



KAW VALLEY HERITAGE ALLIANCE

412 EAST 9TH STREET LAWRENCE, KS 66044

Empowering Healthy Rivers and Communities

Re: Wakarusa Wetlands Learners Program (Phase 2-2009) Co-Sponsorship of \$2,000

The Wakarusa Wetland Learners Program was initiated during spring 2006 by Jayhawk Audubon Society (JAS). It was co-created in close collaboration with Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance (KVHA).

Its main purpose is engaging **upper elementary students** in activities designed to increase their awareness, appreciation, knowledge and understanding of natural environments—beginning with wetlands—and to expand their interest in conservation and preservation. Youth learn about the ecological value and historical context of a local wetland, students develop a lifelong, mutually beneficial relationship with Earth's ecosystems and the organisms living in them. Outcomes are achieved with **project-based consequential learning** activities that blend scientific investigation with creative self-expression.

After two successful pilot trips in May 2006, USD-497 schools experienced 15 trips involving nearly 1,000 sixth grade students, teachers and chaperones. The Elizabeth Schultz Environmental Fund provided funding for this program through a \$4,000 grant in fall 2006 and JAS continues to fund busing.

KVHA now handles coordinating all program support components like arranging for facilitators to conduct activities in the wetlands, and supports teacher preparation and follow-up. KVHA also empowers an internship component of this program by customizing **pragmatic competency training** for college interns, typically science majors, wanting to gain skills as facilitators working in the field with students. The Haskell Indian Nations University Ecology program may support this project with Dr. Bridgett Chapin.

Wetland field trips involve no more than five activities that students rotate through, each 20 minutes waypoint with 5 minute transitions. Content delivery requires 2 ½ hours at the wetlands from start to finish. Of the **five activities**, at least two are science-oriented. Whenever possible, one is on the history of these particular wetlands. Our facilitators are scientists (many associated with Kansas Biological Survey), naturalists, historians, thespians, artists, writers, musicians and others with the interest and appropriate skills to guide activities with students in a natural setting. Kaw Valley's **Dragonfly County** residents with a diverse array of local knowledge and skills volunteer as facilitators, providing hands-on learning experiences for students and adults who participate in our **Imagination and Place** field trips.

One of our local partners benefiting from this program is the Lied Center of Kansas. Through a Kansas Arts Commission grant, about 200 second grade students participated in activities at the Wakarusa wetlands, focused on the theme of cycles (life, water, and weather) in preparation for a performance of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. **The Lied Center Education Department** is currently exploring further grant-supported initiatives in partnership with KVHA by adapting our Wakarusa Wetland Learners Program.

Local sponsors are vital to this program. Thanks in advance for helping us develop a value-added creative connection between today's youth and the natural world which holds their future. Our ongoing **MentorshipART Mission** is conserving landscapes (wildlife habitats) while cultivating mindscapes as socially responsible EarthSea Keepers!

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No Child Left Inside (**NCLI**) Program Evangelist
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