

RIVERS 2 LAKE

Introduction

For the past 13 years, the Rivers2Lake education program has built a community of educators dedicated to sharing the Great Lakes with their students. The program has trained

and mentored 140 teachers, helping them integrate Lake Superior research, history, policy, and stewardship into their classrooms.

Rivers2Lake teachers engage PK-12 students in outdoor and inquiry-

based learning well beyond their year of participation. Working with partners including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, the Great Lakes Aquarium, the National Park Service, and the Superior Rivers Watershed Association, Rivers2Lake brings the Great Lakes Literacy Principles to life. Rivers2Lake is run by the education program at the Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve in Superior, Wisconsin.



Rivers2Lake Goal:

The Rivers2Lake Education Program (Rivers2Lake) uses the Lake Superior watershed and the St. Louis River, its largest US tributary, as a foundation for authentic, experiential teacher and PK-12 student learning and increased Great Lakes literacy.

Rivers2Lake Objectives:

1. Educators who participate in Rivers2Lake engage in a supported change process with professional mentors, resulting in career-long confidence in, and commitment to, using interdisciplinary, outdoor, and inquiry-based learning focused on Lake Superior.
2. Rivers2Lake teachers integrate place-based information and data, educational materials, regional experts, and a personal understanding of the Lake Superior Watershed into curriculum, resulting in engaging educational content that improves Great Lakes Literacy.
3. Through learning and stewardship actions focused on the Lake Superior Watershed, students in Rivers2Lake classrooms demonstrate understanding of the Great Lakes, develop a stronger sense of place, and increase their commitment to stewardship.
4. By participating in outdoor and inquiry-based learning experiences with Rivers2Lake teachers and mentors, students in Rivers2Lake classrooms demonstrate improved academic learning and engagement.
5. Rivers2Lake fosters the development of a dynamic and expanding professional learning community of teachers, non-formal educators, natural resource professionals and others committed to Great Lakes-centered learning.

A Checklist for Participating Teachers:

Successful participation for Rivers2Lake teachers includes:

Whole Cohort Activities

- Participation in the Rivers2Lake Summer Institute **August 4 -August 7, 2026.**
- Participation in the one-day Rivers2Lake Winter Workshop on **Thursday, February 4, 2027**
- Participation in the end of the year celebration in **June 2026 (date TBD)**
- *OPTIONAL: Dreaming & Scheming, drop-in planning times. Dates and locations TBD.*

Ongoing Activities

- Participation in **additional professional development opportunities, totaling 3 hours**, related to the Great Lakes, Lake Superior watershed, or outdoor and inquiry-based learning between June 1, 2026, and May 31, 2027. (The Lake Superior Reserve staff will provide a list of such opportunities).
- Use of **outdoor-learning or field experiences for students at least once per month**, on average.
- **Inclusion of Rivers2Lake content** (related to outdoor learning, the Lake Superior watershed and its communities, culture and history, rivers/watersheds that feed into Lake Superior, the Great Lakes or water quality) **at least once per week, on average.**
- Participation in **twice-monthly connections** (which usually include a check-in meeting and classroom instruction, observation, lesson planning, coordination and planning of field experiences or other assistance) **with a Rivers2Lake mentor.**
- **Students in Rivers2Lake classrooms make public presentations** (which may include events like science fairs, plays, open houses, or presentations to groups or at parent teacher conferences) relating to Rivers2Lake content by the end of the school year.
- **Assistance with the Rivers2Lake program evaluation process**, which may include surveys or interviews for teachers and/or students.
- **Participate in periodic reflection prompts** over the school year—to be in touch with the cohort and celebrate accomplishments.



Benefits of Participation in Rivers2Lake:

- **A stipend:** Participants receive a stipend. \$125 will be received via a mailed check after the Summer Institute, while an additional stipend of \$425 will be mailed in the last week of May 2026 following successful participation in the program. (If requirements, such as the Winter Workshop are not met, stipends will be reduced.)
- **Classroom resources:** Approximately \$120 per classroom to purchase resources relating to Rivers2Lake. Resources are chosen by the participating teacher and will be purchased by the Lake Superior Reserve. We **CANNOT reimburse** supply purchases, so please be sure to submit orders to Reserve staff. They must be ordered by **April 1, 2027**. To submit an order, please email a link for what you would like to purchase to Ryan at ryan.feldbrugge@wisc.edu. We can provide suggestions!
- **Transportation:** Transportation funding for off-site field learning experiences with Rivers2Lake. This is either \$500 or one to two field experiences, whichever limit is reached first. Your school must submit an invoice addressed to the Reserve and the school will be reimbursed for bus cost via a mailed check.
- **Aquarium Visits:** Funding for student admission to the Great Lakes Aquarium. This funding is limited- please let your mentor know if you intend to take students to the aquarium this year.
 - To secure bus funding for aquarium trips, complete the application for a bus scholarship before the end of September 2026.
 - Once confirmation of a bus scholarship is received, book your trip by the end of January 2027. Check with Rivers2Lake mentors on dates before booking with the aquarium.
 - **Funding is NOT available for April or May visits to the aquarium.**
- **Get on the water:** Funding for use of a vessel to explore the St. Louis River Estuary, Lake Superior, or other body of water in the watershed. This funding is limited- please let your mentor know if you intend to take students out on a boat/canoe this year!
- **Water Quality Equipment:** Use of water quality monitoring kits, field guides and equipment. Equipment can be checked out from the Reserve by your mentor.
- **Boots and Snowshoes:** Use of Lake Superior Reserve snowshoes and mud boots for field experiences. Reserve snowshoes and boots in advance with your mentor and we will bring them to your classroom.
- **Fun!** An experience that will revitalize the way you teach and engage your students in their local environment.

