

**Heckrodt Wetland Reserve  
History and Program Summary**

**Heckrodt Wetland Reserve  
1305 Plank Road  
Menasha, WI 54952  
(920) 720-9349  
[www.heckrodtwetlandnaturecenter.org](http://www.heckrodtwetlandnaturecenter.org)**

**History**

The Reserve began with a donation of 5 acres of land from the Frank Heckrodt to the City of Menasha in 1976. After purchasing additional acreage for the south parking lot, little was done with the property until 1989 when the Heckrodt Family established a trust fund for land acquisition and site development. In 1991, the City of Menasha appointed an ad-hoc committee to begin development of the Reserve. That same year, the Wisconsin Conservation Corps (WCC) began building the boardwalk trail system. From 1991-1993, 57 additional acres were purchased from landowners using funds from the Heckrodt Family Trust Fund and WI Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Fund. In 1994, the Reserve opened to the public with 1.2 miles of trails available. The WCC constructed the observation platform at Lopas Pond in 1995.

The ad-hoc committee formed the nonprofit corporation Heckrodt Wetland Reserve Inc. in 1995, just as the WCC was completing the second loop of the trail system, providing a total of 2 miles of trails for public enjoyment. The Heckrodt Environmental Learning Station (A-frame) was completed in 1997 by a Boy Scout Venturing Program sponsored by Boldt Construction, and full service educational programming began at that time. The Lopas Family Environmental Learning Station, a renovation of an existing Lopas family structure, was completed in 1998, and design plans for the Heckrodt Nature Center were well underway.

In the fall of 1998, ground was broken for construction of the Nature Center while educational programming continued. The endowment to support the cost of building the Nature Center was established by Frank and Florence Heckrodt and other members of the Heckrodt family at the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. Additional funding for the interior wetland, large aquariums, and all exterior landscaping was acquired from the Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Nature Center was dedicated in June 1999, with displays including mounted specimens on long term loan from the Oshkosh Public Museum.

Rapid growth of the organization in the years following construction of the Nature Center resulted in the addition of 1,000 square feet to the Nature Center in 2003. This addition houses hands-on programming material storage, a wet work area, and additional office space. A 3 acre parcel east of the existing parking lot was also purchased in the time period after construction of the Nature Center.

In May 2005, 11 acres west of the Reserve were purchased, representing the last contiguous undeveloped section of land adjacent to the property. This property, west of Lopas Channel, was connected to the existing Reserve with the addition of a bridge crossing Lopas Channel in September 2005. The 11 acres, a closed landfill, was developed over the next 3-5 years to include an arboretum mound fence, a prairie meadow and a wildlife management demonstration area. Wild areas along the channel will remain undeveloped to protect existing animal species, including river otter.

### **Site Summary**

Today Heckrodt Wetland Reserve is a 76-acre urban nature reserve with habitats including forested wetland, cattail marsh, open water, open field, and upland forest. Persisting despite the urbanization that continues to grow around it, the Reserve is home to numerous species of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. Migrating songbirds and waterfowl nest and feed in its protection.

The 6,000 square foot Nature Center features a “Living Waters” exhibit with an indoor live wetland, and aquariums that are home to live local fishes, crayfish, turtles, frogs and snakes – surrounded by a display of mounted Wisconsin mammals and birds. Outdoor exhibits include a memorial butterfly garden and bird feeding area, as well as a pond, bog and stream complex. The Nature Center facilities feature a workshop/meeting room, a classroom amphitheater/Discovery Den, Solarium, Keepers of the Earth exhibit, and a resource library.

Three miles of trail, including 1 mile of elevated boardwalk provide access to the Reserve habitats for visitors to explore and enjoy birdwatching, walking, photography, and snowshoeing in winter. The World Beneath Your Feet, a children’s play area, provides recreational opportunities while educating about soil, soil ecology, and soil critters. Wagons and strollers are available for check out at no cost to increase visitor enjoyment of the hiking trails. Wheelchairs are available for visitors who may need assistance. *Explorers Companions* (backpacks equipped with exploration materials for the season), *Diggers Companions* (kits containing soil exploration materials), and *Birding Kits* (containing binoculars, bird guides, and Birdsong Identifiers), are available for checkout at no cost. Snowshoes are available in winter for a small fee. A series of interpretive signs, which change with the seasons, provide a guide for walkers along a section of the trail system.

Heckrodt Wetland Reserve is open year round. The Nature Center is open Tuesday – Friday from 8 AM – 4:30 PM, Saturday from 11AM – 4 PM. The building is closed all major holidays. Trails are open from 6 AM – 9 PM every day of the year. Bicycles and other wheeled recreational items are not permitted on trails. Wheelchairs, wagons, and strollers are welcome. Pets are not permitted on Reserve property. Heckrodt Wetland Reserve is a nonsmoking property.

### **Programming Summary**

The Reserve currently offers educational programs primarily for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students, teachers, and the general public. Since starting

programming in 1997, more than 90,000 program participants, mostly school children and daycare visitors, have participated in educational programs. Many special interest groups including senior citizens, scout groups, church groups, and service organizations participate in naturalist guided tours and programs at the facility.

Monthly family oriented naturalist programs (Community Programs) are provided all year and include special events such as the Heckrodt Prairie Hootenanny and Creepy Crawlies Nonscary Halloween Event. Special programs for toddlers (Toddler Trails) and preschoolers (Turtle Tales Preschool Story Time) provide monthly educational programming for an additional 1,500 youth annually. Scout clinics designed to help cub scout and girl scouts achieve badges and awards are held frequently throughout the year..

### **Site Restoration Summary**

The HWR Environmental Reconnaissance Report was published in 1999 outlining the ecological status of the Reserve, and making recommendations for restoration and management projects. A collaborative program with Lawrence University hydrology department began in 1999 which included installation & monitoring of seven groundwater monitoring wells with the intent to evaluate groundwater flow patterns to make recommendations for enhancing site hydrology. As a result of this ongoing study, a 1.5 acre pond was dug in 2001 to provide a collection point for surface water to improve flushing within the Reserve's waterways. The Reserve manages invasive plant species on the property, and projects are underway to replace native species lost to habitat damaged by alien plants such as buckthorn, purple loosestrife, and garlic mustard. A habitat Management Plan also addresses restoration of ephemeral wildflowers, mitigation of losses attributable to Emerald Ash Borer, Pollinator Initiative, Bat Monitoring, managing for migratory songbirds,, and managing to support native wildlife in general.

### **Governance, Staff, and Volunteers**

Heckrodt Wetland Reserve is Board members and others from the community serve on committees including Fundraising, Personnel and Staffing, Communications, Program and Education, and Site Management. Special committees may be assigned as needed.

HWR employs six full time staff members including Executive Director, Naturalist/Education Coordinator, Naturalist/Public Program Coordinator, Outreach Educator/Community Resource Coordinator, Site Manager, and Natural Resource Associate. Part time seasonal staff are added for specific projects or to support summer education programs.

Volunteers are an important part of operations and volunteer hours are provided in excess of 5,000 hours/year. Numerous groups provide support for site management and maintenance, aquarium maintenance, and special projects. On-call volunteers support educational programming, routine aquarium care, administrative support, and special event staffing.