

BUILDING AN OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACE: ONE DIVISION'S JOURNEY



SLQS & LQS Connections



SLQS3 - Visionary Leadership

SLQS5 - Ensuring First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education for All Students



LQS4 - Leading a Learning Community

LQS9 - Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

Land Acknowledgement



“Table Conversation

Please introduce yourself to your table mates.

Does your division currently have any designated outdoor learning spaces?

What are some of their key features?

*“Children need nature for
the healthy development of
their senses, and therefore,
for learning and creativity.”*

~Richard Louv

“Last Child in the Woods; Saving our Children
from Nature-Deficit Disorder”, 2005





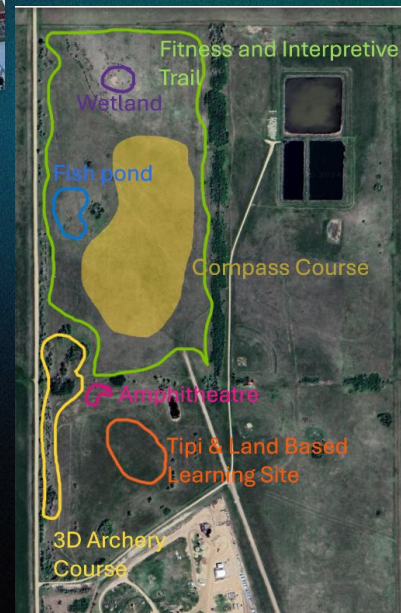
THE SCHOOL

THE KIDS



THE DIVISION

THE PROJECT



“

The idea came from
the kids...



- Brainstorming with students was insightful and invigorating
- Student involvement is a key component to the success of the project



- Both the School and community are very outdoors-centric
- Students undertaking an “Integrity in Action” project met with Youngstown Village Council about getting a fish pond in town
- Council’s suggestion was to look at the old golf course as a possible site
- Contact was made by council with Special Areas regarding transferring lease to Prairie Land School Division



Youngstown School

- Large commercial greenhouse
- Aquaponics & entrepreneurial projects are important to students
- Supported by very active school community



Prairie Land Public School Division

- Largely rural
- 2 Calgary faith-based schools
- 3 online schools
- 5000+students
- Schools of Excellence
 - agriculture, sports, and technology





Prairie Land Focal Points

Teaching & Learning



Teaching & Learning involves relevant learning opportunities, authentic assessment and consistent reporting to help students develop foundational knowledge and skills, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy across the grades.

Health & Wellness



A healthy school community is one that supports the wellness of all its members (students, teachers, staff, and parents) and strives to be a healthy setting for living, learning, and working.

Culture & Inclusivity



Prairie Land is committed to the creation of safe, inclusive learning environments where diversity and uniqueness is welcomed and celebrated. All students and staff feel safe, cared for, respected, and that they belong.

Engagement & Community



As community hubs, each school is an integral component of its community. The local public school presents opportunities for cooperation on rural sustainability and growth. As such, students attend schools that are surrounded by the support of local citizens, service clubs, municipal governments and businesses.

What we have to work with:

Currently, the landscape features long-established, introduced grasses and plant species, providing a viable foundation for examining reclamation processes aimed at restoring native vegetation.

Comparative investigations of both introduced and native flora, alongside studies of agricultural land-use impacts on native grasslands, will offer valuable insights into conservation, stewardship, and sustainable land management practices.





Youngstown is located on Hwy 9, 50 kms east of Hanna

The Outdoor Learning Space is 1.1 km from the school and comprises 114 acres of usable space.

*"Look deep into nature,
and then you will
understand everything
better."*

~Albert Einstein



Land Based Learning Opportunities



Education for Reconciliation

Prairie Land School Division strives to provide a facility where Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing come to light as a foundational component of the Outdoor Learning Space.

This facility will provide opportunities for both staff and students to interact and learn from the land in an authentic manner, gleaning and applying knowledge shared by Elders to gain a greater appreciation for indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.



