



FAMILY HANDBOOK & POLICIES

303 Naples Rd.
PO Box 101
Harrison, ME 04040
(207) 615-9398

missmaplesnaturehouse@gmail.com

Wendy Gallant, Executive Director

FAMILY HANDBOOK & POLICIES

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See our website for >>>

[BENEFITS, RISKS, and HAZARDS](#) and **[ENROLLMENT PACKET](#)**



to **Miss Maple's Nature House!**

Where Kids, Plants and Animals Live Happily Ever After!

Offering nature-based, enrichment programs dedicated to supporting the whole child and their developmental needs, while fostering a love for the natural world.

It is our mission to provide all children with the opportunity to experience and cultivate healthy relationships with nature, community, and self, without regard to physical, mental, or socio-economic status.



Our exclusive program takes place outdoors on our two-acre property, in our nature-inspired indoor spaces, and in various other outdoor spaces in our community. Our incredible Guides provide engaging activities including live animal encounters, trail hikes, art projects, games, songs, and stories. *Miss Maple's* is designed to help your child develop cognitive and problem-solving skills, while cultivating social skills and building confidence. We teach respect for all living beings and how to minimize our impact on the earth. Our lessons flow organically from what nature presents us with each day. We know that every family is unique, each with its own schedules and needs, and we strive to offer programs to fit your family's style.

Our programs are run by a Registered Maine Guide who is governed by the guidelines of that license issued through Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife (DIFW). Staff will always be current on license and employee mandates, and have a cell phone, drinking water, and first aid kit with them.

Our OUTDOOR SPACES are PERFECT for LEARNING and NATURE PLAY



At *Miss Maple's Nature House*, we immerse ourselves in the great outdoors as much as possible. Whether caring for our chickens, playing on one two playgrounds, or concocting in Mud Kitchen, children freely roam and play. The Trails are well-marked for woodland adventures and lead to many favorite places to linger and explore! From seeds and sprouts to tracks and scat, surprises always await. We also have indoor spaces at *Miss Maple's* – warm, inviting, and full of nature-based fun.

CORE ROUTINES of NATURE CONNECTIONS ... things people do to learn nature's ways.

Each day we try to practice as many of the *13 Core Routines* as we can. In this way, we teach and learn to connect more deeply and naturally to the world around us. These Core Routines were developed by the [Wilderness Awareness School](#) under the guidance of Jon Young, author and naturalist, and are used here as a trusted framework for our daily activities

- 1) SIT SPOT
- 2) STORY OF THE DAY
- 3) EXPANDING OUR SENSES
- 4) QUESTIONING & TRACKING
- 5) ANIMAL FORMS
- 6) WANDERING
- 7) MAPPING
- 8) EXPLORING FIELD GUIDES
- 9) JOURNALING
- 10) SURVIVAL LIVING
- 11) MIND'S EYE IMAGINING
- 12) LISTENING FOR BIRD LANGUAGE

RHYTHM OF OUR DAY

An underlying structure, referred to as our “daily rhythm”, provides a flexible structure so children know what to expect during their time at Miss Maple’s. This comforting rhythm includes visual and auditory cues when transitions take place and are not set in stone. We don’t arbitrarily cut learning short for the sake of a schedule – except to go home!

