

Cascade Christian Church / Crystal Conference Center



Justice and Creation fellow: Grace Powers

Mentor: Michael Dirksen

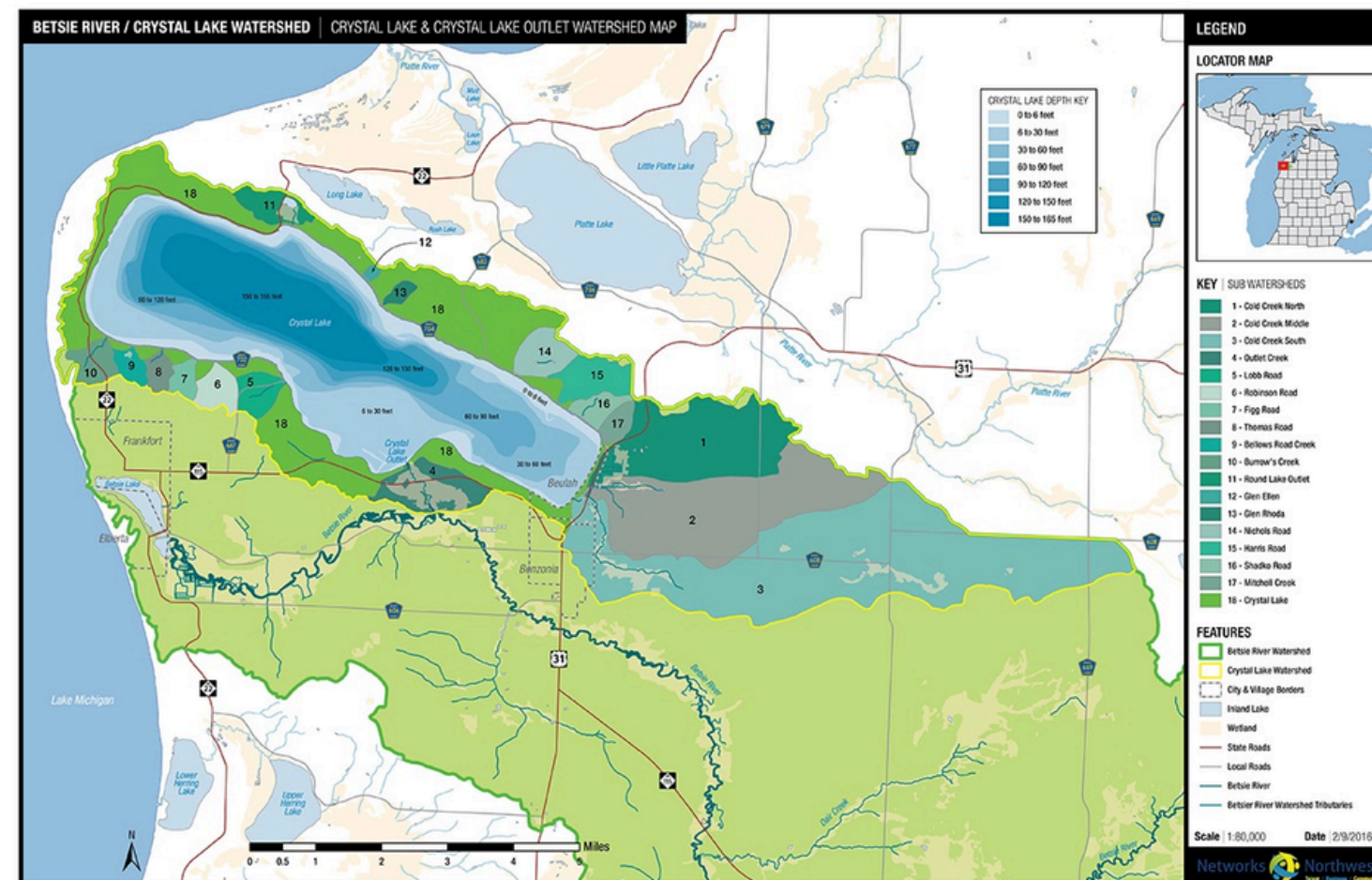


Community Need

Camp Crystal draws in many different groups of kids. Different political views, income levels, geography, and so much more. Many of the kids grow up in cities and don't have the opportunity to connect with nature on a more intimate level. This has been my biggest inspiration for these summer projects.

