assets	\$149,677	\$139,195
TOTAL ASSETS	\$14,586,795	\$14,646,384

	2023	2022
LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS		
Accrued Expenses, Payroll & Other	\$56,455	\$34,210
Note Payable - Ridges Inn	-	\$1,146,906
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$56,455	\$1,181,116

	2023	2022
NET ASSETS		
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$14,530,340	\$13,465,268



2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Jeff Lutsey *President*
- Grace Rossman *Vice President*
- Chuck Germain *Treasurer*
- Sher Rockway *Secretary*

DIRECTORS

- Deb Fitzgerald
- Michelle Hefty
- Jone Kiefer
- Mark Martin
- Ed Miller
- Ashley Prange
- Bill Wolff
- Dave Zuhlke

STAFF

- Katie Krouse *Executive Director*
- Andy Gill *Assistant Director*
- Mary Beth Anschutz *Nature Store Manager*
- Wendy Beilfuss *Administrative Assistant*
- Cathy Costello *Visitor Engagement Specialist*
- Jeanne Farrell *Director of Marketing*

- Anna Foster *Director of Programming*
- Ana Hinkle *Environmental Educator*
- Sam Hoffman *Land Manager*
- Sheryl Honig, PhD *Director of Education*
- Libby Humphries *Environmental Educator*
- Tony Kiszonas *Director of Research*

- Allie Ott *Environmental Educator*
- Secelie Panske *Development Officer*
- Dan Scheiman *Visitor Engagement Specialist*
- Amy Shook *Naturalist*
- Jenn Taylor *Accountant*

2023 Impact

Acres Managed

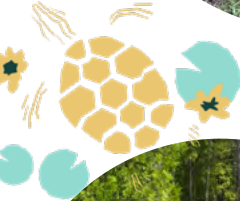
1,700 Total acres protected
17 Volunteers and staff mapped 7 acres of invasive species and treated 1 acre



Youth Education

Forest Days

432 Students engaged in Gibraltar and Sevastopol Public Schools



Education at The Ridges

380 Youth, walking – 11 years old engaged at The Ridges Sanctuary

- Backpack Adventure Camp
- Ridges Forest School
- Tiny Trekkers



Guided Hikes

2,200+ Participants
2,658 Miles Hiked Collectively

Festival of Nature

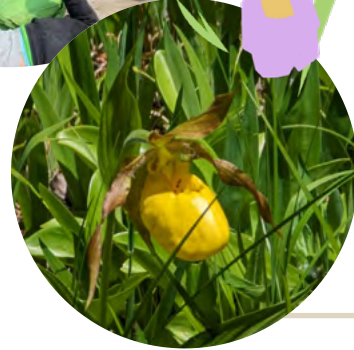
553 Festival of Nature attendees, participated in 65 field trips with 12 community partners



Research

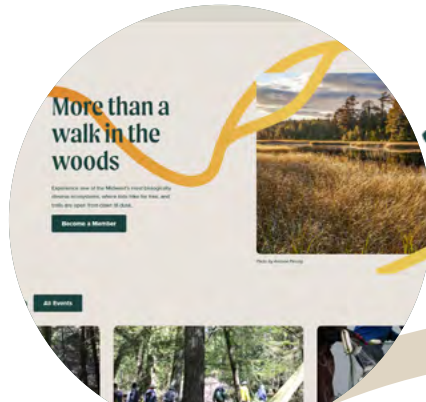
Orchid Trekking

1,706 Individual orchids recorded in 2023
21 Species recorded



Website

New website designed to better serve our community



Membership

2,284 Members
112 New Members
24 New Business Members
81% Member Retention



Baileys Harbor Range Light Tours

44 Individual resident range light docents led tours for 22 weeks



Volunteers

200+ Volunteers
4,997 Volunteer Hours
\$167,400 In value supporting The Ridges



Number of Visitors

30,164 Visitors to the Nature Center

Expanded Accessibility

37 People contributed \$6,350 to make the Trackchair program possible

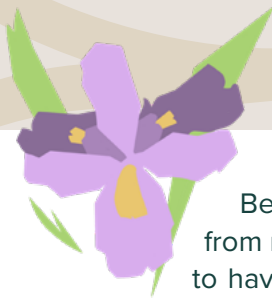


Donors

1,200+ Donors supported our important mission driven work



To access The Ridges 2023 Annual Report with a complete list of donors, visit: ridgessanctuary.org/financials



