

The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College | P.O. Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796 | 260.799.5869 | merrylea@goshen.edu | merrylea.goshen.edu

Welcoming Our First Americorps Member

MEET ALEAH SOUTHWORTH, Merry Lea's first AmeriCorps member! She is joining us through a collaborative partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Indiana. Aleah brings a warm spirit, a love for nature, and a passion for teaching young people about the world around us. She will be with us through August.

Aleah first heard about Merry Lea through an advertisement for one of our adult education programs. That initial spark led her to get involved with Merry Lea as a volunteer, and we're excited to welcome her in this new role where she'll help us expand our capacity to deliver environmental education, especially our PreK-12 field trips and various summer programs, including homeschool sessions.

What makes Aleah truly shine is her connection with young learners. She loves working with children, not just to share her environmental knowledge, but because interacting with them on the trails brings her real joy.

Whether it's spotting frogs, dipping

for macroinvertebrates, or answering curious questions, Aleah delights in those shared "aha!" moments and says she often learns just as much from the kids as they do from her.

"We are so grateful that the Boys and Girls Club could place an Americorps Member with us. We are even more grateful that Aleah was able to jump right in," says Foy Spicer, PreK-12 Programs Coordinator and Environmental Educator. "We've loved having her expertise on aquatic invertebrates, field trip guiding, and driving with a trailer. She's a wonderful addition to Merry Lea."

Her journey into the environmental world first began in 2022 when she enrolled in the Indiana Master Naturalist program in Kosciusko County, which deepened her understanding of Indiana ecosystems and fueled her commitment to environmental stewardship.

When she's not leading hikes or helping with field trips, you'll likely find Aleah reading a good book, making art,




Aleah Southworth

digging in the garden, or exploring trails on her own time. She brings creativity and curiosity to everything she does — qualities that make her a perfect fit for our team and a wonderful role model for young nature enthusiasts.

"Aleah has been a wonderful addition to our team," said Jason Martin, Executive Director. "She is such a positive presence and brings a deep passion for teaching children about the environment."

Looking ahead, we're excited about the future of this AmeriCorps partnership. It's an incredible program rooted in service, enriching lives, strengthening communities, civic engagement, and community-building. The program also offers individuals of all ages and backgrounds a chance to grow both personally and professionally while making a difference in their local communities.

We're thankful for the opportunity to work with individuals like Aleah, whose presence enriches both our team and the programs we offer. We hope to welcome more AmeriCorps members to Merry Lea in the future!

If you or someone you know is passionate about environmental education and is looking for a meaningful opportunity to serve, learn, and grow, we'd love to hear from you! 



Aleah leading a Water Quality field trip at Luckey's Landing teaching students about the Pollution Tolerance Index (PTI).



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE
DR. JASON MARTIN

Honoring the Past, Reimagining the Future:

A Pause in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education at Merry Lea

Since its launch in 2008 as Goshen College’s first graduate program, the Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) at Merry Lea has been grounded in experiential learning, ecological literacy, and a deep commitment to place-based education. Over the past 17 years, the program has equipped graduates to become transformative educators, conservation leaders, and advocates for sustainable communities in diverse settings across the country.

From its inception, MAEE has stood apart from similar degree programs at other institutions for its immersive, cohort-based model that has embedded students within the living landscape of Merry Lea’s 1,189 acres of forests, wetlands, and prairies.

Students in this program haven’t just studied environmental education, they have lived it. They gained invaluable practical experience through teaching in our PreK–12 school programs, developed curriculum, and engaged in applied projects that combined academic rigor with real-world impact. This place-based pedagogical approach has inspired a generation of educators who carry forward the values of care for the Earth and fostering hope.

As we reflect with gratitude on the rich legacy of MAEE, we also recognize that the landscape of higher education is evolving. Given enrollment trends over the past several years and feedback that we have received from applicants and program participants, it has become apparent that the programmatic format and content that has served our students so well in the past is no longer aligned with the shifting needs, priorities, and aspirations of today’s students. Consequently, we have made the difficult decision to pause admissions to the MAEE program to reimagine its future.

This pause is not an ending, rather it is a strategic and hopeful step toward renewal. During this time, a team of Goshen College faculty and Merry Lea staff will engage in thoughtful evaluation, including listening to alumni, partners, and other stakeholders. Our goal is to create a revitalized program that builds on the strengths of the past while responding dynamically to the challenges and opportunities of our current moment.