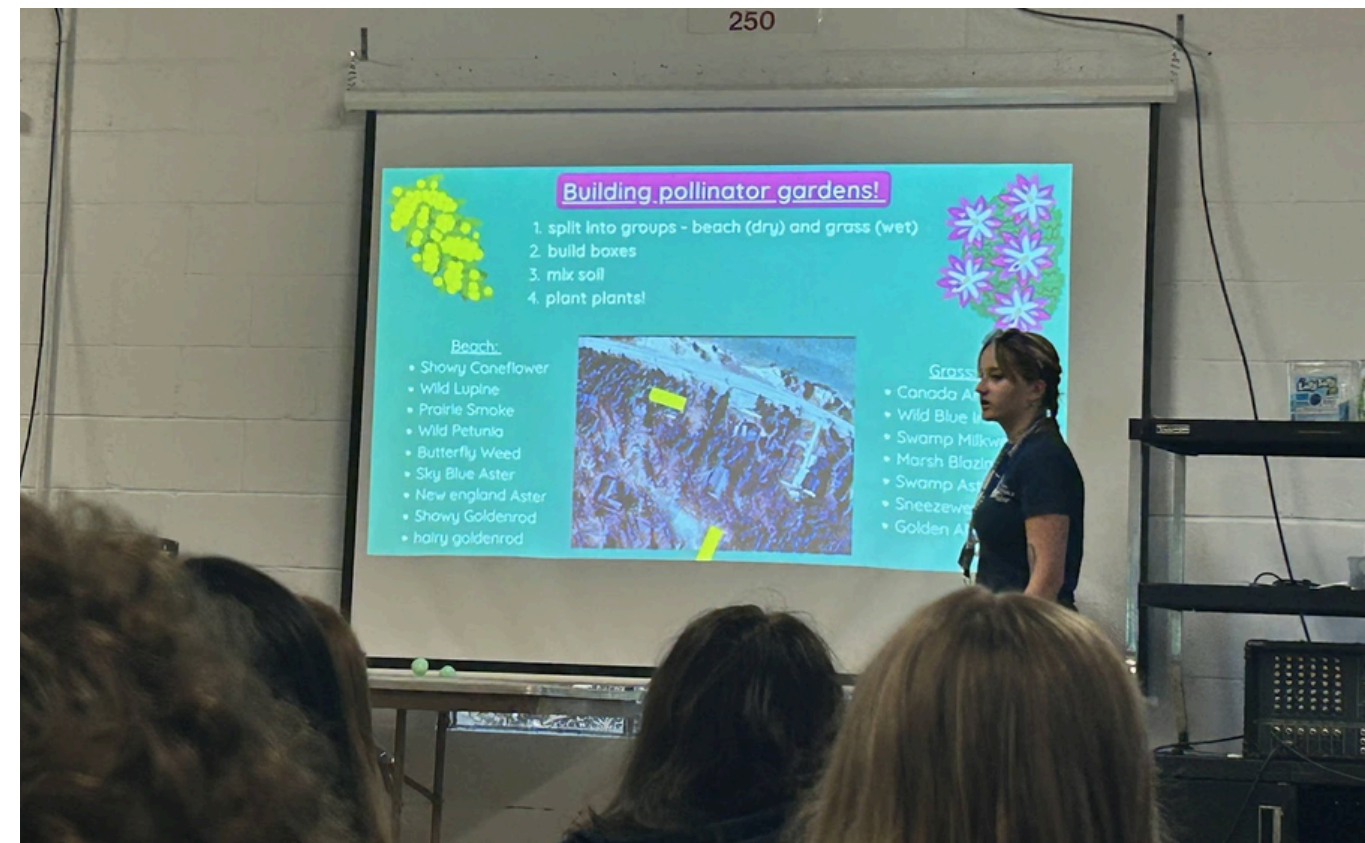
Benzie County, where Crystal Conference Center is located, has a large immigrant community that work in on farms in the area. Finding ways to support these communities was also important to us with the types of ecosystem services we wanted to support and boost

