



What is Young Nebraska Ecologists?

Students in grades 9-12 who are looking for a great outdoor adventure this summer are invited to participate in the Young Nebraska Ecologists program from June 15-18, 2026. During Young Nebraska Ecologists, students spend time actively exploring prairies along the Platte River in Hamilton County and travel to experience other ecosystems in Nebraska. This is an excellent opportunity to gain valuable knowledge about Nebraska ecosystems and participate in outdoor recreation activities like backpacking. Students will have the opportunity to interact with professionals with careers in conservation, ecology, natural resources and science communication. These experiences will open new doors for students interested in these topics and help them find exciting new ways to enjoy the outdoors.



Who sponsors Young Nebraska Ecologists?



Young Nebraska Ecologists is a project of Prairie Plains Resource Institute - an educational land trust based in Aurora, NE since 1980. We focus on maintaining and restoring Nebraska ecosystems and create opportunities for education, research, stewardship and community development. SOAR (Summer Orientation About Rivers) and the Youth Naturalist Program are two of our programs you may be familiar with. Young Nebraska Ecologists is built as a continuation of SOAR and the Youth Naturalist Program and focuses on developing naturalist skills, outdoor recreation skills and introduces high school students to diverse ecosystems in Nebraska, local conservation topics and to professionals working in the field.

Who can get involved in Young Nebraska Ecologists?

Any student presently (2025-2026 school year) in grades 9-12 is eligible for Young Nebraska Ecologists. You will need to apply to be a part of the program. We will accept up to 10 students. In most cases we have been able to accept all students who apply, however if there are more applicants than we have space for in the program, we will select students based on their expressed interest in participating in the program (by reviewing their statement of interest).



When is Young Nebraska Ecologists?

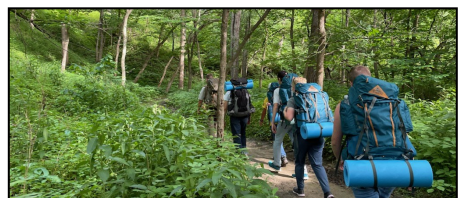
Young Nebraska Ecologists runs June 15-18, 2026

The dates and times are:

Monday, June 15 from 8:00am - 4:00pm

Tuesday, June 16 at 8:00am - Thursday, June 18 at 5:00pm

(Indian Cave State Park trip / backpacking)



Where is Young Nebraska Ecologists?

This year we will be visiting the following amazing sites:

Monday, June 15: Gjeroff Prairie and Sherman Ranch

Tuesday, June 16 - Thursday, June 18: Indian Cave State Park - camping/backpacking trip

We are providing car/truck transportation to the sites. Students will be picked up in the band parking lot to the east of Aurora High School. The vehicles will depart from this location promptly at the start time listed for each day to travel to the various field sites. The vehicles will return to the same location at the end time listed for each day.



Why participate in Young Nebraska Ecologists?

Young Nebraska Ecologists follows an active, hands-on approach to learning about and enjoying nature. You will spend time exploring oak woodland, prairies, wetlands and rivers in Nebraska while learning about the life present there. You will have the opportunity to go on a backpacking trip and learn backcountry skills from an instructor. You will develop many naturalist skills, from learning about animals, plants and fungi native to Nebraska ecosystems, to gaining a better understanding of oak woodland, prairie and wetland ecology. You will meet new friends and professionals that work in the field of ecology, conservation, natural resources and science communication. You will view the area where you live in a new and exciting way. Students interested in natural sciences, outdoor recreation, conservation or agriculture are strongly encouraged to participate. Any students interested in spending more time outdoors, hiking, backpacking and exploring these incredible natural areas should participate!



How do I participate in Young Nebraska Ecologists?

To apply to Young Nebraska Ecologists, visit <https://www.prairieplains.org/education/young-nebraska-ecologists.html> Scroll down and click the "Register Online for YNE 2026" button OR print the application form and mail it in to the Prairie Plains address printed below. Students will need to complete the application, including the "Statement of Interest", and have a parent/guardian complete the release information/signature. The registration fee for this program is \$200.00 and helps cover the cost of food and travel to Indian Cave State Park. Financial assistance is available. Scholarships can help cover the registration fee of the program and are based on expressed financial need. If you feel you may qualify for financial assistance, please contact the Young Nebraska Ecologists coordinator, Sarah Bailey, and request a scholarship application (see email and phone number below). Please don't hesitate to reach out with any other questions about Young Nebraska Ecologists.

Application Deadline: May 1, 2026

Contact: Sarah Bailey

Young Nebraska Ecologists Coordinator

Prairie Plains Resource Institute
1307 L Street
Aurora, NE 68818
Ph. (402) 694-5535
Email: sarah@prairieplains.org

We hope to see you this summer!