We honor the dedicated students, staff and faculty who have shaped the MAEE program into a beacon of excellence in environmental education, in particular David Ostergren and Carla Gull who have both served as MAEE directors. Their contributions have left a lasting imprint not only on Merry Lea and Goshen College, but on the many communities where our alumni live and work.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to training tomorrow’s environmental educators as a vital part of our mission. The vision that gave rise to the MAEE program—one rooted in care for the natural world, grounded in place, and animated by hope—continues to guide us.

Thank you for your ongoing support and shared passion for educating for a sustainable future. We look forward to sharing updates as the next chapter of the MAEE program unfolds. 🌱

ABOUT MERRY LEA

Merry Lea was created with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and through the generosity of Lee A. and Mary Jane Rieth. It is operated by Goshen College. The center provides a comprehensive program of environmental education and recreation.

The Merry Leaflet, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. Kayla Beasley is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at merrylea.goshen.edu for more updates.

TEAM MEMBERS

Gonzalo Barahona Hernandez
Operations Assistant

Kayla Beasley
Associate Director of Communications & Marketing

Freya Berntson
Natural Resources Manager

Carol Good-Elliott
Environmental Educator

Carla Gull
Director, Master of Arts in Environmental Education program / Associate Professor, Biology & Sustainability

Stephany Hancock
Environmental Educator & Residence Life Coordinator

Luke Kreider
Assistant Professor, Biology & Sustainability

Melinda Long
Office Manager

Jason Martin
Executive Director

John Mischler
Associate Professor, Biology & Sustainability

Ruth Mischler
Assistant Professor, Biology & Sustainability

Christi Nickey
Farm Manager

Jonathon Schramm
Professor & Chair, Biology & Sustainability / Director of Institute for Ecological Regeneration

Jeremiah Sharp
Environmental Educator & Public Programs Coordinator

Foy Spicer
Environmental Educator & PreK-12 Programs Coordinator

Kaitlyn Sproles
Director of Environmental Education Outreach

Alan Stadler
Building Manager

Josie Strader
Property Manager

BOARD MEMBERS

Andy Rieth, *Chair*

Greg Perigo, *Vice Chair*

Doug Vendrely

Ben Bontrager

Carl Weaver

Bekah Houff

Beth Squires

Ex Officio: **Ann Vendrely**

Ex Officio: **Jason Martin**

Master of Arts in Environmental Education Memories



Thank you for your support

Thank you to the following people for donating to Merry Lea during this quarter. Your support has contributed to delivering safe environmental programming, maintaining facilities and the upkeep of hiking trails.

Karen Bradley
Jewel Lehman & Deana Baker
Charles & Esther Nafziger
Jordan Shields

Tim & Jane Short
Mary Berghoff & Neil Meyer
Dale & Karyn Bowman
James & Karen Farlow
Shirley Friesen
Heather Harwood
Kristen Mast
Roveen & Wayne Yoder



Get Involved with Environmental Stewardship

We are thrilled to share various volunteer and stewardship opportunities that Freya Berntson, our Natural Resources Manager, has been working hard on creating! These activities help us continue to maintain and restore Merry Lea’s 1,189 acres of land.

“A core part of Merry Lea’s mission is connecting people to nature. Participating in ecological stewardship is one way to develop and deepen your own personal connection to the land around you,” says Freya. “Stewardship events at Merry Lea serve a multifaceted purpose of helping people learn about our local ecology, offering experience in ecological restoration, and increasing our capacity to do work with the land to promote habitat for native flora and fauna.”

Thank you so much to everyone who has been able to help us out already. We are so grateful for an amazing community of volunteers. These opportunities are free and open to the public. If you are interested in helping with any of these activities, please reach out to Freya at freyakb@goshen.edu or visit merrylea.goshen.edu/get-involved.

Please note that the locations of these activities will be determined a few days before each event based on where the greatest management need is at that time. Once you sign up for the event, Freya will reach out with more details.