Research

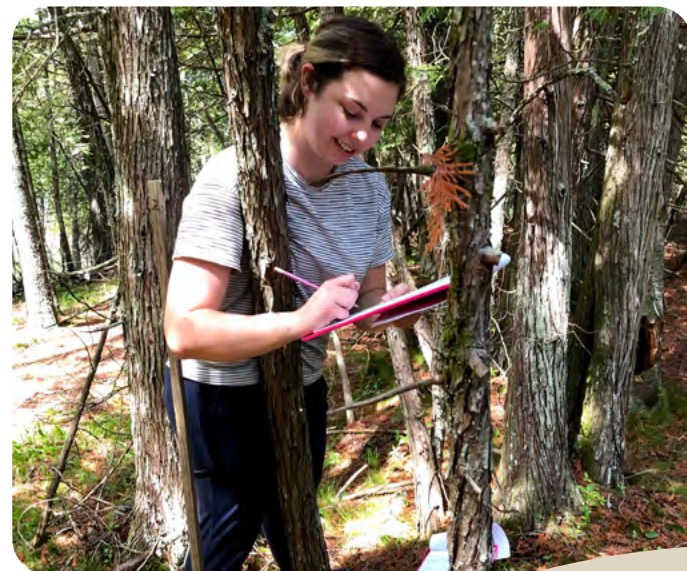
Because of a long-term commitment from many individuals, we are fortunate to have numerous opportunities for our community to participate in important scientific research through our citizen science programs. This group of scientists continues the legacy set forth by the founders of The Ridges Sanctuary and with the assistance of Ridges Land Manager Sam Hoffman and Ridges volunteer and Master Naturalist Jane Whitney, programs are being refined and the number of projects is growing. Current botanical activities include work with inventories, research plot monitoring, orchid trekking, phenology, display maintenance, data analysis, and workshops. Animal endeavors include eagle nest observations, sucker monitoring, pollinator phenology, counting cranes, and reporting on observed birds during the Christmas Bird Count. The **Water Action Volunteers** stream monitoring program provides longitudinal water quality data from streams throughout Door County. There is a continued effort to seek additional programs as outlined in the master plan. Most of the citizen science programs are in collaboration with state, national, and international organizations. We are also fortunate to work in coordination with numerous conservation partners including Crossroads at Big Creek and the Door County Land Trust. These cooperative efforts were showcased at a Citizen Science Symposium we hosted in October.

The Ridges hosted four individuals from the Smithsonian North American Orchid Conservation Center and Environmental Research Center. With this team, plans were outlined for specimen collection, educational opportunities, and further collaboration efforts. Naturalist David Barnes led the group into the field for the collection of a particular genus of orchid and brief tour of the Sanctuary. This group presented three orchid research studies at a meet and greet open to the public.

The **Orchid Research for Restoration** project continues with data collection from 19 research plots, 6 wild plots, and 1 large indigenous population. With the work of statisticians Mark Polczynski, Bob Wise,

and Kurt Kiefer, plot success parameters are being identified with subsequent abiotic corollaries. A cloud-based data repository is hosting many years of data that has been collected and are continually expanding. There was successful lab germination of showy lady's slipper orchids and refinement work continues regarding the media mixtures and protocols. Pollinator cameras are deployed to help identify the orchid pollination vectors. There are Ram's head lady's slipper tissue samples going through genetic analysis at Northern Michigan University for population comparisons. The University of Wisconsin LaCrosse labs are analyzing fungal and seed samples from Ridges Sanctuary showy lady's slipper sources. The goal is to identify and culture the fungus needed for seed germination.