Arrival & Welcome	We most always meet and greet outside. Grown-ups say good-bye at the door, kids hang their packs use the bathroom, and gear up for the day. Children explore simple provocations in the various rooms/areas with tools, art materials, natural artifacts, or books, etc. which rotate throughout the year. Free play while awaiting everyone’s arrival.
Morning Circle	We begin with a welcome song, Gratitude’s, weather, and a recap of what our day might look like. Children’s input is welcome. Depending on the mood and weather, we’ll then engage in any of the following activities: yoga movement, big movement activities, dance games, yard games, songs, Show & Tell, etc. Intentional activities are led by guides to build on children’s interests and seasonal happenings.
Habitat Care	Feed our chickens and collect the eggs. Check in with birds, pond, or other habitat elements.
Hike or Wander	Exploration of wild habitats can include wandering the Trails, Camp Road, Brook Town. Going to the Lake, collecting treasures. Follow-up art experiences, games, bug watching, animal roles, etc. (age dependent) Running, climbing, crawling and simple wandering are often part of the adventures.
Nature Play	Children freely engage in unstructured nature play; such as handcrafts, science project, theatrical fun, or help feed the birds, etc. We also encourage their nature journaling, reading, mapping, and investigations. This time also includes handwashing and snacking, depending on the children’s needs
Lunch and Rest Nest	Children use the bathroom, wash-up, and set-up for lunch, independently. We begin lunch with a Moment of Silence, Gratitude to Mother Nature, and communal grace. After lunch we get ready for Rest Nest, a group story, and then mandatory 30-45 minute rest. Bigger kids, or those who don’t fall asleep, can be excused to a quiet activity, or one-on-one with the Guide for some academic practice, etc.
Quiet Group Activity & More Outdoor Time	As friends begin to rouse from their Rest, we join for a quiet group game (Jenga, playing cards, coloring) or activity. Snack and bathroom time, and re-gear up to go outside for the remainder of the day.
Departure	Grown-ups will meet us at outside for pick-up. Children go home with their dirty clothes, lunch boxes, backpack, and any take-homes. Outdoor gear can remain in their cubby hooks for the week. Please, ask your child to share their highlights with you!

EMERGENT CURRICULUM

Our curriculum is ever-changing and parallels the changing seasons. Sprout, blossom, go to seed, decay, and slumber – we discover the mysteries of the natural world. Children bring their ideas, interests, backgrounds, and skills to outdoor exploration and learning. As guides observe the children’s play and inquiry, they identify ways to support the needs and growth of each child. In this way, guides and children are co-collaborators of meaningful emergent curriculum. The pace, mode, and topics of learning are born in nature and informed by children who lead the way. <https://www.naturalcommunity.org/daily-rhythm>.

Our curriculum is a compilation of several sources and experiences. We especially like *Exploring Nature with Children*, by Lynn Seddon and *Growing Up Wild*, by Project Wild. We also tap into the National Association of Environmental Education (NAEE), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools (ERAFANS), Tinkergarten, YouTube, and Pinterest. The sources for fun and emergent nature-based curriculum and activities are endless. Feel free to share your ideas and suggestions with us!

Fun-filled Elements of our Learning:

- Fort-Building
- Loose Parts
- Make-Believe
- Wandering
- Mud Kitchen
- Dramatic Play
- Animal and Garden Care



CELEBRATIONS

Life is one big celebration, and it seems everything we encounter in the natural world is worthy of its own recognition. With that being said, Miss Maple’s refrains from celebrating traditional/social holidays (Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Easter, etc.) to allow time and place for the wonderful happenings around us each day. We rejoice in the blossoming of a new flower, the hatching of baby chicks, seasonal transitions, seasonal changes, moon phases, and especially our own birthdays. These natural wonders are part of our curriculum, including each child’s birthday that we’ll mark in a small and commemorative way. Parents can send a special snack, no gifts please.

PROGRAMS ~ DAYS & HOURS OF OPERATION

Miss Maple's Nature House operates under the guidance and expertise of Registered Maine Guides. We offer multi-age programs for ages 3-11 years old. Generally, the youngest kiddos come mid-week reserving other days for more 'big kid' activities.

Our programming follows the natural cycles of the seasons. We currently offer three 10-week sessions - fall, winter, and spring, and two 4-week sessions in the summer. During the 'off' weeks between these sessions, our staff is busy planning, training, and taking time for their own adventures. We also offer 'drop-in' care between sessions. Pre-registration is required.

FOREST KINDERGARTEN (Ages 3-6) - Our Forest Kindergarten model is "child led" with teachers acting as guides for learning. Daily activities are emergent and include nature walks, circle time, caring for our chickens, onsite gardens, Mud Kitchen, observing the changes of the season, identifying insects and flora, "animal of the week", using natural materials to create works of art and most of all ... free play in the forest!

TRAIL BLAZERS (Ages 7-11) is held exclusively in the outdoors. We meet alternately between Miss Maple's and various forest environments throughout the local area. Kids learn life skills, techniques of discovery, bush craft and survival skills. Ultimately, they explore ways to connect to their natural world, community, and themselves.

