

Pierce Cedar Creek  Institute  
for environmental education

# Strategic Plan

For  
2008 – 2010

Prepared by  
the Board and Staff of  
Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

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## **BACKGROUND:**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute opened its doors to the public in 2001 with a five-year strategic plan in place. The Institute is a private operating foundation that grew out of The Willard G. Pierce & Jessie M. Pierce Foundation, begun by Bill and Jessie Pierce, long-time residents of Hastings, Michigan. In 2006 work began on updating the Institute's strategic plan and involved input from board members and staff. Through this update, the mission of the Institute was re-written and expanded from ecological to environmental education and research.

## **MISSION:**

**The mission of Pierce Cedar Creek Institute is to promote environmental education, research, preservation and appreciation.**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute is a mix between a nature center and biological field station. It is open to the public and provides a variety of community programs, along with serving a consortium of colleges and universities by offering research and field-based learning experiences for students and faculty.

## **VISION:**

**The vision is to be a leading force and vibrant center for environmental education and research, resulting in awareness, appreciation and preservation of the natural world.**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute includes a visitor center, education building, research lab and housing, located on 661 acres in southwest Michigan, Barry County. Approximately 41% of the land is forested; 40% is wetland that includes fens, swamps, vernal ponds and a bog; 17% is upland field, sand prairie and constructed prairie; and 2% is open water in the form of a "pot hole" lake, stream and retention ponds. Currently, seven hiking trails, a total of just under seven miles, are available to visitors daily from dawn to dusk.

## **VALUES:**

This mission and vision will be accomplished based on values that are primary to how the Institute operates. Values define how we interact with each other in the organization and how we treat our guests, business partners and the community. These values impact every aspect of our organization. The values identified as key are:

- **Land Conservancy**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute values the natural environment and the native plants and animals that are a part of a healthy ecosystem. We believe biodiversity and natural change play a critical role in the sustainability of the land and support all efforts that promote this sustainability.

- **Environmental Responsibility**

We believe our actions must speak louder than our words and through best management practices we will work ethically and responsibly to protect the health of our environment now and for future generations.

- **Fiscal Responsibility**

Resources must be managed carefully and at Pierce Cedar Creek Institute we value financial resources as a way to ensure our continued growth and development. We will take care to wisely manage our financial resources while effectively planning for the future.

- **Pursuit of Knowledge**

In life we are constantly making decisions that affect the environment. The knowledge we receive plays a key role in helping us all make informed decisions. Pierce Cedar Creek Institute does not advocate a particular viewpoint but believes that awareness and understanding come through knowledge that is made available in a clear and non-biased format.

- **Honest and Ethical**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute believes honesty is a core value that promotes ethical practices. Fairness, trust and respect for everyone and everything we come in contact with are integral.

- **Good Citizen**

We believe playing an active role in our community and serving our community are important. The Institute will serve as a facility for collaboration and cooperation between Barry County organizations to improve the quality of life in our community.

- **Inclusive**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute values and respects all living beings and believes that people have a right to learn about the natural world. We believe healthy interactions breed a healthy environment from which to learn and grow.

## **CUSTOMERS:**

The Institute serves anyone interested in the natural world but believes we can best serve the following groups of customers or markets:

- **Barry County Community**

Our founders, Bill and Jessie Pierce, displayed a strong commitment to their neighbors and friends in Barry County. The Institute will continue this commitment through support to local citizens and community leaders, schools and non-profits in Barry County.

- **Pierce Cedar Creek Institute Members**

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute is committed to the individuals and families who support the Institute through an annual membership. Their donations and support of our mission and vision are important to our success. Membership is concentrated in the West Michigan area.

- **K-12 Teachers**

Our goal is to provide educators with resources to increase the number of environmental topics being taught in the classroom. Through teachers, we will reach the students who are our future leaders.

- **Biological Field Station Consortium Members**

In 2004, the Institute formed a partnership with colleges and universities to bring field-based environmental research and educational experiences to their undergraduate students and faculty. These 13 colleges and universities are key to the Institute's program development and focus.

## **PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:**

The Institute is focused in the area of environmental education and research. Environmental science, an interdisciplinary field, is the study of the interactions between the physical, chemical and biological components of the environment, including their effects on all types of organisms. Environmental science encompasses issues such as climate change, conservation, biodiversity, groundwater and soil contamination, use of natural resources, waste management, sustainable development, air pollution and renewable energy. Ecology is a sub-category to environmental science and is also an important focus.

