



Do you truly  
know the  
history of our  
ecosystems at  
WMAES?



# CULTIVATING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AT WMAES

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Presented By: Dante and Jesse





# 01

## THE PROBLEM

- NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS ON OUR OWN CAMPUS HAVE THEIR HISTORIES GO UNKNOWN
- CULTURAL + ECOLOGICAL HISTORY IS INVISIBLE



# WHY WMAES IS THE PERFECT PLACE TO ADDRESS THIS

WEST MICHIGAN  
ACADEMY OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
SCIENCE (WMAES)

# 02

01

Outdoor learning is part  
of the school's mission

02

Prairie plantings, outdoor  
amphitheater, garden  
spaces

03

BUT: Their potential is under  
because they lack that histo  
knowledge



# OUR INTERVIEW: LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT JAY WOMACK

STUDENTS SHOULD BE “IMMERSED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY INTO NATURE,” AND THE LANDSCAPE NEEDS INTERPRETATION SO ITS MEANING ISN’T LOST.”

–JAY WOMMACK

- Mr. Womack confirmed that outdoor features are not reaching their full educational potential
- He also stressed the need for storytelling and visible cues
- His insights validated our solution:
- **Signage makes nature understandable and engaging**

03



# 04

## OUR SOLUTION: EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE

WE DESIGNED AND INSTALLED  
FOUR INTERPRETIVE SIGNS THAT:

- 01** Inform others about our environments
- 02** Highlight cultural connections
- 03** Promote hands-on learning
- 04** Goal: Make the prairie and other environments meaningful every day.



# THE EFFECT

EACH SIGN PROVIDES:

- Ecological education (prairie function, biodiversity)
- Cultural context (Indigenous history & knowledge)
- Sustainability guidance (habits, choices, stewardship)
- Outdoor learning support (teachers can use them instantly)

