

FIELD NOTES

Summer 2026

A Note from Canuche



Summer is in full swing at the Wenatchee River Institute (WRI), and the campus is buzzing with the energy of campers, volunteers, visitors, and wildlife. Before we get too far into the updates, I want to pause and say **thank you** to everyone who helped make our

2026 Bird Fest such a success. From volunteers and presenters to sponsors, partners, and participants, this event continues to reflect the best of what makes WRI special: curiosity, community, and a shared love for the natural world.

As we look ahead, we are already beginning to imagine next year's **25th annual Bird Fest** – a wonderful opportunity to celebrate how this event has grown.

Right in our backyard, the **Blackbird Island Pond** is a cherished outdoor classroom for WRI's Summer Camps and an accessible fishing spot for local families. Following the severe flooding last December, our community rallied for a massive clean-up, while a grassroots campaign and the Icicle Valley Trout Unlimited Chapter funded vital repairs. Looking ahead, Trout Unlimited plans to hand over pond management. WRI is actively exploring this stewardship role, talking with stakeholders to navigate the moving pieces. We are excited to keep this community treasure thriving!

It takes a community to do this work, and I'm grateful you're in it! Happy summer to you and your family.

Canuche Terranella
Executive Director



Bird Fest Community Fair attracted over 250 participants and offered free nature activities for all.



2026 Bird Fest Keynote Speaker, Neil Paprocki, led a group of birders along Mountain Home Ridge.



From logs and debris to clear and stocked with fish, thank you to everyone who brought the pond back to life!



Young anglers enjoyed fishing the newly restocked pond this July.

Our Community Steps Up

Imagine back to when you were a student, counting down the days until your school's Field Day. Remember the excitement of stepping off the yellow school bus, smelling the fresh air, and discovering something new outside with your classmates?

Now, imagine if those core childhood memories were taken away.

That was the reality we faced this spring. For years, state and federal funding allowed schools to pay for these experiences. However, that funding has vanished or been greatly reduced.

This left us with a choice: scale back and serve fewer students or find a way to fund the program ourselves. **We chose to step up and invite our community to join us.**

To help subsidize WRI's Nature Scholars Program, we needed to **bridge a \$40,000 funding gap**. This covers the educators, supplies, and transportation needed to deliver the lessons that make science and nature real for kids across North Central Washington.

The Nature Scholars Program not only covers our signature Field Days on the WRI campus in Leavenworth but also brings the magic directly to local schools through Traveling Planetarium visits and After School Programs. In the 2025-2026 school year alone, WRI's educators worked with students from **26 different schools** to deliver these activities, making over 10,000 different connections to nature!



First grade "Nature Detectives" from Peshastin-Dryden Elementary arrive at the WRI campus and break into their learning groups to start their Field Day adventures.

And the good news is... our community stepped up with us!

We kicked off our fundraising campaign with an incredible \$20,000 Community Challenge, featuring a lead gift of \$12,000 already in hand and an \$8,000 match to unlock. Our supporters moved so fast to clear that initial \$40,000 goal that their momentum inspired another generous donor to step forward with a surprise, second \$5,000 matching challenge to see how many more classrooms we could protect.

\$61,110 Raised!

Ultimately, **114 generous donors** answered the call and completely surpassed our goal.

Because you stepped up and doubled down, the conversation is no longer about scaling back. Instead, our team has a head start for the upcoming school year!

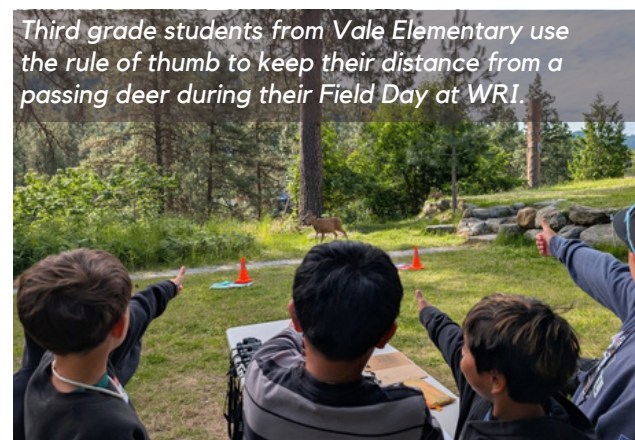
To every single person who gave, shared, and cheered us on – thank you for being the backbone of this work and keeping our kids exploring!



