

Pierce Cedar Creek Institute

for environmental education

Beginning in 2019, Grand Rapids native Faith Kuzma began researching the population decline of the eastern box turtle at the Institute. Kuzma said little was known about box turtle population at the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute before she and other researchers from Grand Valley State University began studying them, but she said it is very likely the population has declined over time.

While conducting her research at the Institute, Faith used one effective conservation technique — head starting. To increase a turtle’s chance of survival in the wild, Faith and her team gave the turtles a “head start” by putting them in a protective environment for a period of time. It is a method used to increase survival for animals that are vulnerable during their juvenile stage. Through her research she learned the head started turtles have higher survival rates. Faith has spent many summers conducting research at the Institute. She said the experience has made her a better scientist in every aspect. She discovered her passion was field-based, management-oriented research and what surprised her most was how much planning and "behind the scenes" work went into research.

“I got experience writing grants, applying for permits, ordering supplies, and planning fieldwork activities. I also learned so much about our local Michigan species since I would come across all sorts of interesting plants and animals while I was tracking my turtles.”

She also received a lot of practical experience that will prepare her for her future such as practicing presenting scientific research via oral and poster presentations and writing scientific papers.

In the future, Faith hopes to continue working in conservation and she hopes to do more field-based research that has direct implications for conservation and management. After completing her master’s thesis, Faith will graduate from Grand Valley State University this winter.

Congratulations, Faith!