All of this being said, we decided that supporting the pollinators in the area—along with setting up a permanent “Creation Care Corner,” a small, dedicated space where we can keep the focus on caring for the Earth with different resources and hands-on opportunities—would satisfy the needs we were trying to meet.



Ministry Response-Action + Initiative

So many of the children's unique gifts were highlighted through this project. Strong leaders emerged, offering guidance, sharing creative ideas, and helping to solve problems with thoughtfulness and collaboration. Others expressed their artistic talents through design and decoration, while some showed a natural ability and joy for gardening with their green thumbs. These diverse skills were not only helpful but essential in creating a deep sense of community as we worked together to build bat boxes, bee hotels, and pollinator gardens. It was beautiful to witness how God has uniquely gifted each child, and how those gifts could be used in harmony to care for His creation.



Throughout the summer, we focused on four different projects. Ten bat boxes were made, painted, and installed around the camp property through a connection between volunteers from our church, campers, and camp staff. Many bee hotels were made by the campers and counselors, and installed by Cascade's youth group. Three pollinator gardens were planned by our middle and high school campers along with their counselors - the camp staff continue to nurture and care for the gardens when camps aren't present. A "creation corner" was created by myself and the dean of the elementary camp, Jill Forton. On top of these physical projects, I presented information to all age groups during the summer and led a Creation Care option time, which included hiking, clean up, education, and more environmental crafts and conversations.

Collaborators and Partners

There were many people and organizations involved in making our projects this summer possible. When talking about this mission with people at our church, Armond felt strongly about supporting and made all of the bat boxes along with an educational “unfinished” box that we used to explain the inner workings to the children. He also donated cokpost he had been working on for the pollinator gardens. There were more donations of bagged soil from different campers families during check in which was an amazing surprise!



In years past we had worked with an organization called Grow Benzie for mission work during our camps, so we reached out to them for guidance on finding local businesses to support. They put us in contact with a local nursery.



Birdsfoot Native Nursery was vital in the creation of our pollinator gardens. Not only did we purchase all of our plugs from them but their expertise helped us create thriving communities of plants that worked best for the different soil types on the camp property. Although we did extensive research and when in with some ideas, they really helped refine our plant selection and gave tips on a smooth introduction of our plants to their new home.



The real VIPs of all of the projects were the campers. They helped us put our plans into action and gave me the opportunities to teach them about the Earth with open hearts and minds. Between making bee hotels, painting bat boxes, and creating pollinator gardens - these kids and counselors put in the work!

Impact and Ripples

Some of the most impactful moments for me this summer were the interactions I had with the elementary campers. Their genuine curiosity and discussions we had really gave me hope for the future generation's care for the environment. Even though I didn't always have a clean-cut answer, they all listened so intently and brought up topics I taught them about many times throughout the week. It was clear that the seeds of stewardship were being planted in their hearts as they left our camp.