Please check our website for current program schedule and information.
www.MissMaplesNatureHouse.com

We are open Monday – Thursday, 8:30a-4:30p and closed on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day/Day After
- Christmas Eve/Day

We *do not* close for snow days (snowstorm fun!) but, will close for icy or dangerous conditions. *Please don't travel if you do not feel safe to do so.* We'll need at least 3 children to be open for the day.

FIELD TRIPS

Each month we meet at other outdoor locations to explore and learn. Parents may be asked to transport their child(ren) to these alternative sites and are always welcome to hang out with us for the excursion, too! (Example outings - Pie Tree Orchard, Children's Museum of Maine, Crystal Lake Park, Pondicherry Park). MMNH has recently purchased a 15-passenger van for group outings!!! Any driver of the "Magic Maple Mobile" is required to take a Transportation Safety Course every two years.

TUITION

Tuition Agreements - *Miss Maple's Nature House* and parent/guardian will sign an Agreement stipulating the agreed days, costs, and financial responsibilities. We invoice per Session or per diem for Drop-In care. Bi-weekly payment plans are available. (Bi-weekly billing for 2023 will begin on Sun. Jan. 1 and every other Sunday thereafter.) We use Venmo as the primary pay source and will send a "Request for Payment" a few days before your child is scheduled to attend. Cash or check is also accepted, and payment is due upon receipt.

- While ideally, we would like payment to be made **before** your child attends, we will grant a one-week grace period.
- Families with accounts more than two-weeks overdue will not be allowed to send their children until the account is brought up to a 'paid' status.
- Absences due to non-payment are still payable.
- Accounts more than three weeks unpaid will be regarded as Terminated and the slot will be offered to the next family on our Wait List.

***Please reach out confidentially if there is a financial hardship.
We do not want your child to miss out on their Miss Maple's experiences.***

Absent Policy – *Tuition is payable regardless of attendance*, including a child's personal/vacation days, sick days, storm days, and non-payment days. For children sick for 3+ days, tuition may be reduced to ½ rate for up to two weeks. A doctor's note may be requested. The Lead Guide (Miss Maple) is entitled to one paid sick day/session (Forest Kindergarten only).

Probation Period – Within the first two weeks of care, either party may discontinue service without notice.

Cancellation Policy - After the initial Probationary Period, both the Parent and Provider agree to give a minimum of two-week notice before withdrawing/dismissing the child OR, Parent agrees to pay two weeks of tuition in lieu of notice.

Termination Policy - We reserve the right to terminate for the following reasons (but not limited to):

- Failure to pay
- Failure to complete the required forms
- Lack of parental cooperation
- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time
- Physical or verbal abuse of any person or property
- Our inability to meet the child's needs

See *MMNH TUITION AGREEMENT* for financial details.

GEAR UP - *It is assumed that children enrolled in our programs are able, or parents are actively working on teaching them to, get dressed and toilet independently.*

All children should come dressed for the weather and messy play. We recommend clothes with elastic waistbands—no zippers, snaps, laces, belts or suspenders, loose embellishments, as these greatly complicate getting un/dressed and bathroom time.

YOUR CHILD WILL NEED TO BRING >>>

1. a backpack for personal items and a snack. For all-day programs bring a lunch and a water bottle to leave at MMNH.
2. sturdy, closed-toed shoes or insulated winter boots for trail-blazing. (ie. Crocs-style, Keen, Bog boots, etc.).
3. an extra change of clothes stored in a labeled Ziploc bag to keep in their bag.
4. weather-appropriate gear for outdoor play. Layered clothing.(see below)
5. hair must be kept out of their face so as not to be a distraction or hinder vision or balance.
6. *Please leave personal toys, candy, gum, coins, and other small items at home.* One item for Show & Tell is allowed and will be kept in their backpack until presentation time.

COLD WEATHER GEAR

- ✓ BOG style boots work great.
- ✓ Layered outerwear.
(most days begin cool and end warmer).
- ✓ Avoid one big, puffy jacket.
- ✓ Snowpants or snowsuit.
- ✓ Hat, insulated mittens.
(not fingered gloves)

WARM WEATHER GEAR

- ✓ Sandals with CLOSED TOE and HEEL STRAPS work best. CROC-style shoes are great!
- ✓ NO flip-flops (tripping and stub-toe hazard)
- ✓ AVOID sneakers as they get damp/wet and hot/sweaty feet and don't dry out well.
- ✓ ALWAYS avoid lace-shoes, unless your child knows how to tie them.

