An education partnership: Helmsburg, Sycamore Land Trust

Ate we going to go outside today?” This question was enthusiastically asked by each third- and fourth-grade group I met as a guest in Brenda Ely’s science class at Helmsburg Elementary School.

Mrs. Ely let them know that I’d be there. These students were excited about learning. They were excited about going outside.

“I think it is so important for kids to be outside. We live in one of the most beautiful places on earth. I want our measures of physical activity, academic performance, cognitive abilities, attention deficit disorder and stress levels.

Sycamore Land Trust’s Environmental Education Program has partnered with Ely to support and enhance the learning experience for Helmsburg students. Soil was our topic on the unseasonably warm day in early December. We discussed a soil profile and the different “soil horizons,” from the organic layer to the bedrock or parent material. The students had been studying soil and shared their knowledge of the different soil particles (sand, silt, and clay) and of loams.

Together, we gathered leaves in different stages of decay to create a timeline of least decomposed to the most decomposed.

Students made connections back to the soil horizons and that the organic layer is mostly made of dead or dying organisms. The students then took

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(Continued from page B1)

Area environmental education events

Jan. 5: Healthy Hike in a Winter Wonderland, Trevlac Pluffs Nature Preserve, Brown County, all ages. This event focused on the importance of snowy habitats for wildlife.

Jan. 23: Lil’ Hikers: Winter Games, Touch the Earth Natural Area, Bartholomew County, geared for children up to 12. Students learned about winter animals and how to survive in snowy conditions.

March 5: Lil’ Hikers: Making Maple Syrup, Cedar Crest-Sycamore Office, Monroe County, geared for children up to 12. Participants learned the process of making maple syrup from trees.

March 12: Weekday Walkers, Backyard Sugarin’ (maple syrup), private property in northeast Monroe County near Lake Lemon, all ages. Volunteers taught participants how to make pure maple syrup.

May 25: Weekday Walkers, Spring Forest Hike, Laura Hare Nature Preserve at Downey Hill, Brown County, all ages. Hikers explored the spring wildlife and plant life.

July 14: Weekday Walkers, Explore a Conservation Easement, Yellowwood Farm, Brown County, all ages. Participants gained an understanding of conservation easements and their importance.

To register, contact Jaime at (812) 836-8524 ext. 100, or register at sycamorelandtrust.org by clicking on “events” then “register here.”

Monthly “Explore a Preserve” volunteer opportunities will be available soon.

Sycamore Land Trust believes that building an appreciation for nature is critical to our mission of protecting land and to creating a healthier Hoosier landscape. By providing environmental education to people of all ages and abilities, we increase the number who understand the value of nature and are therefore more likely to take steps to protect it.

In the past nine months, over 1,000 people have participated in Sycamore education programs.

Sycamore partnerships like the one with Helmsburg Elementary are crucial for this mission. Ely summarized, “The more they (students) experience nature and the things in it, the more they will learn to appreciate what we have, and the more it fosters a sense of responsibility to take care of our earth and help preserve it.”

To schedule an environmental education program for your group, contact Shane Gibson at shane@sycamorelandtrust.org. To view our public programs, visit sycamorelandtrust.org and click on “Events.”

For volunteer opportunities, contact Jaime@sycamorelandtrust.org.

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