



# Grounding our Education

*In this issue of The Link, we focus on **place-based learning**. Place-based learning encompasses a number of concepts, and here we emphasize the school yard as a learning environment.*

First we explore what is happening in Jefferson County, Kentucky, where school yard habitats have county-wide support. We spoke with Jim Fegenbush, Director of Jefferson County Buildings and Grounds. In Jefferson County, local school grounds staffs are encouraged to work with teachers and students to develop and maintain outdoor classrooms. Almost half of the county's schools have developed a place-based outdoor learning environment. One of their most successful programs is the Legacy Tree Program, which has been expanded into the Tree Museum Program. The Legacy Tree Program consists of planting trees that are confirmed to have some association with a historical person, such as scientist George Washington Carver or author Laura Ingalls Wilder. The Tree Museum Program involves planting trees in honor

*"We need to put the same kind of effort into creating outdoor environments that coaches put into stadiums."*

of some event from the distant or recent past. For example, one tree museum honors local soldiers who participated in Desert Storm. Another tree museum is being planted in memory of the victims of the September 11 tragedies. Teachers then use the trees as an

outdoor learning site to teach to the state education standards. In this way, history, English, and social studies teachers are encouraged to use the outdoors.

Taking a more comprehensive perspective of place-based learning, Dr. Lawrence Stueck has spent more than a decade developing his philosophy of education. A high school art teacher and creator of 3-D Educational Media, Inc., Dr. Stueck says that education is all about delivering context. If a topic does not have a purpose for kids, they will not be likely to learn: "Kids might know the difference between a pine tree and an oak tree, but they can name 14 different kinds of sneakers, 18 different kinds of drinks, and what year, make and model a car is a quarter mile down the road." We have to deliver a context that matters to them, and the outdoors is a perfect place to do that.

Dr. Stueck notes that the outdoors as a context matters because it takes care of us, it sustains us, and if we do not take care of it, we will be in trouble: "Using the outdoors can teach kids what common sense is. For example, if kids learn to build and experience a straw bale house, they can learn that it's acoustically better than conventional homes. Is it thermally better? Yeah, it's cheap to heat and cool. By creating an environment that matters you give all these messages without even having to say them. And in the process, for example, kids learn about physics as well." Dr. Stueck summarized his philosophy by saying that he works "on context, on attitude shifting, on creating common sense, and on beauty and relationships." He does this by turning outdoor environments into "walk-in textbooks." When kids learn primarily through



*Schoolyards provide living classrooms for place-based learning.*

conventional textbooks, the internet, TV, and movies, reality becomes abstracted. When this happens, "the learner begins to think that he or she cannot access reality directly, they think reality is known only through another source or another person. I try to create environments that engage the student, environments that kids can develop affection for. I want them to fall in love with the outdoors."

Dr. Stueck looks to an unlikely place—athletics—for inspiration. He notes that coaches and parents lobby hard for football stadiums, practice fields, gymnasiums, and tennis courts. And they get them. He wants science teachers and supportive parents to follow that model and demand outdoor classrooms for their students. "We need to put the same kind of effort into creating outdoor environments that coaches put into stadiums, and that textbook developers put into their textbooks, but do it three dimensionally. Once you develop a stadium, the space is about sports. We need to do that for environmental education as well. The school yard should be all about the environment."

# Georgia EE Providers

*Editor's Note: With publication of The Georgia Environmental Education Teacher Resource Guide, EEA and The Link continue to share with our members and readers a sampling of EE providers. In this issue, we highlight a national organization, National Wildlife Federation, 1330 W. Peachtree St., Suite 475, Atlanta, GA 30309.*



## Schoolyard Habitats® Living Classrooms for Place-Based Learning

By Craig Tufts, Chief Naturalist, National Wildlife Federation

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has encouraged individuals and communities to create and conserve wildlife habitat since 1973, when the Backyard Wildlife Habitat™ program began. In 1996, the Schoolyard Habitats program was created to meet the growing interest and distinct needs of schools in creating and restoring wildlife habitat on school grounds. The Schoolyard Habitats program focuses specifically on assisting school communities in the use of school grounds as sites for wildlife conservation and cross-curricular learning. Through the Schoolyard Habitats certification program, NWF recognizes the accomplishments of, and fosters networking among innovative school communities nationwide.