The ideal way to keep a child comfortable during a cold day as s/he romps through nature, is to dress them in layers. Layers should be loose-fitting to trap heat easily.



Layering Rules of Thumb:

- 1st Layer – **W**icking (under shirt, silk-blend long-johns)
- 2nd Layer – **W**armth (fleece, sweatshirt, sweater)
- 3rd Layer – **W**eather (windbreaker, Oakie)

*Whether the weather is cold, Or whether the weather is hot.
Whether the weather is nice, Or whether the weather is not.
We'll whether the weather, Whatever the weather,
Whether we like it or not.*

MEALS

Miss Maple's Nature House provides snacks and fresh water made available throughout the day. Parents provide well-balanced lunches. To limit lunch trash and to encourage your child's independence, please **avoid sending food in single-use packaging** (granola bars, yogurt, juice boxes, etc.). We recommend the multi-compartment lunch box (ie. Bentgo) – it makes for an easier and more enjoyable mealtime.

Parents are required to notify staff of any known food allergies your child may have and provide any specific foods for children with special dietary requirements. Children are encouraged to try new foods and to eat what their parents send them with, but never forced to eat anything. Uneaten food brought from home will be returned that same day so parents can see how much/what their child has eaten.

Please note ... We have a very gracious local food bank. Please let us know if your family needs assistance with breakfast, lunch, or at-home meals.

Lunch time is a special part of our day and an important element in our nature-based rhythm. Children use the bathroom, wash hands and join at the table. Miss Maple/Nature Guide leads with Gratitude "Dear Mother Nature, thank you for " (ex: the Gift of this day, the warm sunshine, the fresh, clean water, etc.) Each child is then encouraged to offer their own Gratitude to Mother Nature or they can say "Pass". Together, we say Grace.

GRACE

Thank You for the World so Sweet.

Thank You for the Food we Eat.

Thank You for the Birds that Sing.

Thank You Earth for Everything!

Bon Apetit!



TOILETING – *(It is assumed that children enrolled in our programs are able, or parents are actively working on teaching them, to get dressed and toilet independently.)*

We regularly prompt children to use the potty (arrival, snack, lunch, after Rest Nest) and this rhythm meets most toileting needs. In order to attend our program, children must be independent in their toileting, or working towards that. (ie. be willing to 'go', know when they have to 'go' and be able to communicate that). Please send your child in easy access clothing such as elastic waist pants. Avoid onesies, overalls, belts, pants with buttons, dangly embellishments. Also, please supply an extra set of clothing for this training period.

Note: Because we are outdoors the majority of our time, children may need to pee outdoors in a designated place.

BEHAVIOR & GUIDANCE

We believe in using positive reinforcement, redirection, and reassurance as our primary tools. We highlight the importance of not only respecting each other's spaces but, also the space of our living forest. (ex: ask a flower for permission to pick one of its blossoms). We also expect children to respect their parents and have frequent conversations about what 'respect' looks like and its importance. (ex: little tolerance is given for hitting, running from, nagging at a parent.)

You'll often hear Guides say "Don't give up!", "You can do it!", "I believe in you!". We don't *do* for them as we believe our role is to *guide* children through their challenges and development and into success and self-achievement.

We have a zero-tolerance policy for hitting, grabbing, pushing, throwing rocks, name-calling, aggressiveness, disrespect towards parents, ignoring important direction from staff, or any other demeaning behavior. If any of these behaviors occur, we work with the child to redirect their behavior. In the event of hurtful, destructive behavior, or repeat behavior, we may use a brief "time-out" to allow the child a chance to calm down, discuss the issue and resolution, and then welcome them to rejoin the group activities. Children are taught how to give a proper apology (not just say "sorry") and how to accept one (not "it's ok", rather "thank you".) Parents will be informed of reoccurring incidences and the progress being made. We want all children to feel safe and supported.

What will not be used ...