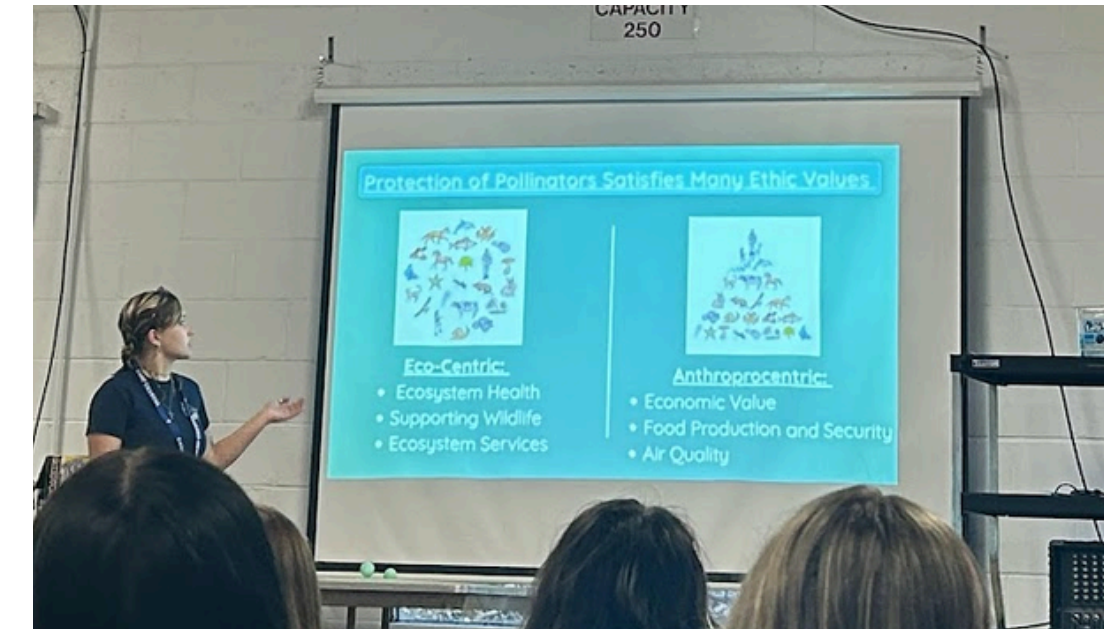
Bee hotels and bat boxes/watershed education - 94 participants
Pollinator gardens - 80 participants

One of the joys of working with middle and high schoolers was that they already had a base understanding of environmental issues. This allowed for a deeper conversation about the impacts that we were having - both good and bad. Different activity groups were made based on age and gave me the opportunity to connect with them in smaller groups.

I hope that this fellowship impacted my congregation and ministry site throughout the summer and will have lasting ripples moving forward. So many of the campers are so excited to come back to the camp and see how the gardens have grown, and see the bats in their boxes. For me, keeping interest in the environment alive in the kids is the most important thing that has come out of these projects and fellowship, so they can continue their stewardship without my guidance in the future.



Presentation on the conservation of watersheds to elementary campers



Presentation on the importance of pollinators and conservation easements to middle/high schoolers

Spirit of God-Awe Moments

God's presence was powerfully felt throughout this entire process. Seeing kids from such diverse backgrounds come together in unity to bring this project to life was a beautiful reflection of how God calls us to live—in community, with purpose and love. The genuine care, thoughtful questions, and deep conversations we shared made it clear just how much they truly wanted to understand and protect God's creation. Beyond the work itself, the amount of fun we all had sharing and listening to music, laughing with each other, sharing stories, and getting dirty before ending our projects with a jump in the lake created a bond and memory that I hope they will carry with them in the coming years.



Beloved Community

This summer, God's beloved community has come together in our camp community, bringing together children and adults from diverse backgrounds with a shared mission: caring for God's creation. Camp Crystal had become a place for them to not only learn about the environment and put that knowledge into practice, but also exercise or discover each of their unique God-given gifts. The "Creation Care Corner" we established stands as a lasting and visible symbol of this work, offering a permanent space for learning, reflection, and engagement with environmental stewardship. The ripples of this project are visible through the excitement from both the campers and the surrounding Crystal Lake community. Presenting the work we did up north to our church brought so much joy and passion to the members and helped remind them of the importance of this kind of work.

Looking into the future, I hope that we can continue a partnership with the Green Chalice Mission. I will continue to ensure that nature-based activities are integrated into our camp curriculum, as well as maintain the projects we undertook this summer. The children, parents, and staff all enjoyed being part of these projects and the feeling of contributing to the well-being of both the camp and the Earth.



Painting the bat boxes and creating the bee hotels