A major project in the preliminary phase is to identify Sanctuary areas that are suitable for the reintroduction or translocation of dwarf lake iris. The initial phase entailed developing research protocols, deployment of four HOBO monitors, and establishment of control plots to collect baseline data. Transplantation research is currently underway. Rangelight Corridor and research area tree removal was the next phase followed by the establishment of variable research plots. Dwarf lake iris transplantation will take place and long-term data collection is scheduled. Determination of appropriate environmental parameters will be determined, and site selection will take place.

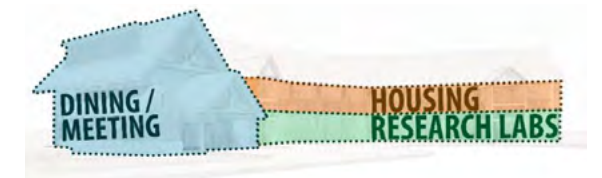


Looking Ahead: Master Plan Update

The Ridges has long been a participant and host for important environmental research. From our nationally recognized orchid restoration program to our quickly expanding citizen science programs, The Ridges is only scratching the surface of its potential as a hub for research. The master plan provides several recommendations to continue to grow research efforts at The Ridges, including repurposing the former Ridges Inn as a new Research Station. This campus will support space for existing research programs, and the potential for cooperative research-in-residence programs with regional partners and institutions utilizing renovated facilities and provide on-site lodging. Through adaptive reuse of these facilities, this campus can support the above programs

in addition to providing a permanent base for citizen science.

This transformation also provides the opportunity to restore Hidden Brook by relocating the cabins on the creek bank to other sites. Hidden Brook is critical habitat for the endangered Hine's emerald dragonfly. We are excited for the future of this important property and are confident it will become the home for valuable research and citizen science efforts.



Education

Ridges Environmental Educators Sheryl Honig and Libby Humphries spent the year in the School Forests with teachers and students of Gibraltar School and Sevastopol School. Sheryl and Libby teach **Forest Days**, an Environmental Education curriculum for 4K – Grade 6, written by Ridges staff to align with school natural science objectives. Gibraltar children spent 90 minutes each month hiking, learning, exploring, and journaling in Peninsula State Park. At Sevastopol, children in grades K – 2 also had monthly Forest Days in their School Forest “Ecolab.” Students learned about the diversity and complexity of their local habitats while enjoying time to get connected to nature.

Libby implemented 5th and 6th grade GLOBE protocols, a NASA-sponsored scientific literacy program that encourages students to be citizen scientists in their communities. Protocols, such as water quality testing, atmospheric conditions and soil texture, allow students to familiarize themselves with the same tools that environmental researchers use in the field. Student-collected data are uploaded to the GLOBE database and made accessible to participants worldwide. Knowing that their work serves a greater purpose beyond the school environment is empowering to these students; they feel enabled to make a tangible impact on the world.

In December, the Gibraltar School Board approved The Ridges Sanctuary’s **Dragonfly Nature 4K** as part of the Gibraltar Collaborative 4K project. Fifteen Gibraltar families have enrolled their children through the school district to attend 4K at The Ridges. Sheryl has collaborated with the 4K teachers at Gibraltar and Northern Door Children’s Center to develop this model and write a curriculum that aligns with Wisconsin Early Learning Standards and Natural Start Guidelines. This collaboration with 4K families and the Gibraltar School District extends our reach out into the community in exciting ways.

This fall **Forest School**, a program for homeschoolers aged 6-9, began with 11 students. In November Environmental Educator Jane Morse left The Ridges

for new adventures, and the program continued with Ana Hinkle as Lead Teacher. With the aid of long-time educator and volunteer Kathy Reiderer, Ana created an exciting 2 ½ hour, Tuesday/Thursday program. Forest School students hike, learn about The Ridges ecosystem, conduct investigations, and enjoy new friendships in the beautiful outdoors.

