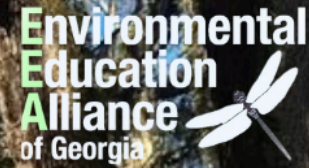


EEA 2026 Conference Program and Schedule



2026 EEA CONFERENCE

"WILD about the Future of EE"

Get **connected, prepared, and inspired** at Georgia's largest and most exciting conference for leaders in the fields of outdoor education, community science, environmental stewardship, 3-dimensional K-12 science, and teacher prep.

March 26-28, 2026

Kendeda Bldg / Georgia Tech

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Conference Strand Color Coding

	All-Conference Sessions
	Nature Engagement
	Conservation
	3-D Science, STEAM, PBL
	ATEEG certification

WEDNESDAY at a Glance: Pre-Conference Workshops on Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Time	Auditorium Rm 152	Upstairs Classroom 210	Upstairs Classroom 230
8:30 - 4:00	Silent Auction and Conference Set Up	ATEEG EE Certification Course: Assessment and Evaluation ATEEG Instructors	3-D Science STEAM & PBL Workshop Reagan Biwott

WEDNESDAY March 25, 2026 Session Descriptions

WED	Session Title and Description	Presenter(s) and Bio(s)
8:30 - 4:00	<p>3-D Science and STEM Outdoors Workshop - Metro RESA This immersive workshop will engage educators in what high-quality, three-dimensional outdoor STEM instruction looks and feels like—so you can design and implement similar experiences in your own classroom, campus, or community setting. AND you will leave with free curriculum resources as a Project WET certified educator! FEE: \$49, payable on the EEA Add-Ons Registration form. REGISTER HERE for this Wednesday March 25 event.</p>	<p>Dr. Reagan Biwott, Metro Atlanta RESA Is an educator of nearly three decades who is passionate about integrated and inclusive learning. A former science teacher, academic coach, and professor, Reagan now serves as a Professional Learning Specialist at MRESA where she partners with Atlanta-area K-12, higher ed and informal science institutions to support learning in ways that nurture curiosity, connection, and real-world experiences through facilitation of on-site and job-embedded professional learning for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) educators. As a culturally proficient coach, trainer, and facilitator, Reagan also partners with organizations across the U.S. to cultivate internal workplaces and external service practices rooted in true belonging. She is currently serving as the Vice-Chair of the EEA board of directors.</p>
8:30 - 4:00	<p>Assessment and Evaluation Workshop - ATEEG instructors This all-day workshop is intended for participants pursuing Environmental Educator Certification through EEA’s nationally-accredited ATEEG program. The in-person workshop is part of a course that includes online modules that must also be completed. Three ATEEG courses, a capstone (independent) project, and 30 hours of continuing education are required for certification. FEE: \$180, payable on the EEA Add-Ons Registration form. REGISTER HERE for this Wednesday March 25 event.</p>	<p>ATEEG Instructor Corps</p>

THURSDAY Schedule At a Glance - EEA Conference March 26, 2026

Locations	Auditorium Room 152	Seminar Room 118	Upstairs Classroom 210	Upstairs Classroom 230
8:30	Welcome & Conference Kick-Off			
9:00 - 12:00	Climate & Wildlife Workshop Kim Morris-Zarneke	Skills for Connecting to Nature Naomi Thompson	Dunwoody Nature Center Stream/Wetland Restoration & Boardwalk Javier Sayago	The Beauty Project: Experiential Learning at the Intersection of Art and Nature Nicole Adkins
		Creative Skill Building Naomi Thompson	Teaching Beyond the Classroom: Using Place as a Living Learning Lab Dajawn Williams	
11:00 - 12:00		Intro to ATEEG Trish Foster & ATEEG Grads		Native Plants: The Real Reason is... Charlie Monroe
12:00 - 2:00	Keynote Luncheon Georgia's bipartisan Outdoor Learning Initiatives			
2:00- 3:00	GOLD Grantee Showcase Sarah Bell, Sean Splawski, Tonelle Price	ATEEG Project Showcase: Empowering Environmental Educators through Community ATEEG Grads	Think Like a Ranger: Real-World Learning Through the DeKalb County Junior Ranger Program Jonah McDonald, Tasha Messer	A Wild Lens: Incorporating Nature photography as a Tool to Engage Students and Develop Scientific Research Skills Alex Troutman
3:00 - 4:00	Animals Who Plant the Planet: Hands-On Explorations of Plant-Animal Partnerships Rachel Beltran, Jess Wackerman			
4:00- 5:00	Ugly Butterfly performance Announcements, Door Prizes, Silent Auction Bidding			
5:00-7:00	Rush Hour Hang Social / Games / Auction Bidding / Snacks			