- Punishments using food, naps, toilet training.
- Pinching, shaking, biting, hitting, putting anything on child's mouth, humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting or yelling at a child using harsh, abusive or profane language.
- We will never leave a child in an unsupervised area such as a closet or room with locked door.
- Restricting a child's movement, holding or restraining ... unless it's deemed a safety or dangerous scenario.

ILLNESS, ACCIDENT, AND SAFETY POLICIES

MMNH will ...

- provide hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol) in multiple locations around the property for adults and children to use freely and frequently.
- ensure that hand washing occurs before/after specific activities and at least three times a day.
- routinely clean and sanitize surfaces and objects that are frequently touched.
- frequently remind children to keep their hands away from their face.
- assess the outdoor spaces and equipment every day for hazards or new risks.

Illness: For the health and safety of your child and all of the children in our care, please do not bring your child to MMNH sick. Children must be kept away from other children in the event of contagious illness, or if displaying any of the following symptoms within the last 24 hours:



- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever over 101
- Unidentified rash
- Discharge from the eyes or ears
- Fever-free for 24 hours without medication, before returning to care.

Contagions are a problem, not only for other children and families in our care, but for staff. If we are ill, we may have to close and still charge for the time missed.

Your child **may** attend with the following symptoms:

- clear runny nose
- slight cough
- slight or no fever

If you are unsure if your child should attend MMNH, please call and check with us. If a child becomes ill during care hours the parent(s)/legal guardian(s) will be contacted to pick up their child. If parent(s)/legal guardian(s) are not available, the emergency contact person will be notified.(see TUITION for Absence Policy).

COVID-19 Policy (when activated) - Children or staff who present COVID-like symptoms during the day will be isolated immediately, provided a face covering, and sent home with their caregiver as soon as possible. If COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member, both parties must notify each other immediately and we will notify all exposed families. Covid-positive children/staff will follow the current Covid-19 guidelines as determined by [Maine's CDC](#)

Medication: Our policy is to dispense only those medications deemed necessary by the child's physician for the minimal number of doses possible. Parent must provide written permission to dispense any medication to the child indicating the name, dosage and time schedule for the medication. All medication must be in the original, labeled container.

Serious Injury/Accident: Any injury to a child while in our care will be noted in their file, reported to their guardian, and all *serious* injuries will be reported to the Department of Health and Human Services. A written copy of a completed report will be kept in the child's file. Please realize that we are risk-based program and children are active. No amount of child proofing and supervision can prevent all injuries. (See *Benefits, Risks & Hazards*)



Staff maintain Adult/Pediatric/Infant CPR & Wildlife First Aid Certification.

Medical attention is a guardian decision. When a guardian cannot be reached, we will act on our stead when a decision on immediate medical attention is needed.

In the event of an accident, injury, or emergency involving a child or staff member, we will immediately:

- Provide appropriate First Aid/CPR
- Call the local emergency response team (911), if needed
- Notify the parent/guardian.

Water Safety: Children have access to a sprinkler, a garden hose, a Slip 'N' Slide, a small wading pool, a running brook, and occasionally, the shores of a lake or pond. MMNH will ensure that all water-based learning environments are actively supervised, and containers emptied when not in use.

When at large water bodies – children are allowed to be in the water up to their belly-button without a life vest, unless a parent says differently. Children 6+ who've demonstrated the ability to bob or float may jump off a dock into water not over their head. At least one adult with Water Safety training must be present and have a safety ring on hand. Supervision ratio is 1:5.

Through a review of the literature, it is evident that when children are connected with nature, they are healthier physically and emotionally. Studies show that being exposed to views of green grass or trees can improve memory, concentration and grades, and the symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). (Schmitz, 2012)

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE PLAN

This plan for emergency preparedness will be reviewed annually. We will do what it takes to protect the children in our care in the event that they are in fire, emergency situation away from the House, must shelter in-place or be evacuated off-site to a safe area away from the House. The specific type of emergency will guide where and what special care will be provided:

Fire and Wilderness Emergency Drills - We conduct at least one of each drill per session (4x year). Documentation of these drills are posted on our Communications Board at MMNH.