The entire school community can become involved in creating valuable habitat – food, water, cover, and

places to raise young – for local wildlife. While creating a dynamic outdoor classroom and expanding educational opportunities, teachers and students will also be creating positive change in the environment.

Throughout North America, and in many other parts of the world, interest in using outdoor teaching areas is increasing. Instead of limiting hands-on, outdoor learning to infrequent off-site field trips, teachers can make use of a living laboratory right outside the classroom door. By engaging in a Schoolyard Habitats project, they can foster students' sense of stewardship for the local environment while also saving money on grounds maintenance and developing stronger ties to the wider community.

For more information about Schoolyard Habitats or for educator workshops in your area, visit National Wildlife Federation's website at [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org) or contact Jana Jones at 404-876-8733/[jonesj@nwf.org](mailto:jonesj@nwf.org)



David Orr says integration of place into education is important because:

- (1) it requires the combination of intellect with real experience;
- (2) it can help solve problems associated with over-specialization since place cannot be understood from the perspective of a single discipline or specialization;
- (3) it is significant in re-educating people in the art of living well where they are; and
- (4) knowledge of a place—where are and where we are from—is intertwined with knowledge of who we are. *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, pp. 128-130.

\*Inspired by Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Share your ideas for renewal in this regular feature!

## EEA Spotlight Vicki Seastrom

EEA board member and co-managing editor of the *Link*, Vicki Seastrom is an educator with National Wildlife Federation. Primarily involved with place-based education for adult learners, she teaches NWF's Backyard Wildlife Habitat program, helping grown-ups to experience, learn about and protect wildlife habitat where they live.

This part of her job is a great fit for Vicki who trained for her environmental education career by growing up as a Girl Scout, receiving a degree in anthropology and education, and earning a green thumb as an instructor at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Vicki first taught in New York's Greenwich Village, the teacher who always took the kids outside to explore wild nature in the city as well as the interesting people and places in the neighborhood. She still takes "kids" outside—members of garden clubs, church groups, educators, parents, elders and business people—to learn about the importance and joy of creating and enhancing places for wildlife. Vicki says this program promotes positive change in people and on the landscape. "It's a way to reach people with NWF's message of community-based wildlife habitat conservation. We invite citizens to join in and learn the how-to's of gardening to attract wildlife wherever they are, whether they garden on a balcony or several acres." In her spare time, Vicki gardens with wildlife-friendly native plants on a wooded slope in a once wild area just outside Atlanta. Contact Vicki at 404-876-2602, Ext. 223 or by e-mail: [seastrom@nwf.org](mailto:seastrom@nwf.org)



Vicki Seastrom working with a student in a schoolyard habitat.

# The Georgia Framework for Environmental Education

By Diane Davies, State 4-H Specialist- Environmental Education and Senior Public Service Associate, Group 12 Kellogg National Fellow

In this age of children who are information-rich but often experience-poor, the need for a comprehensive framework for environmental education has never been greater. We have such a framework in Georgia, illustrated by the following diagram. It is a continuum of learning experiences linking children to the natural environment with the goal of developing a more environmentally literate and responsible citizenry.

Residential environmental education (an overnight or three- to five-day field study) is the culmination of the environmental education framework experience for children in grades 4-8. The resident environmental education experience incorporates interdisciplinary, experiential classes that use the out-of-doors as a dynamic, living laboratory for learning math, science, language arts, history and other subjects.

Many Georgia educators have worked hard over the years to provide quality environmental education experiences for children but have lacked a mechanism to bring efforts in the non-formal environmental education community together with the formal education community to establish comprehensive statewide environmental education. That is about to change.

Planning is underway for an environmental education summit designed to bring legislators, educators and policy makers together to develop a statewide master plan for environmental education. An environmental education certification for practitioners, teachers and volunteers is also under development.

In addition, Georgia has been selected by the State Environmental Education Roundtable (SEER) as a demonstration state in its national project, "Using the Environment as an Integrated Context for Learning" (. Eight to ten schools will be chosen to participate and pilot this project in partnership with the non-formal environmental education sector.

Once known for lacking any coherent environmental education plan, Georgia is now positioned to become a leader. The framework providers and others working in this field have long been leading the way, carving a place for environmental education in Georgia and the nation. A true statewide effort to build capacity for environmental education to flourish in Georgia is now, for the first time, within sight.