In the summer of 2023, Ridges staff conducted a six week **Backpack Adventure Camp** for 174 campers, ages 4-11. Campers got to hike, learn, and explore the beautiful places at The Ridges, including the Family Discovery Trail, the rustic trails, and the beach. Children left camp with new friendships, good memories, and materials to extend their nature experience at home.

Throughout the year, The Ridges hosted **stewardship-based workshops, symposia, and events** focusing on critical flora and fauna of Door County, including Wisconsin’s owls, eastern bluebirds, sandhill cranes, Wisconsin’s beetles and aphids, monarch butterflies, mushrooms of the boreal forest, and Wisconsin’s bats. These workshops and events provided educational opportunities for all ages to learn about the species of focus. In 2023, over 450 visitors and members participated in workshops and symposia. Most importantly, participants were able to bring what they learned back to their own communities and put stewardship to practice.

Guided Hikes engaged visitors from the local community and worldwide. Over 2,200 people of all ages participated in guided hikes in 2023, learning about the history and ecology of the Sanctuary. Almost all these hikes were led by dedicated volunteer Hike Leaders.

In 2023, The Ridges also honored its commitment to increasing accessibility of the Sanctuary. In February, Ridges staff accepted the donation of a Trackchair from Kinect M1. This motorized, all-terrain chair allows visitors who are not able to navigate a rustic trail to enjoy the Sanctuary. Individuals can reserve the Trackchair to use on the designated Trackchair Trail anytime from May through October.

Looking Ahead: Master Plan Update

The Ridges has prided itself on providing high quality environmental education to local families and visitors since its founding in 1937. The master plan pays homage to that and outlines several strategies to increase the impact of The Ridges education pillar. The plan envisions North Campus (Hwy 57 & Q near old cabins) as the central hub for educational programming.

Critical to this effort is enhancing both the Kaye and Marshall Cabins as year-round education spaces that will also be served by new outdoor classrooms. A new Education Center built at the site of the existing workshop will anchor the Education Campus and provide a year-round learning environment with

ample access to nature as well as a gathering space for events. The emergence of our Forest School, new 4K partnership with Gibraltar, and growth of Backpack Adventure Summer Camp all reiterate our need for outdoor learning space where students can interact with nature.





Preservation

The Ridges' community made significant contributions to the preservation pillar of the Sanctuary's mission in 2023. Much progress was made in several key areas, including trail maintenance, invasive species control, and rare plant conservation. Our community, especially our volunteers, plays an integral role in land management and preservation.

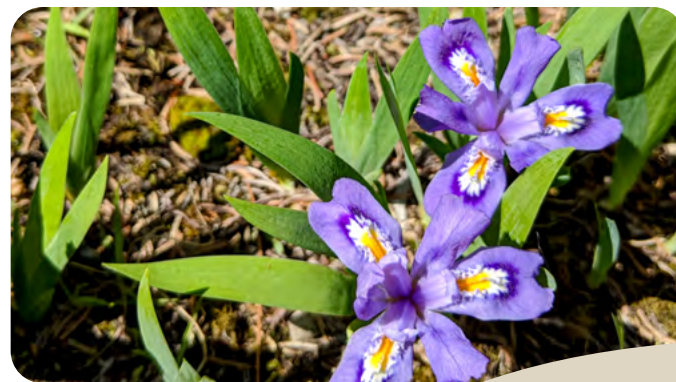
The Wednesday Crew made further improvements to our trails in 2023, including the replacement of two bridges on Cedar Trail, two smaller boardwalks on Winter Wren and Fir Trails, and reopening a previously closed bridge on Fir Trail that overlooks a very scenic section of Cowslip Swale. Additionally, two small boardwalks on the Family Discover Trail were upgraded. Keeping our trails and bridges maintained improves accessibility while protecting the sensitive habitats we want to observe.