The Institute's programs and activities always support the mission of the Institute and provide opportunities to engage in environmental education, research, preservation and appreciation.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

The mission and vision of the Institute can not be accomplished without clear, measurable goals and objectives with accountability. The strategic goals and objectives of the Institute over the next three years are described below and provide the framework for a working document that is used to direct and measure the Institute's efforts and resources to ensure progress and success.

### **Goal 1: Provide quality educational programs and opportunities for customers to promote a stronger understanding of the environment.**

#### ***CUSTOMER: Community/Institute Members***

- A. Conduct market research with members to determine interests
- B. Prepare an annual environmental education program calendar based on research data, evaluate results and adjust program as needed.
- C. Create interpretive signage to inform guests of important natural features found on the property.

#### ***CUSTOMER: K-12 Teachers***

- D. Develop a schedule of pre-designed teacher workshops (Wet, Wild, PLT, etc).
- E. Develop and offer a course in partnership with area school districts that impacts the teaching of science by Middle School (6<sup>th</sup> Grade) teachers.

***CUSTOMER: BFS Consortium Members***

- F. Increase the number of schools and students that participate in the *Ecology for Pre-Service Teachers* course.
- G. Promote courses and field trips to the Institute by consortium members.
- H. Improve interest and participation in the Modular Course series.

**Goal 2: Conserve the integrity of the property and maintain its value as a place to learn from and enjoy nature, and a place to conduct environmental research.**

- A. Administer the Deer Management program annually.
- B. Manage the Prairie Restoration program.
- C. Develop and oversee an Invasive Plant Removal program.
- D. Maintain and oversee the Trail Management program to provide guests with safe access to the Institute's hiking trails.
- E. Develop and oversee a Native & Rare Species Protection program.

**Goal 3: Facilitate the highest quality learning experience for those involved in undergraduate research through an innovative program respected both regionally and nationally.**

- A. Conduct the URGE summer research program, evaluate results, adjust program as needed.
- B. Increase applications to the URGE research program.
- C. Expand the research program through a "Faculty in Residence" program.
- D. Conduct a long-term research (LTR) project in conjunction with consortium schools.
- E. Inventory existing lab equipment and identify important equipment for purchase.

**Goal 4: Develop all resources necessary to ensure the Institute continues to build upon its vision.**

- A. Develop evaluation systems in operational areas to ensure customer needs are met through quality services.

- B. Develop and maintain a volunteer program that provides the support needed to provide a quality learning experience for all customers.**
- C. Develop an internship program for Natural Resource/Biology student from area colleges and universities.**
- D. Build upon the existing Renewable Energy Advisory Team to support a quality renewable energy education effort.**
- E. Identify and secure external funding sources that will provide the monies needed to expand programs without providing an unnecessary drain on the Foundation's endowment.**
- F. Increase promotions of community and BFS programs to SW Michigan Region, focusing on Kent, Ionia, Allegan, Barry, Eaton, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, and Clinton Counties.**
- G. Create and maintain a mailing list of science teachers in Southwest Michigan.**
- H. Revise, update and maintain the website to provide better information, communication and educational opportunities for all customers.**
- I. Ensure the Strategic Plan is utilized as a working document to monitor progress and adjust efforts to ensure progress continues.**
- J. Develop and maintain a system for collecting and disseminating data on the property, including specimen collections.**
- K. Develop new and enhance existing on-site conservation projects to provide an example of best management practices (BMPs).**
- L. Increase facility rental revenue through an enhanced and expanded facility rental program.**

## **Goal 5: Develop an internal structure to support efforts.**

- A. Create and implement environmental Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit our impact on the environment.**
- B. Develop a Policy and Procedures Manual for URGE and non-URGE researchers.**
- C. Create a Facilities Maintenance Manual of regular and periodic maintenance.**
- D. Create a 3, 5 and 7 year Maintenance and Capital Improvement Plan for each building included in the facilities.**
- E. Update and maintain the safety program and Emergency Action Plan.**
- F. Define and adopt risk management policies that protect the Institute.**

- G. Complete the Michigan Nonprofit Association's Infrastructure checklist.**
- H. Increase understanding of operational and mission-related issues through on-going board training.**
- I. Maintain memberships with relevant organizations to keep staff current and connected with environmental and job-related issues and trends.**
- J. Provide job-specific training for staff members to ensure they stay current on job skills and trends.**

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