Education for Reconciliation

Ongoing plans include:

- Learning and working with Elders in harvesting and preparing tipi poles
- Reclamation of land and reintegrating native flora to the area either by natural propagation or by nurturing seedlings
- Creation of a guided walking trail with signage that highlights the native plant species, their traditional and contemporary uses, as well as Indigenous, Latin and English names.



Education for Reconciliation

Ongoing plans include:

- working with local Elders to help staff and students learn and understand the necessity of living sustainability, for food security and the wellbeing of generations to come.
- hosting land-based learning camps, four season camps and providing opportunities for students to connect with nature in a variety of ways



CTS Courses and Post Secondary Pathways



Programming Options

CTS Courses

- Online/In person theory, practical component on site

Specifically Developed Programming

- Curriculum specific activities
- POLS designed/based activities
- CTF project site

External Organization Led Activities

- Training, demos, test plots



Collegiate Programming and Growing Post Secondary Partnerships



**LETHBRIDGE
POLYTECHNIC**

Dual Credit courses currently accessed by Prairie Land Students

Lakeland College

Sustainable Energy Technology Diploma

- Basic Energy Principles
- Introduction to Solar Energy

Environmental Science Diploma

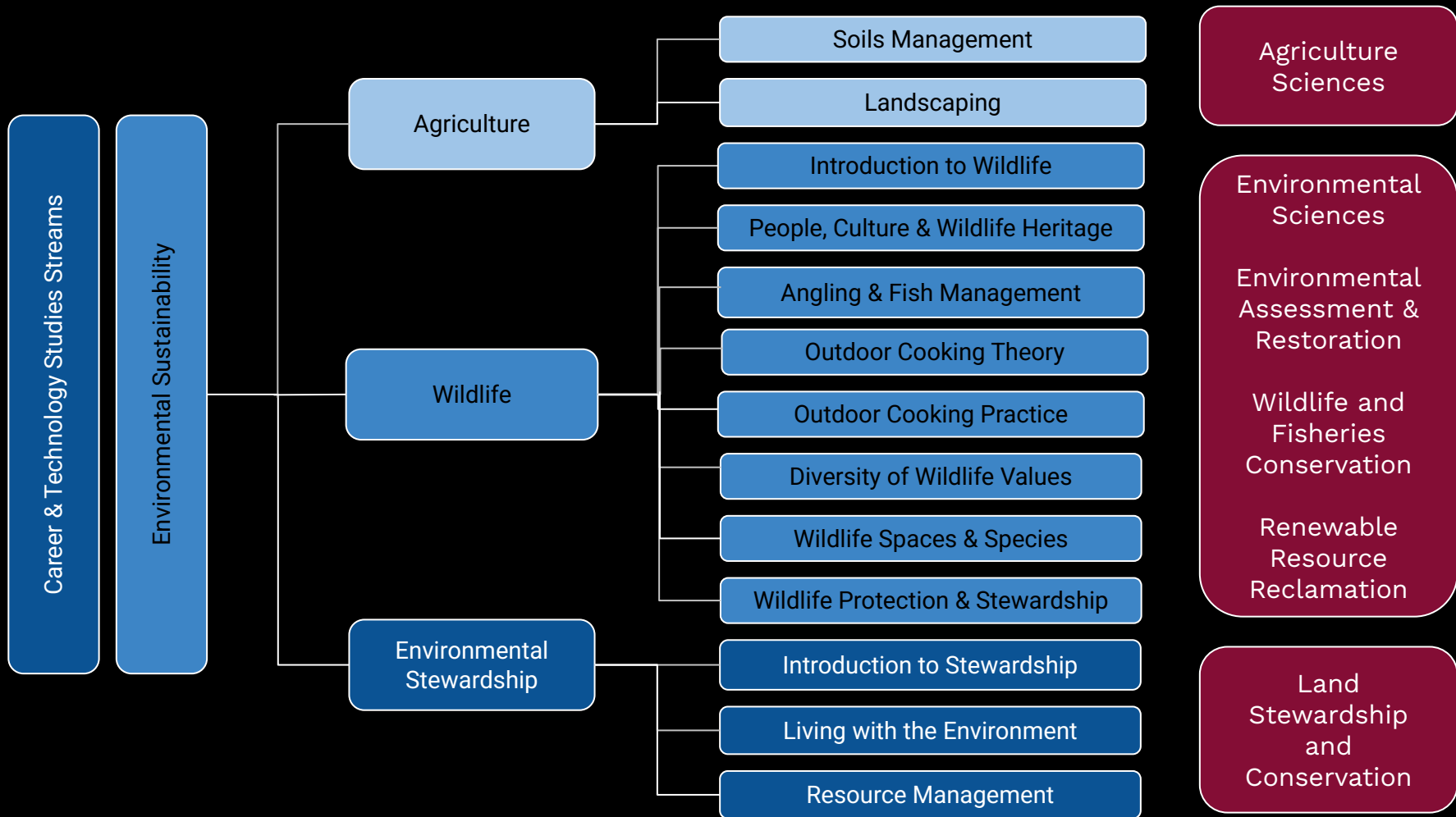
- Introduction to Soil Sciences

Agribusiness Diploma

- Marketing Principles

Lethbridge Polytechnic

- Intro to Aquaponic Principles
- Botany
- Foundations of Agriculture
- Agriculture Finance
- Ecology
- Animal Science
- Commodity Marketing



Projects, Activities and Possibilities





Staff Learning Opportunities

- Subject specific teacher training - Developing activities and spaces for specific curricular outcomes
- Training teachers in accessing the site and using the available resources
- Teacher Certification in areas such as Project Wild, Hunter Education, Fishing Education, Canadian Firearms Safety Course
- Land based learning for teachers

Expanded Educational Offerings

- Develop day long programs for non-Prairie Land schools
- Host training sessions in various curricular areas open to teachers outside of Prairie Land
- Act as demonstration site for environmental & agricultural organizations