Mapping and control of invasive species was again an ongoing priority for preserving the native biodiversity of our natural plant and animal communities. The first year of our property-wide inventory targeted swales and coastal wetland habitats, resulting in seven total acres of invasive populations mapped with about an acre of those being treated. Priority species will continue to be surveyed in additional properties and habitats in future years.

New initiatives in land management were spurred by the completion of the organization's master plan, which was completed in early 2023 and developed with significant input from stakeholders within the community. The Ridges Land Committee is comprised of conservation partners and stakeholders who provide input at land management discussions, which are now focused on master plan recommendations, including updates to management plans, our land acquisition policy, and survey and monitoring protocols. The committee recently recommended to the board to pursue the purchase of a 12-acre parcel that is critical for protecting the groundwater quality in the wetland habitats that the federally endangered Hine's emerald dragonfly relies on.

Another new project initiated in 2023 was the **Dwarf Lake Iris Restoration Project**. In collaboration with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, funding was secured to remove trees in the Range Light Corridor for maintenance of the Baileys Harbor Range Lights, and to conduct long-term research and restoration of the federally threatened dwarf lake iris populations within the Sanctuary. This important work will contribute to the Fish and Wildlife Service's recovery goals aimed at preserving the vulnerable species throughout its limited range on Great Lakes coastal habitats.

Lastly, in keeping with The Ridges' mission to promote positive environmental behaviors, a new **Land Stewardship Workshop Series** was kicked off in 2023. The exciting new program is geared towards private landowners looking to actively practice stewardship and conservation on their lands. The workshops provide landowners with the knowledge, tools, and resources to conserve their natural resources. We are excited to offer this series again in 2024 to continue to inspire community members to be better stewards of their land.



Looking Ahead: Master Plan Update

At the very heart of The Ridges is land preservation. Preservation is the reason The Ridges Sanctuary became Wisconsin's first land trust and it's why we now protect over 1,700 acres of land. Land preservation and sound management will always be at the core of our mission.

The master plan reiterates that purpose and sets clear goals and recommendations related to land management and acquisition. With support from The Ridges Land Committee, work is already underway to revise and update land management policies and practices. We are working in partnership with the WI DNR to align our practices with State Natural Area policies and goals.