Students from Seeds Learning Center & Academy explore the habitat around the Wenatchee River.



"Earth Explorers" from Damman School work together on a hands-on erosion control project at Barn Beach.



Third grade students from Vale Elementary use the rule of thumb to keep their distance from a passing deer during their Field Day at WRI.

Year-round Exploration

Another year, another season of curious kids exploring the outdoors! Summer has arrived, but we are still reminiscing about the wonderful school year we had.

Field Days are a core part of our youth programming during the school year. **Field Days provide a mix of science, exploration, and discovery for students throughout North Central Washington.** Spending time outside learning and caring for the land teaches students that they can do good things in the natural world, and have fun while doing it!

"I love this field trip because we get to be outside in nature which is so pretty!"

4th grader from Mountain View Elementary

Each season brings its own adventure! Our curriculum caters to the wonders that the natural world provides us throughout the year.

The Fall kicked off with students diving into the living rhythms of the Wenatchee River ecosystem. Shifting between water and earth sciences, they explored how our local environment is shaped by our river. Down by the banks, students tracked spawning salmon, searched for river bugs, and tested water quality. Up on the trails, the focus turned to the landscape as they experimented with erosion control and explored the vital role of fire ecology. Even our youngest learners got their hands dirty with nature art and habitat-building. If it swam, grew, or flowed nearby, our students were out there discovering how it all connects.

Winter had other plans. Normally this is snowshoe season, but the snow barely showed, so no snowpack studies or snowshoeing this year. Instead, students worked on winter and post-storm observations, explored the night sky in the planetarium, and had fun in the mud.

Third graders from Grant Elementary in Ephrata spotting WRI volunteer, Turtle Tim, with their binoculars during their Field Day.



Each Field Day is a celebration of learning! These kindergarteners from Peshastin-Dryden sure thought so.

Spring brought a double dose of outdoor adventure, blending rescheduled winter explorations with our peak seasonal programs. Students stepped into the role of Nature Detectives, cracking the code of forest ecosystems, hunting for hidden habitats, and decoding the secret world of local lichen. But the absolute headliner of the season was our Wild Bird Program. Armed with binoculars and listening closely, students spent the bulk of the spring learning to identify our feathered neighbors by sight and sound, fully connecting with the vibrant life returning to the valley.

"This year, 3rd graders from Alpine Lakes Elementary joined us for 5 wonderful rotations. For many of these students, coming to WRI to learn about birds wasn't just a field trip; it was their absolute favorite part of 3rd grade."

Dragonfly Dee, WRI Youth Programs Coordinator

**2025-2026
Field Days
Impact**



13 schools



1,938 connections



5,240 educational hours!



FIELD NOTES

Summer 2026



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What's inside?

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Connecting
People,
Communities
and the
Natural World

STAFF:

Canuche Terranella
Rebecca Ryan
Sara Evans
Deanna Butcher
Randee Zerger
Angela Crampton
Brandon Hughes
Tiffany Theden
Virginia Shoup
Michaela Drougas
Fern Lopez Cruz
Jack Jefferds
Emma Knott
Sophia Kinninger, Intern
Haley Erikson, Intern

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WRI's Nature Journal

Entry No. 9: Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)

As the last remaining species in the family Pandionidae, osprey are a truly unique group that split from hawks and eagles over 50 million years ago. Though often called “seahawks” or “fish eagles”, they are in a league of their own—and today, they can be found nearly everywhere on Earth, on every continent except Antarctica.

- **Fish-Hunting Specialists:** Fish make up 90% of their diet. A reversible outer toe and barbed foot pads help them clutch slippery prey.
- **Epic Migrators:** Master aerialists that log over 160,000 miles during their 15-to-20-year lifespan.
- **Local Nesters:** Look for their giant stick nests along the Wenatchee River from Hwy 2. Their 1 to 2 chicks fledge around mid to late July, with males taking flight about a day before females.
- **Aerial Rivals:** Frequently lock claws in sky battles with bald eagles and get mobbed by local crows and ravens.

Osprey sitting on a tree snag outside of the WRI's River Haus snacking on a fish while fighting off hungry crows.