- Host tours exploring grasslands, agriculture and prairie wildlife



Joint Research & Conservation Projects



On-Site Conservation/Habitat Projects

Wetland Development/Restoration

Grassland Restoration

Shelterbelt Development/Restoration

Ongoing Habitat & Species Development /Restoration

Feasibility Studies

Collaborative Planning:

- Students work with Ducks Unlimited, Special Areas, Grassland Restoration Forum
- Hands on experience in environmental assessment and land use planning

Industry Input:

- agricultural, conservation, and environmental consultant corporate partners
- Students gain insights on land reclamation, sustainable water management, and best practices for riparian habitat preservation.



Real-World Learning Experiences

Student Involvement:

- conceptualization to implementation - students help design projects, conduct site surveys, and monitor ecosystem health.
- authentic engagement provides experience in data collection, project management, and environmental stewardship.

Interdisciplinary Projects:

- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) experiences integrate biology, chemistry, geography, and technology curricula.





Industry Collaborations and Career Pathways



Grassland Restoration Forum



Career Exploration

The site is ideal for hosting events highlighting careers in environmental sciences, restorative agriculture, resource management, conservation enforcement...



Applied Research and Internships

Industry-Sponsored Projects:

- Environmental consulting firms, agricultural producers, and energy companies sponsor research topics linked to water conservation, reclamation, or habitat restoration—problems with direct industry relevance.

Work Experience Placements:

- internships or practicums with industry partners
- applying classroom learning to actual workplace contexts while gaining early career exposure.



Technology and Innovation

Resource Sharing:

- Corporate partners could contribute specialized equipment for use in student-led projects.
- Live & trail cameras can provide finite evidence of wildlife and habitat use.

New Product Development:

- pilot programs where students and faculty test emerging technologies in environmental monitoring or climate adaptation - aligning academic inquiry with market-based solutions.