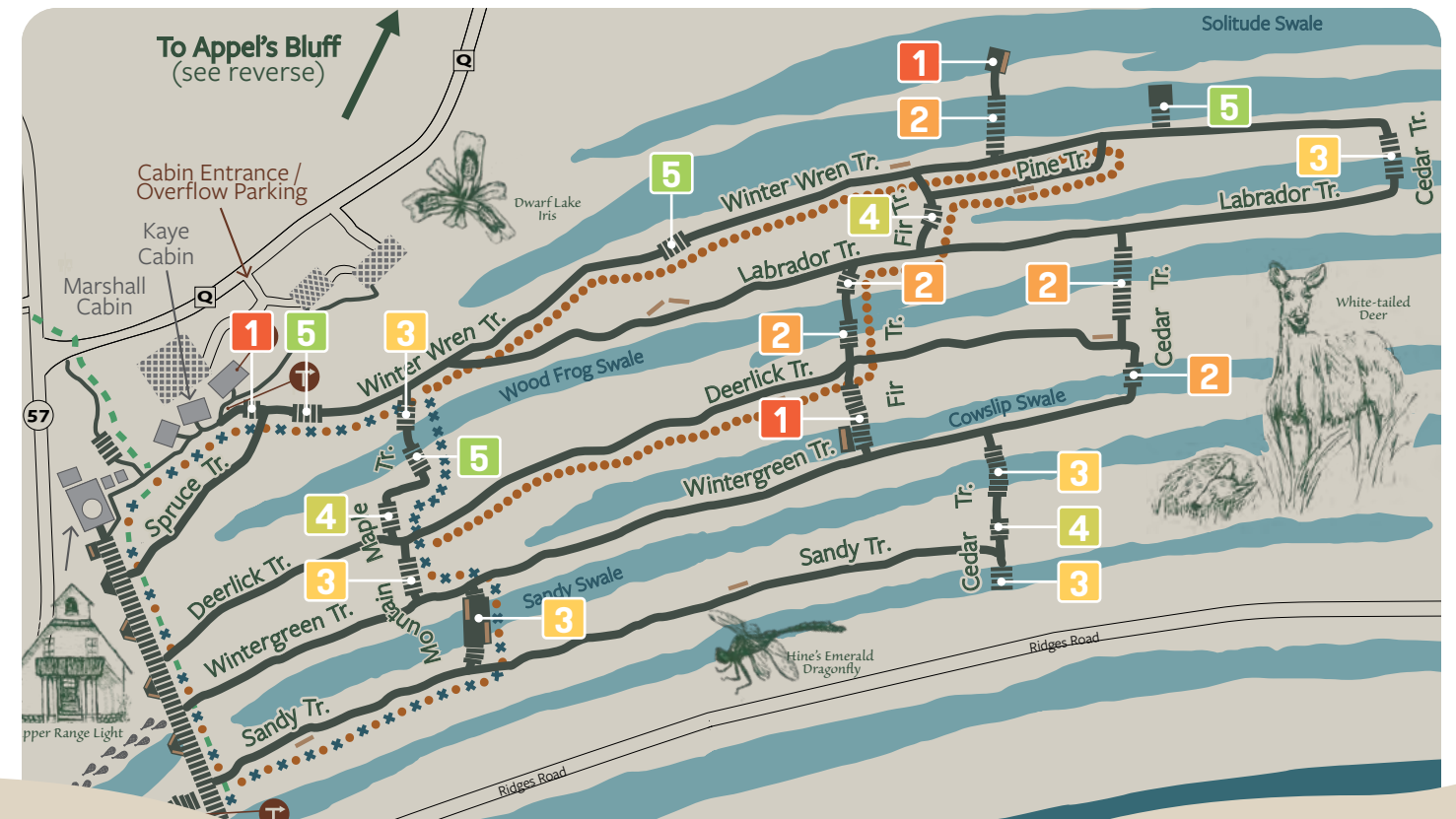
We'll continue to replace and build new boardwalks that increase access for all visitors, but also minimize human impact on the vulnerable Ridges habitats. Our management team and volunteers are already mapping invasive species and developing plans for their eradication. Finally, land acquisition will continue to remain a critical tool for the preservation of the unique ecosystems of The Ridges Sanctuary.

To support our preservation efforts, we will be building a new volunteer workshop at North Campus. The new workshop will be a critical resource for volunteers and staff to utilize for land preservation efforts.