An **In-Place Sheltering** could occur if:

- A weather-related emergency made it too dangerous to leave the safety of our House;
- An illness that required isolation arose while in our care;
- There was a toxic chemical spill outside the House;
- There was the threat of a violent incident that made it unsafe for children to leave; or
- We were directed to shelter in place by local emergency personnel.

An **Off-Site evacuation** could occur if:

- A weather-related emergency made it too dangerous to stay in the House;
- There were imminent threats of safety in the area; or
- We were directed to evacuate by local emergency personnel.

If the children in our care are evacuated off-site:

- They will be transported to a secure facility as designated by the Emergency Plan (Harrison Fire Department).
- Information will be provided to parents by:
 - Direct phone call/text – I will send a group text and then begin calling the easiest to reach by phone first, then the farthest away until all contacts have been made.
 - Written notice – If we need to evacuate to another site, a note will be placed on the MMNH door to confirm where to pick up your child.
 - We will post on social media as stated by the Emergency Plan.
- Children will only be released to parents or an individual that a release authorization has been provided for.

The purpose for sharing this information is to reassure you that we are prepared to handle all types of emergencies in a way that will ensure the safety of your child(ren). In the event of an actual emergency, we will call you as soon as it is safe to do so.

When you enrolled your child in our care, you completed a list of emergency contacts and persons who may pick up your child. It's very important to keep that list up-to-date in case an emergency occurs. Please reach out if you want to review the emergency contact information that I have for your child(ren).

Please let me know if you have questions or comments regarding this information.

The safety of your children is our highest priority.

COMMUNICATIONS

We always strive to be open and transparent with our beliefs, policies, and actions. We ask that families do the same.

- The best way for us to communicate is by return phone call or email.
- Texting is appropriate for short and non-vital messaging, not for back and forth conversations or important subject matters.
- We don't always answer calls or texts during program hours to focus 100% on the children.
- If you need to convey time-sensitive information, such as an imminent absence or late arrival, please send a text with the details.

Newsletters and updates are emailed to parents outlining current and future adventures, activities, nature-based resources, and any other important information. Personal pics, vids, activities, field trip, info, etc. are posted to our private FB group.

- Our [Miss Maples.com website](#) is the primary source for program and enrollment information.
- Our [Facebook business page](#) is considered a mini-web version and is interactive with resource sharing, community interaction, and industry-related musings.
- Our Facebook private group page, *Miss Maple's Nature Kids!* is for daily boasting, blogging, and social communicating between families. Enrolled parents will be sent an "Invite".
- We also have an Instagram account. Please check-in, post, and share regularly

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Miss Maple's Nature House has a strong community of parents, families, and neighbors. We rely on contributions of supplies or materials, as well as transportation to our off-site field trips to help with these overhead costs. Within our Maple family there's a variety of talent and skills available to each other. (ie. speech therapy, family counseling, carpentry, education, insurance, chef, retail sportswear, catering).

- We find the best time for parents to mingle or observe with their child is during the last half hour of each day, or they can sign-up for a volunteer slot (usually 2-3 hours).
- We also have a monthly adult-only session called *Parent Meet-Up*. This is an after-hours session, designed to discuss current or upcoming calendar events, parent resources, parent hi-lights, get-to-know-each-other, or whatever the group wants to focus on. *Parent Meet-Up* can be attended in-person (usually at the House) or via Facebook Messenger Live Chat. Parents can also connect with us/each other via our social media outlets.

MMNH ADVISORY GROUP

MMNH is run by the Executive Director and a volunteer Advisory Group made up of a handful of parents, educators, and/or community members. The group meets monthly.

If you'd like to join the group, please reach out to Wendy Gallant, Executive Director.

Thank you!

STAFF/NATURE GUIDES

Miss Maple's Nature House staff are hired based on their desire to inspire children in the best possible ways, as well as on their education, background, experiences, skillsets, and connection to outdoor life. Whenever children are in a wilderness setting, they will be guided by a Registered Maine Guide or one in active Guide training. Maine DIFW requires that all Registered Maine Guides pass a fingerprint/background check and hold a certificate in CPR and Wilderness First Aid. In addition to the above, MMNH requires all staff to complete assigned readings and 12 hours of ongoing field-related education/training.



