



Inland Seas

EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

2026 Great Lakes Watershed Field Course Teacher Packet

What you will find in this packet

This packet should help you get a picture of what we are offering. In it you will find:

- Great Lakes Watershed Field Course: Overview
- Sample Agenda
- Commitments:
 - Requirements of participating teachers
 - Commitments Inland Seas will make to you
- How to apply - detailed information

Great Lakes Watershed Field Course: Overview

About Inland Seas Education Association

Inland Seas Education Association (ISEA) is a 501(c)(3) committed to connecting people to the Great Lakes through experiential programming and first-hand experience with science and Great Lakes ecology. We exist to encourage stewardship behavior, promote science, and provide unforgettable and meaningful experiences with the Great Lakes. Inland Seas has been offering Great Lakes watershed programming since 1989, aboard our tall ship schooners, *SV Inland Seas* and *SV Alliance*, and onshore in the forests, streams, and shorelines. Learn more at schoolship.org

Program Dates and Location

The Great Lakes Watershed Field Course takes place in three parts, with the third part being optional, over the course of about one year.

Part 1: The in-person portion workshop that takes place August 4-7, 2026 at the Capt. Thomas M. Kelly Biological Station in Suttons Bay, MI.

Part 2: Takes place during the 2026-2027 school year when you implement the curriculum you learned at the workshop to facilitate an environmental action project with your students. We will have three official virtual check-in meetings throughout the school year and at the end, you'll complete a brief wrap-up assignment that summarizes your experience participating in the GLWFC.

Part 3: The **optional** GLWFC Reunion takes place in June following your participation in the GLWFC. It's a 2-day, in-person reunion in Suttons Bay that brings participants back to share project stories and continue learning together.

What is the Great Lakes Watershed Field Course (GLWFC)?

The GLWFC is a year-long collaboration that will prepare teachers to design and facilitate a student-led, watershed-focused environmental action project in their own classroom. The experience is open to all formal or nonformal educators - whether you teach English to middle schoolers, chemistry to high school students, or have a whole classroom of 3rd grade students, we encourage you to apply.

During the GLWFC, teachers learn about issues potentially impacting their local watershed and how to facilitate a student action project that will create positive change in their community. We will utilize the [Earth Force](#) model, which is a process that puts students at the center of using civic action to create positive environmental change. With this curriculum, teachers gain tools to build student autonomy, take their students outside of their classroom, assess community strengths and weaknesses, identify strategies for betterment, and make an impact in the form of an environmental action project.

Part 1

During the in-person portion, ISEA will facilitate workshops and discussions about strategies for teaching about watersheds, place-based pedagogies, and the six steps of the Earth Force model. Through field visits, ISEA will also offer the opportunity to observe environmental projects that exemplify best practices, which might include:

- Removing invasive species
- Promoting nearshore health by protecting watersheds from polluted runoff
- Restoring wetlands and other habitats

In addition to field visits, participants will sail aboard one of ISEA's tall ship schooners, *SV Inland Seas* or *SV Alliance*, and use it as a platform for investigating Great Lakes ecology.

Part 2

After the in-person portion, teachers return to their classrooms for Part 2. At some point in the school year, teachers will draw from the Earth Force model learned at ISEA to help their students lead a watershed-focused environmental action project. Projects can be any amount of time, days or months, and can be as big or small as the group chooses. It's up to teachers and students to decide what works for their curriculum and what is meaningful to the group. The most important part is that the students identify an environmental issue that is meaningful to them, with the teacher's guidance, and then do something about it.

Participants will be split into cohorts, connecting in small groups with ISEA staff and each other three times during the school year to celebrate successes, troubleshoot hurdles, and share resources. ISEA will also provide \$300 in the form of a mini-grant for project implementation.

Part 3

The optional GLWFC Reunion that takes place every June is a two-day, in-person event back in Suttons Bay. Exact dates will be announced a few months in advance. The Reunion is an opportunity to reconnect with fellow GLWFC participants to strengthen your network, share project stories, and continue to learn about Great Lakes topics.

Lodging, food, and transportation to field sites are included. *Transportation to and from Suttons Bay is not included.* Spots are limited to the first 15 people to RSVP after the Reunion dates are announced.

Learning Objectives

After completing this course, participants will be able to:

- Design and implement a meaningful watershed experience for their students based on the Earth Force model.
- Point to various watershed actions that support watershed functionality and health.
- Describe current critical issues impacting watersheds and how those issues play out in their home areas.
- Provide reasons to protect and improve the health of the Great Lakes.

Required Materials/Textbook

None. All materials provided or are freely available online.

Sample Agenda

The 2026 agenda will be provided a few weeks prior to the August start of the GLWFC.