Diagram of boardwalk condition inventory

CONDITION

- 1 Very Poor
- 2 Poor
- 3 Average
- 4 Good
- 5 Excellent



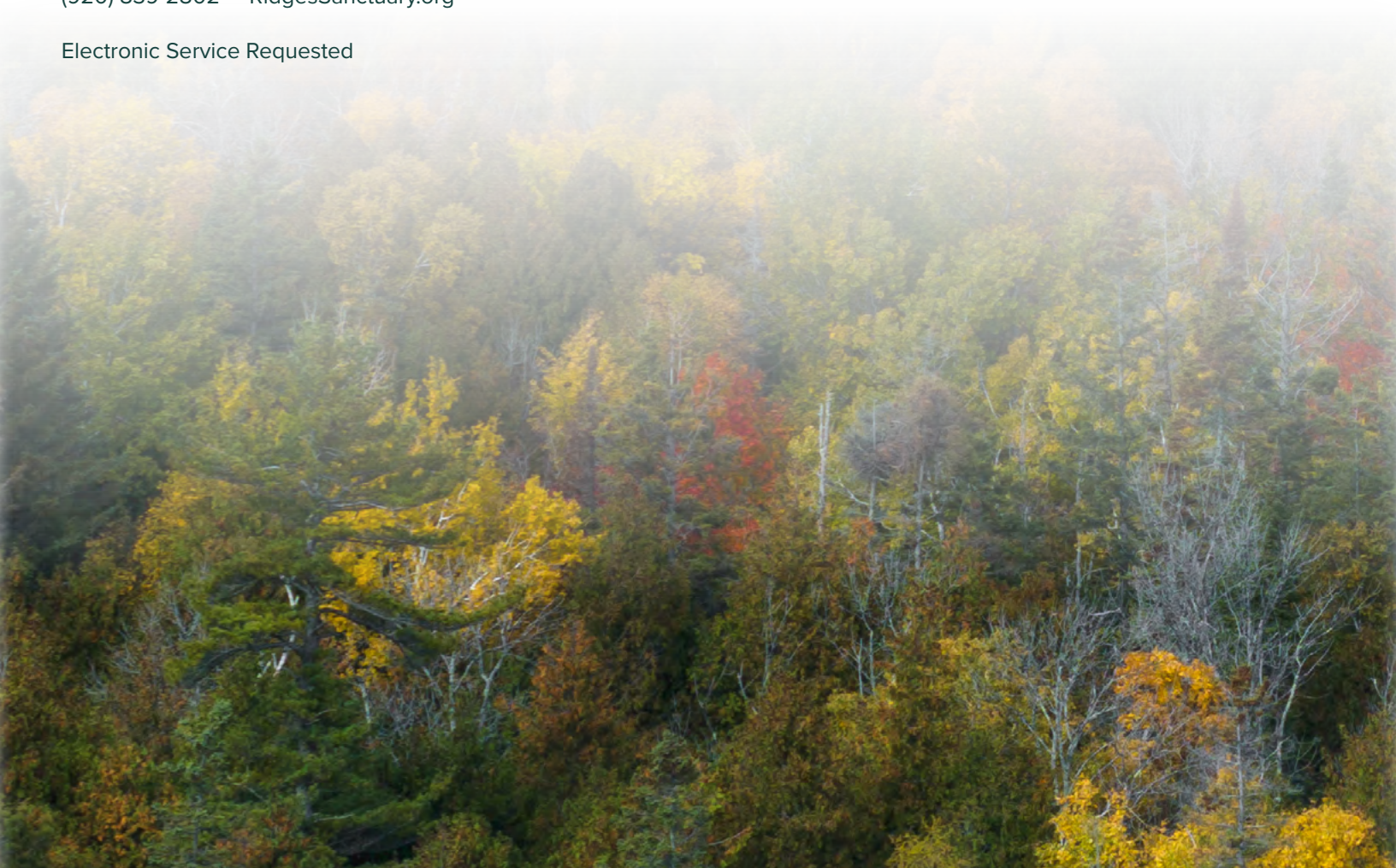


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The Ridges Sanctuary

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Electronic Service Requested



Mission

Today, the mission of The Ridges is to promote positive environmental behaviors through impactful educational experiences, land management and protection, and ecological research. Every day, the staff, members, volunteers and visitors ensure the mission is incorporated in all we do.

Leaving a Lasting Legacy

Did you know that you can leave a natural legacy with The Ridges Sanctuary through planned giving? Making a plan for a legacy gift is a powerful way to create a lasting impact on The Ridges and ensure that what you care about will continue to thrive and benefit future generations. To learn more about joining The Albert Fuller Society and in what ways you can give a planned gift, please contact us at 920-839-2802. We will be available to help determine the right giving option to meet your charitable goals.

It is because of your support and your consideration of a planned gift for tomorrow that The Ridges Sanctuary continues to thrive. We value your commitment and look forward to honoring the legacy of The Ridges Sanctuary together.