Community Engagement and Ongoing Sustainability



Public Awareness and Outreach

Workshops and Presentations:

- Host community events to share findings, promote environmental awareness, and encourage public participation in conservation efforts
- Collaborate with representatives from a variety of organizations (Special Areas, Duck Unlimited, Alberta Conservation Association, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Grassland Restoration Forum partners, etc)

Open Access to Research:

- Aggregate data from feasibility studies and ecological monitoring shared with local stakeholders and other schools,
- Foster a culture of open-source environmental knowledge.
- Possible archaeological exploration of adjacent homestead or former agricultural school would introduce a new way of viewing the space.



Long-Term Stewardship

Maintenance of the Projects:

- Students in subsequent cohorts will continue monitoring water levels, soil & water quality, and biodiversity, ensuring the projects on site remain a living laboratory for years to come.

Adaptive Management:

- Continuously refine conservation practices—adapting the Outdoor Learning Space management to reflect new scientific insights or environmental conditions.



Community Focused Activities

- Local history of the area/town/land
- Historical connection between landscape, indigenous peoples and settlement

- Possible archaeological exploration of adjacent homestead
- Location for events utilizing adjacent ball diamonds
- Meeting site for groups such as birding enthusiasts, walking club, naturalists

The Prairie Land Outdoor Learning Space (OLS)





Fitness & Interpretive Trails

- Viewing and activity stations
- Signage for plants, geography, historical and First Nations information
- Use of augmented reality when suitable
- 2 loops 2.3km & 1.3km



Wetland

- Evaluation by Ducks Unlimited to take place in spring 2025
- Equipment and clay available for restoration and relining



Compass Course

- Introductory “Rose” course (150m diameter)
- Second course “Coyote” 400m between furthest pins
- Third course to be built after construction on site is completed

Fish Pond

- Kidney shaped pond approximately 120m across, 25m wide and 7m deep
- Stocked with rainbow trout
- Signage to encourage catch and release - emphasis as a learning pond
- Restocking via aquaponics program at school greenhouse
- Construction has begun



3D Archery Course

- Proposed 10 target course
- Elevated platform to simulate shooting from a treestand
- Available for school and community use



Amphitheatre

- Made using spoils from fish pond
- Provide formal outdoor presentation space
- Ground level circular wooden stage





Land Based Learning Area

- 3 - 24' diameter tipis
- Dedicated fire pit



Parking Lots

- Buses, public
- Discourage fishers from parking on gravel road



Proposed Permanent Structures

Classroom/Covered Space

- 32x24' log classroom
- 32x24' attached covered Space

Concrete Restrooms

- 2 stall
- Double as tornado shelter

Teaching & Learning

- Environmental Sustainability
- CTF/CTS course related activities
- Project Based Learning & student involvement in planning, constructing & maintaining the site



Culture & Inclusivity

- Tipis and Land Based Learning
- Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
- Indigenous learning opportunities
- Indigenous languages



Health & Wellness

- Learning Outdoors
- Fitness & Interpretive Trail
- Map & Compass Courses
- Connecting to nature
- 3D Archery Course



Engagement & Community

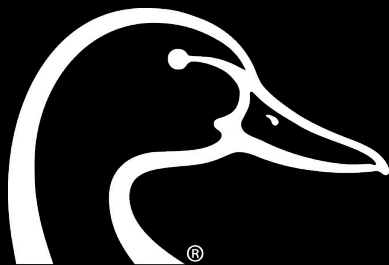
- Student involvement in planning and construction
- Community partnerships
 - Ducks Unlimited
 - Special Areas
 - Rod & Gun Clubs

Discussion:

What are some of the ways you/your division encourages learning outside of the classroom?

What are the biggest challenges to providing outdoor learning activities to your students?





*Conserving
Canada's
Wetlands*



VILLAGE OF
YOUNGSTOWN

Part of the Harvest Sky Region

Contact Us



Kelly Lewis
Curriculum Coordinator
kelly.lewis@plrd.ab.ca

Ellen Vanderkolk
Curriculum & Inclusive Education Coordinator
ellen.vanderkolk@plrd.ab.ca

403-854-4481
www.plrd.ab.ca