DAFFODIL DIGGIN’

Although daffodils are beautiful flowers, they are not part of our native ecosystem. Merry Lea has an expanding population of daffodils in a few areas that are taking space away from native plants that offer greater benefit to our local birds, bees and butterflies. If you would like to help remove the daffodils, rehome some to your landscaping, or both, please reach out to Freya. If digging is not an option for you but you’d like to receive some of the bulbs, please let us know and we will gather some for you!

All ages welcome, volunteers under 18 must be accompanied by an adult.

When: Wednesday, June 4 | 2 - 4 p.m. & 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

MULTIFLORA ROSE & OTHER INVASIVES REMOVAL

Multiflora rose is one of Merry Lea’s common invasive “woody” plants. We will use loppers to cut the stems and daubers to paint the stumps with herbicide*. This method keeps herbicide use to a minimum and targets only the plants you want to treat. We will work in teams with one person cutting and one person daubing. The roses are THORNY, so long sleeves and pants are recommended no matter how hot it is. *Volunteers must be over 18 to apply herbicide.

When: Tuesday, June 10 | 2 - 4 p.m.
Wednesday, June 11 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Wednesday, June 18 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, June 24 | 2 - 4 p.m.
Thursday, June 26 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.



NARROW-LEAF CATTAIL MANAGEMENT

Join us for an invasive species work day hand wicking cattails. We will be working off trail on potentially mucky, uneven terrain. Long sleeves and long pants are required. Rubber boots or shoes that you don’t mind getting very muddy are highly recommended. This activity will be a higher level of difficulty, primarily due to heat and terrain.

When: Tuesday, July 8 | 2 - 4 p.m.
Thursday, July 10 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, July 12 | 8 - 11 a.m.
Wednesday, July 16 | 2 - 4 p.m.
Thursday, July 17 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, July 22 | 2 - 4 p.m.
Thursday, July 24 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Merry Lea Team Updates

Gonzalo Barahona Hernández



New Operations Assistant

B.S. Biology with a minor in Sustainable Food Systems, Goshen College, 2024

Gonzalo first got connected to Merry Lea in 2022 as a student in the Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) program. Since then, he has engaged with Merry Lea in a number of ways, including serving as an intern on the grassland cattle grazing research project in 2023 and as a farm hand at the Teaching Farm in 2024.

In March 2025, Gonzi became a permanent member of the Merry Lea team when he

became part of our operations crew. In this capacity, he helps with various building projects, natural area management (such as performing controlled burns), grounds management, and trail and outdoor structure maintenance.

Originally from Tegucigalpa, Honduras, he now resides in Goshen, Indiana. In Gonzalo’s free time, he enjoys supporting local food systems, gardening, cooking/ baking, and spending time in nature.

We are thrilled to officially welcome Gonzalo as a full-time member of our team! His passion and dedication will play a key role in advancing our mission, and we can’t wait to see all the amazing contributions he’ll make.

Christi Nickey



New Farm Manager

M.S.C Regenerative Organic Agriculture, Maharishi International University, 2024

B.A. Regenerative Organic Agriculture, Maharishi International University, 2022

B.A. Animal Science, Clemson University, 2013

A.A.S. Culinary Arts, Florida Culinary Institute, 2001

Christi joined the Merry Lea team in March 2025 as our Farm Manager. In this position, she will be overseeing all aspects of the day-to-day operation and function of the Merry Lea Teaching Farm. Though originally from the Muncie area, she has spent much of her life living in Florida, South Carolina, Colorado and Iowa.

As a long-time professional chef and restaurateur, Christi has been deeply involved in food systems work for many years before pivoting into farming full-time.

She recently completed her Masters degree in Regenerative Organic Agriculture while working at Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa. Christi has a deep love of nature and is passionate about seed sovereignty, local food webs, social justice and education.

She is excited to lead the teaching farm and engage deeply with the environmental stewardship and regenerative capacity of Merry Lea as a whole. In her free time, she enjoys camping, cycling, reading, cooking, growing native plants, birding, and spending time with her three children.

We are grateful to have Christi’s expertise and have enjoyed watching her transform the barns, greenhouses and educational gardens.

Carla Gull



Vacant Associate Professor, Biology & Sustainability; Director of MAEE

B.S. Elementary Education, Brigham Young University, 1998

M.A. Curriculum and Instruction, National Louis University, 2002

Ed.D. Instructional Leadership, Argosy University, 2009

After serving as the director of our Master of Arts in Environmental Education program since 2023 and teaching in the program in an adjunct capacity for several years prior to

that, Carla will be leaving Goshen College at the end of June.