05



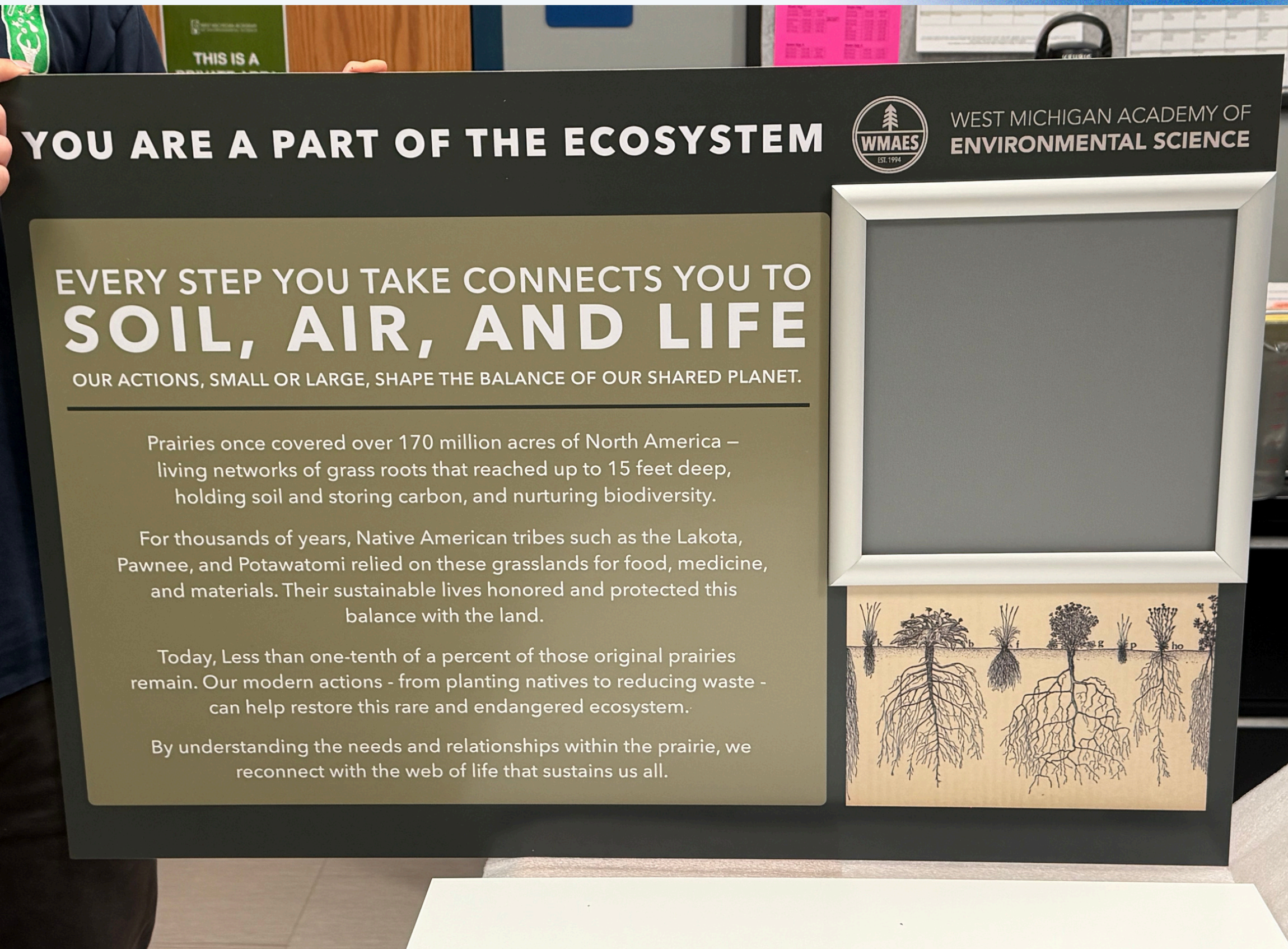
# SIGN #1



06



# SIGN #2




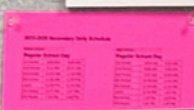
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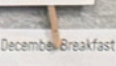


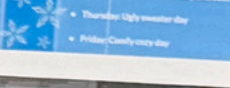
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STAFF ONLY









WMAES  
EST. 1994

WEST MICHIGAN ACADEMY OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

EDUCATION IS ACTION

LEARNING ISN'T LIMITED  
TO THE CLASSROOM.


EVERY MINDFUL ACT-PLANTING, CONSERVING, RESTORING- IS AN EDUCATION IN ITSELF.


At WMAES, Learning expands beyond the walls of the classroom and into the landscape itself. Surrounded by native plants and open air, students connect theory with practice, gaining a deeper understanding of ecology, stewardship, and sustainability.

New outdoor learning spaces, such as the amphitheater, council ring, and garden classrooms, offer hands-on opportunities to explore science, art, and history surrounded by nature.

Inspired by conservationist Jens Jensen's philosophy, these spaces show that restoration begins with participation. Whether students are planting milkweed, saving seeds, or testing water quality, each act strengthens both ecosystems and understanding.

When we learn through action, we rebuild the world - and ourselves.





08



# SIGN #4



09





# EXPECTED OUTCOMES

HOW WE EXPECT THE SIGNS TO  
AFFECT FUTURE TEACHING

- Students understand the prairie ecosystem
- Increased connection to land and local history
- Stronger sustainability habits across campus
- A foundation future classes can build on



# CONCLUSION

THE PRAIRIE IS NOT  
JUST SCENERY—IT'S A  
STORY, A TEACHER, AND  
A LIVING SYSTEM.

“WHEN WE INTERPRET THE  
LANDSCAPE, WE UNDERSTAND IT.  
WHEN WE UNDERSTAND IT, WE  
CARE FOR IT.  
AND WHEN WE CARE FOR IT, WE  
PROTECT OUR FUTURE.”

—WENDELL BERRY