Wendy Gallant aka "Miss Maple", is the founder and Executive Director of *Miss Maple's Nature House* and has worked with children in a variety of positions for over 30 years. She is a Master Gardener, holds degrees in Business and Tourism & Hospitality, minored in Community-Tourism Development, is a certified Nature-Based Educator and most humbly, has recently become a Registered Maine Guide. She has three adult children and a six-year old grandson. In her spare time (lol), she enjoys motorcycling, travel, building, backpacking, pickleball, kayaking, and raising her chickens.



Taylor Hjelmeland, is a Nature Guide in our Forest Kindergarten program. She's also a Pediatric Speech-Language Pathologist and has worked directly with children of all abilities for over 15 years in recreation programs, camps, preschools, and in the home through early intervention services. She holds a Master of Arts in Communication Sciences and Disorders as well as a Wilderness First Aid certification. Taylor lives in Casco with her two daughters, husband, two dogs, and nine chickens. She believes in nature-based, child-led learning with a strong emphasis on unstructured outdoor play. She enjoys hiking, reading, gardening, skiing, ice fishing and making memories with her family in the Maine woods.



Tami Brill is a retired K-1 teacher from the RSU10 district (Mexico, Rumford area) and helps us with curriculum, admin, goodwill, and occasional staff coverage. She has a BS in teaching from University of Maine at Fort Kent, and a Master's in Literacy. She lives in Waterford with her husband Dave and together they have four grown children and seven grandchildren. She enjoys cooking, reading, writing, camping, and sky diving.



Kayla Knowles is one of the Nature Guides in our Trail Blazer program. She's a busy mom of four nature-lovin' kids, a bunny, and a young Golden Doodle that all love to adventure. They're also an 'un-school' family allowing lots of opportunity to live and learn in the great outdoors. Kayla and her husband are former nurses and now co-own a nurse-staffing agency. She lives in Otisfield and enjoys yoga, hiking, reading, women's retreats, all things nature, and is currently in-training for her Registered Maine Guide license.

RESOURCES

- [Children & Nature Network](#): a hub of research, community networks, and training tools with the goal of increasing children's engagement with nature.
- [Natural Start Alliance](#): a project of the North American Association for Environmental Education, and a coalition of educators, parents, organizations, and others who want to help young children connect with nature and care for the environment.
- [Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools \(ERAFANS\)](#): Professional association that blazes a trail to meaningful nature connection through nature-based teacher training and education.
- [Registered Maine Guides](#): Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife website. Classifications, resources, Q&A
- [Register Maine Guides Association](#): An organization of professionals dedicated to quality, ethical outdoor experiences.
- [Balanced and Barefoot: How unrestricted outdoor play makes for strong, confident, and capable children.](#); Angela J. Hanscom, Author. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2016. Angela Hanscom is a pediatric occupational therapist and the founder of TimberNook—an award-winning nature-based program.
- [Growing Up Wild – Exploring Nature With Young Children](#) (ages 3-7); Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies, Washington, DC. 2018.
- [Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature](#); Jon Young, Ellen Haas, Evan McGown, Authors. Wilderness Awareness School. 2008.
- [The Essential Guide to Forest School and Nature Pedagogy](#); Jon Cree, Marina Robb, Authors. 2021
- [Forest School Lou – To the Trees](#) – YouTube channel
- [Maine Child Developmental Services](#) - The Child Development Services system is an Intermediate Educational Unit that provides both Early Intervention (birth through two years) and Free Appropriate Public Education (for ages three through five years) under the supervision of the Maine Department of Education. The CDS system ensures the provision of special education rules, federal and state regulations statewide, through a network of regional sites.



Registered Maine Guides are outdoor professionals who are licensed and permitted to accept any form of remuneration for their services in accompanying or assisting any person in the fields, forests or on the waters or ice within the jurisdiction of the State while hunting, fishing, trapping, boating, snowmobiling, using an all-terrain vehicle or camping at a primitive camping area.

Specialized Recreational classification means that a person has met the qualifications to guide watercraft, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiling and camping activities. This classification also qualifies a person to guide watercraft including paddle sports on inland waters as defined in DIFW Rule 24.02 E

<https://www.maine.gov/ifw/programs-resources/registered-maine-guides/index.html>