Carla and her family are moving to Hawai’i, where she will be working as a K-12 STEAM teacher.

We have been so grateful to have her knowledge and expertise as part of our team and for everything that she has done for the Master’s program.

Carla has made a large impact on students of all ages during her time here. We wish her the best as she embarks on her next adventure.

Ecology & Sustainability in the Indian Himalaya

Jonathon Schramm, Professor & Chair in Biology and Sustainability is currently leading a Goshen College Study Service Term (SST) course in India focused on exploring the influences that are shaping the country's ecosystems and modern landscapes, analyzing economic practices across the Himalayas, and experiencing firsthand how communities navigate their everyday needs.

A highlight of the trip for the students so far was a weeklong trek from the village of Agora to Dodital, a high-altitude lake that is considered a sacred site. The group established a base camp at Dodital for three nights, from which they explored higher elevations, including a summit at Darwa Top



Gearing up for their weeklong trek through the Himalayans!


reaching approximately 13,600 feet. During this adventure, the students encountered a variety of subtropical habitats, native flora and fauna, and SO many birds.

The group has also studied the Terai, a unique lowland region characterized by diverse wetlands and grasslands. These ecosystems, home to incredible wildlife such as tigers, leopards and elephants, offered students a contrasting ecological lens to the high Himalayan environment.

Despite frequent rain, the group has engaged in meaningful discussions and hands-on exploration throughout the trip. Staying in Agora at the beginning and end of their trek gave students a deeper sense of daily life in remote Himalayan villages. "The guides, cooks

and mule drivers that supported our trek all week were awesome (and all from the village of Agora), and conversations with them also added much to our experience," says Schramm.

In addition to their fieldwork, students have learned from guest speakers on topics ranging from wildlife conservation and rural economic development to the nuances of ecotourism, local history, and India's three major religions. In Delhi, they also explored how sustainability is both practiced and challenged in urban settings.

To see other updates about this trip to India or to see pictures during their time in India, visit goshen.edu/blogs/category/indian-himalaya. 



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Merry Lea relies on the generosity of people like you to provide quality environmental education programs that are accessible for all ages.

Please consider becoming a Friend of Merry Lea. Thanks so much for your consideration.

You may give online at merrylea.goshen.edu/donate or call our office at (260) 799-5869.

Can you "be-leaf" it?

Did you know the first Leaflet was published in Fall of 1974? In that issue, a contest was held to name the newsletter. In Winter of 1975 it was officially named The Merry Leaflet.

For more fun facts and updates about Merry Lea, follow our social media outlets!

Facebook: Facebook.com/MerryLeaEnvironmentalLearningCenter

Instagram: Instagram.com/merrylea_goshen/

Seasonal Happenings and Updates



SUMMER RESEARCH AT MERRY LEA

Banding and Blandings and Grazing, oh my! Throughout this summer, we are excited to have two Goshen College students joining us to help with Merry Lea's ongoing research projects.

Lily Berkey is assisting Carol Good-Elliott with bird banding research and Jonathon Schramm with the cattle prairie grazing project. Isabel Woodcox is helping Jason Martin with Blanding's turtle research. Both students will be living at Merry Lea through August and are eager to get out into the field to start collecting data.

HIKING GUIDELINE REMINDERS

Our hiking trails are free to use and open daily from dawn to dusk! Please stay on maintained and designated trails. Off trail hiking is not permitted as it damages sensitive habitats. Leave all plants, mushrooms and animals undisturbed — foraging is not permitted. All pets must be leashed and under direct control at all times. Please carry out all trash, including pet waste.

Parking and trailheads are located at the Learning Center, the Farmstead and Rieth Village's outer lot. Restrooms are also available at the Learning Center building during business hours or porta potties are available at the south and east trailheads.



FIRST ADULT INDIANA MASTER NATURALIST COHORT

This past February, we hosted our first weeklong adult Indiana Master Naturalist (IMN) program, building on many years of educating younger naturalists through our Jr/Teen IMN programs. Participants discovered Indiana's natural world through hands-on activities, outdoor investigations, volunteering and learning from local experts from a variety of career paths and organizations. Ten dedicated individuals completed the program and are wrapping up their volunteer hours to officially become certified!