- **Arrive (Monday)**
 - Arrive in Suttons Bay, settle into the dormitories, and explore the local area
- **Day 1 (Tuesday)**
 - Welcome!
 - Introduction to the Earth Force process
 - Workshop on how to conduct community inventories
 - Shipboard program on schooner *Inland Seas* or *Alliance*
 - Group dinner
- **Day 2 (Wednesday)**
 - Water quality and macroinvertebrate sampling with Leelanau Conservancy at Leo Creek Preserve
 - Workshop on decision making techniques
 - Stakeholder interview techniques
 - Group bonfire and dinner at ISEA Campus
- **Day 3 (Thursday)**
 - Workshop on setting goals, strategies, and action planning for stewardship projects
 - Kids Creek Restoration Project Tour with Watershed Center of Grand Traverse Bay
 - Tour of Wastewater Treatment Plant
 - Group sunset on Lake Michigan beach
- **Day 4 (Friday)**
 - Discuss the ISEA-provided mini grants and Schoolship scholarships
 - Planning time
 - Celebration! Kayaking on nearby inland lake
 - Reflection and wrap-up
- **Departure (Friday or Saturday)**
 - Pack and depart Friday afternoon or stay another night and leave Saturday

Read about the experiences of past field course teachers in the blog posts linked below:

- [My GLWFC Testimony](#) - Angela Gaige, 2024 GLWFC Participant
- [Another PD In The Backpack](#) - Scot Martin, 2022 GLWFC Participant
- [The GLWFC Impact on the Classroom](#) - Avril Wiers, 2022 GLWFC Participant
- [Meaningful Water-Based Education](#) - Colleen McVeigh, 2021 GLWFC Participant

Commitments

Teachers must commit to the following:

1. Complete pre-workshop assignments (should take less than 4 hours).
2. Attend the entire 4-day workshop, August 4-7, 2026 in Suttons Bay, Michigan.
Transportation to and from Suttons Bay is not included.
3. Engage students in meaningful watershed experiences in your classroom.
4. Facilitate the development of a student-led environmental action project with at least one classroom or group of students using the Earth Force model.
5. Support your students in the implementation of their stewardship action plan.
6. Participate in three virtual group meetings during the 2026-2027 school year.
7. Produce a wrap-up assignment that summarizes the experience (you choose one option - either a presentation, blog post, or written project story).
8. Complete ISEA evaluations at various points before, during, and after the program.

ISEA promises to provide:

1. Meals, lodging in our [dormitory space](#), and transportation to field sites during the 4-day program.
2. Earth Force training on how to develop and implement stewardship action projects with students.
3. Visits to local exemplary conservation projects, possibly related to the prevention and control of invasive species, reducing nutrient runoff, and/or restoring habitat for native species.
4. Support on meeting state education standards while completing stewardship action projects.
5. Opportunities to get to know the Grand Traverse region (paddling, hiking, food, etc.).
6. Ongoing support throughout the school year, including three check-in meetings.
7. A mini-grant to support student stewardship project (\$300 value).
8. A full scholarship (\$825 value) to bring a classroom of students (32-35 people max, including adults) to Inland Seas for a shipboard or shoreside education program in Fall 2026 or Spring 2027. Scholarships for overnight stays are also available as needed.
There is no cost for the program, but schools are responsible for transportation.
9. The opportunity to earn SCECHs (Michigan continuing education credits).

How to Apply

[Visit our website](#) for a link to the application.

Some things to help you prepare to fill out the application:

1. We will ask you for a reference who can speak to your level of commitment to education, your experience as an educator, and/or your innovation in teaching. This could be a supervisor, principal, science specialist, etc. We will reach out to this person so they can speak on your behalf. In the application, we will ask for the name, phone number, and email address of your reference.
2. There are four short essay questions, copied below. Write 1-2 paragraphs for each one.
 - a. In what ways do you hope to grow as an educator as a result of the Great Lakes Watershed Field Course?
 - b. Describe your motivation to link STEM education and place-based experiences to student-led action projects. Do you have past experiences with place-based outdoor experiences and/or student-led action projects?
 - c. How often do you integrate water, the water cycle, local bodies of water, or other water-related content into your curriculum? (Estimate by weeks, standards, or describe your units that include water) If you do not currently integrate these topics, please share your initial thoughts on how you might incorporate watershed topics into your curriculum in the future.
 - d. The Earth Force process (the curriculum we'll be using) is centered around student-led environmental action civics. This means that throughout the process, students have the autonomy to investigate an environmental issue that's important to them, then democratically make decisions to develop and implement an action plan with the goal of creating positive change in their community. Do you have any experience in facilitating student-led action projects? What challenges do you anticipate?

Applications are due April 13, 2026 by 11:59 p.m. EST.

We will inform you of your acceptance by April 24, 2026.

If you have any questions about this program or hesitations about any of the commitments, please contact Julie Johnson, School Partnership Coordinator, at jjohnson@schoolship.org or 231-271-3077 ext.107.