The center was created in 1990 by the state Legislature to develop, promote and evaluate environmental education and create a resource center for educators. The center was placed at UWSP because of the university’s stature as a national leader in environmental education and its strong College of Natural Resource.

One of the center’s first moves, Champeau said, was to assess the environmental literacy of fifth- and 10th-grade students across the state. Results showed that two weaknesses for students were energy and forestry education, and the center began developing its curriculum programs with those two areas in mind.

The center has greatly expanded its offerings since those early years. Now, it has programs that take teachers to foreign countries to learn and teach, and UWSP offers a master’s degree for environmental teachers.

“(School) districts are calling us,” Champeau said. “Years ago, we were out there trying to promote it.”

In the Stevens Point Area Public School District, the education begins as early as the 4K program with trips to the Boston School Forest, and then is gradually introduced more and more through science curriculum as students get older, said Karen Dostal, the district’s environmental education coordinator.

Dostal, also the forest’s director, has worked with the WCEE for about 10 years and has watched the awareness of how humans interact with the environment grow during that time. She also has seen the envy and amazement from visitors from outside the state.

The WCEE has been a beacon throughout the state for the movement, she said, and has set the state up well for the future.

“I think we’re going to expand not just how we value the environment and ecology, but how we live as a culture,” Dostal said.