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRADUATION

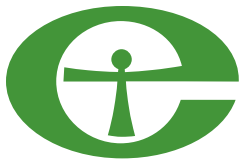
On Thursday, May 22, we celebrated the graduation of our two 2024-2025 Master of Arts in Environmental Education students! We've loved getting to know Zane and Sara — not just as students, but as passionate educators and thoughtful leaders. Watching their growth, confidence, and dedication blossom has been an inspiration to us all. Sara has accepted a position in Illinois as an assistant camp director while Zane has accepted an environmental educator position in Wisconsin. We are so happy for them both for this next step in their professional careers.



FARM UPDATES

Christi Nickey, our farm manager, and our farm intern, Marcu, have been tidying up the greenhouses, orchard and teaching garden, which are used to provide food for students in residence and to educate our young learners about where food comes and how to grow fruits and vegetables while minimally impacting the environment. We also welcomed a second farm intern, Joshua, in early June.

Baby chicks have also arrived at the teaching farm! Christi has been working hard to clean up the barns in preparation for their arrival. During the Exploring Merry Lea Teaching Farm field trip and other public programs, students will have the chance to meet these feathery friends.



Merry Lea

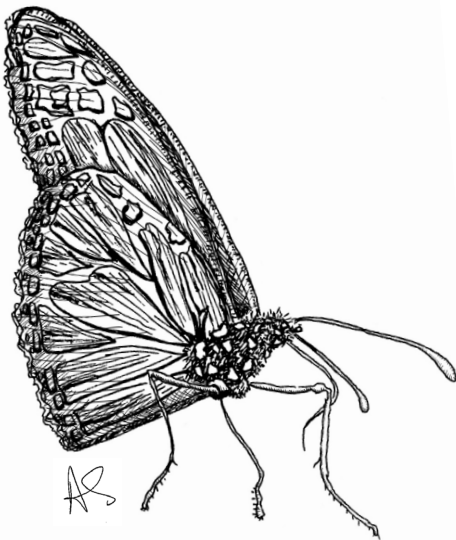
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Events

* Registration required

Register or learn more at: merrylea.goshen.edu/events

Nature Play Day

WHERE: Learning Center, 2388 S 500 W, Albion, IN 46701

WHEN: Thursday, **June 5** | 1 – 4 p.m.

COST: FREE!

Don't miss this opportunity to join Merry Lea at this free, family-friendly event designed to get people outside on Thursday, June 5, as part of a state-wide effort by Indiana Children and Nature Network (ICAN) Nature Play Days! There will be a variety of guided and self-guided activities to choose from all afternoon. Dip for tadpoles, create a craft, go on a hike, work on a scavenger hunt and more. Come explore the natural world in your own backyard!

* Jr/Teen Indiana Master Naturalist Summer Day Camp

WHERE: Merry Lea (Albion, IN) & Gene Stratton-Porter (Rome City, IN)

WHEN: July 21 - 25 | 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

COST: \$125 per student

The IMN program features various nature topics for local youth to discover Indiana's outdoor world through hands-on activities, outdoor investigations, volunteering and learning from local experts across different career paths, interests and organizations.

* Native Plant Series #2: Divisible Plants

WHERE: Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701

WHEN: Saturday, **July 12** | 3 – 5:30 p.m.

COST: \$15 per adult

Seeds aren't the only way to get more native plants. Many of our favorite grasses, sedges and forbs can be propagated through root division. Learn how to select which plants work best for this process and how to make individual plants cover more ground. If you do start seedlings in a flat, what do you do when they start filling their space? We will also go over methods for potting up seedlings you may start in the future.

* In The Glow: Discovering Moths' Night Time Journey

WHERE: Learning Center, 2388 S 500 W Albion, IN 46701

WHEN: Saturday, **July 12** | 8:30 p.m. – 11:00 p.m.

COST: \$7/adult, \$5/child

So many kinds of insects come out at night! Join us as we use "light lures" (lights on a sheet) to attract a wide variety of winged critters. We will also search for moths and other insects that glow under black lights while learning more about these fascinating creatures! This program is open to the general public. Adults and families can register.