## Non-formal Environmental Education Framework Providers

<b>Parents</b>	<b>On-site School</b> Outdoor classroom	<b>Day Use</b> Field study trips to nature centers, zoos, museums, farms	<b>Residential EE</b> Field study trips, overnight or 3-5 days
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A child experiences the natural environment beginning with its parents. If the experiences are positive, a solid foundation of curiosity about the world can be nurtured. Then the non-formal environmental education community, working in conjunction with the formal education community, provides real world learning opportunities in the natural environment. These programs are integrated with the state's Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) standards.

Outdoor classrooms designed on the school grounds offer opportunities for learning that augment the core curriculum on-site. Day field study trips to nature centers, zoos, museums, farms and other sites build on the school experiences and are designed to be more in depth and specific than the school site opportunities.

In addition to hands-on classes that focus on cognitive gains designed to improve student performance, residential environmental education also targets affective behaviors by helping students learn how to get along with each other, team work strategies and coping skills. Because of the longer duration of these programs, more positive gains in learning and social skill development can be achieved.

The above framework is a linkage of experiences with no one experience standing in isolation. Progressively building on the other, the combination is an education continuum connecting early learning with sustained and varied learning opportunities in a wide variety of outdoor settings, helping the learner establish a solid knowledge base about the environment.

## AN INVITATION FOR EEA MEMBERS!

Attend a workshop introducing **The Georgia Endangered Plant Stewardship Network – Teaching and Displaying Native Wildflowers and Endangered Plants** on Thursday, February 7, 4:00 -8:00 pm & Friday, February 8, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm at The State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens.

Join EEA for a workshop initiating its new partnership with the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance (GPCA). The Georgia Endangered Plant Stewardship Network (GEPNS) was formed in 1996 and is comprised of a network of schools and nature centers interested in growing and teaching about the endangered plants and habitats of Georgia.

The workshop will provide nature center educators with information and resources about Georgia's endangered plants and threatened habitats. Nature centers and other informal science centers are encouraged to bring a teacher from a nearby school to partner with their facility in implementing this new project.

Instructors will teach about Georgia's native and endangered plants using science inquiry investigations and hands-on activities. Learn plant propagation methods using Wisconsin Fast Plants, common wildflowers, and endangered plants and how to transplant seedlings to school sites, to build a small bog for pitcherplants, and to establish a plot for medicinal plants, including ginseng and goldenseal.

Registration fee is \$25. All other fees are covered by an Eisenhower Higher Education Grant and a Turner Grant. Funds are provided for housing at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education in Athens, and for some meals. Funds up to \$50.00 (for Feb. 8 only) are available to reimburse schools for substitute teachers.

An additional day of instruction for 2 SDU credits is offered Sat., Feb. 9, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. To register contact: Jennifer Ceska, [jceska@arches.uga.edu](mailto:jceska@arches.uga.edu) (informal educators); Anne Shenk, [ashenk@arches.uga.edu](mailto:ashenk@arches.uga.edu) (classroom teachers).

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EEA is a self-governed, non-profit organization that promotes communication and education among professionals in the field of environmental education in Georgia. EEA is an affiliate of the North American Association for Environmental Education.

**Time to renew your EEA membership?  
Check your mailing label for your membership expiration date.**



**EEA MEMBERSHIP FORM**

*Become a Member Today!*

Fill out this form and mail it along with a check to Elachee Nature Science Center at the address above.

**MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:**

**Quarterly Newsletter** – Provides educational resources, legislative updates, notice of workshops and events, grant opportunities, and much more.

**Annual Spring Conference and Fall Retreat** – Held at different sites throughout Georgia with guest speakers, workshops and field trips. A great opportunity to meet people and share.

**Sharing and Exchanging Exhibits** – The opportunity to find out and exchange exhibits from member organizations.

**The Georgia Environmental Education Teacher Resource Guide** – 132 pages of environmental education resources and learning opportunities in Georgia.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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- Membership Category:  Individual \$15
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E-mail articles to: Vicki Seastrom, seastrom@nwf.org, (404) 876-2602, ext. 223 or to Barbara McDonald, barmac@bigfoot.com, (706) 559-4224.

**Coming in the next issue,  
registration information for**

**2002 EEA Conference  
March 22-24**

Unicoi State Park  
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