THURSDAY Morning March 26, 2026 Session Descriptions

THURS	Session Title and Description	Presenter(s) and Bio(s)
9:00 - 12:00	<p>Climate and Wildlife Workshop Climate change is a complex topic that can be intimidating to teach. However, understanding climate, including the ways it is changing and how that impacts the environment, is crucial to making informed decisions and building resilience. This session will introduce activities from Project WILD's Climate and Wildlife Module to equip educators with resources that build student interest and relevance to climate change.</p>	<p>Kim Morris-Zarneke, GA Dept of Natural Resources is the State Coordinator for Project WILD and has conducted over 150 professional development workshops for educators (formal and nonformal) over the last 25 years. She has led workshops on environmental literacy, foster learning, climate change, Georgia's natural resources and ecoregions, water quality, biodiversity, robotics, and oceanography. Kim works for Georgia Department of Natural Resources as Sr. Program Manager of the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center.</p>
9:00 - 10:00	<p>Skills for Connecting to Nature Learn from an Occupational Therapist how to adapt the environment and the task to foster successful nature experiences for all. Presentation includes case studies with takeaway tips and book giveaways.</p>	<p>Naomi Thompson, ATEEG Instructor has been teaching and mentoring with ATEEG for over 10 years, showing educators best practices in environmental education.</p> <p>Laura Martucci has been practicing occupational therapy for over 20 years. Laura is a certified sensory integration therapist and has worked in settings including hospitals, school systems, home care, and private clinics. Since 2007 she has been the Director of Occupational Therapy at CommuniKids, a speech language and occupational therapy business.</p>
9:00 - 10:00	<p>Stream / Wetland Restoration & Boardwalk at Dunwoody Nature Center A section of Nancy Creek was restored to more natural conditions involving stream and wetland stabilization, as well as construction of an aerial boardwalk to overlook the stream and the wetland. Four access points allow pedestrians and the general public to access the boardwalk, the stream, and the wetland.</p>	<p>Javier Santiago, Lowe Engineers (Conference Sponsor) Javier Sayago is a stormwater professional with 10 years of experience in the field and is now working in several green infrastructure and low impact development.</p>
9:00 - 11:00	<p>The Beauty Project: Experiential Learning at the Intersection of Art and Nature Explore how immersive theatre and storytelling can deepen connections to nature, community, and self in "The Beauty Project: Through the Looking Glass," a site-specific performance created with KSU students and local 5th graders. Participants will experience strategies for integrating art, sensory exploration, and reflection into environmental education, fostering empathy, observation, and stewardship in learners of all ages. The session highlights trauma-informed, body-positive, student-centered approaches that model care for selves and the world.</p>	<p>Nicole Adkins, Kennesaw State University is an award-winning playwright, teaching artist, Literary & Education Director at Discovery Stage Company. She teaches at Kennesaw State Univ and Hollins University's Playwright's Lab. Co-author of Playwriting and Young Audiences: Collected Wisdom & Practical Advice from the Field (2017), her nature-inspired plays have been produced in theatres, schools, museums, gardens, and hospitals. A certified Master Naturalist, Pollinator Steward, and Body Positive Facilitator, Nicole is passionate about ecology, community, and theatre.</p> <p>Emily Kitchens Assistant Professor of Acting, Kennesaw State University Vanita Keswani Education and Exhibits Manager, Smith-Gilbert Gardens</p>
10:00 - 11:00	<p>Creative Skill Building One way to help students understand the story of complex environmental issues is to foster their creative expression. Discover techniques for developing student critical thinking skills, as well as sense of place. Then sit down with paint or watercolor to create your own environmental issue artwork.</p>	<p>Naomi Thompson, ATEEG Instructor has been an instructor and mentor for the Advanced Training for EE in Georgia for over 14 years. She has attended and presented at Georgia Council for Social Studies Conferences for 10 years and led a coastal history teacher workshop for 5 years.</p> <p>Kenzie Thompson has painted for over 8 years using acrylics and watercolors. She finds it more calming to focus her work on natural landscapes. She's attended classes at The Sketching Pad and High Museum of Art. She is an Environmental Science major at Berry College.</p>

<p>10:00 - 12:00</p>	<p>Teaching Beyond the Classroom: Using Place as a Living Learning Lab This session will equip environmental educators with practical strategies for transforming greenspaces and outdoor environments into Living Learning Labs. Participants will explore how hands-on, place-based learning can align with Georgia curriculum standards while actively engaging learners in meaningful stewardship work that addresses real environmental challenges. Emphasis will be placed on designing experiences that not only educate, but also build long-term momentum, ownership, and sustainable impact within these spaces.</p>	<p>Dajawn Williams, KSU Sustainability Office and EcoAddendum is an environmental educator and restoration practitioner with extensive experience designing and leading place-based learning initiatives across school campuses, public parks, and community greenspaces throughout Metro Atlanta. His work bridges formal and informal education through hands-on stewardship projects that align academic standards with real-world environmental problem-solving, emphasizing long-term engagement and community ownership. Drawing from roles in conservation, nonprofit leadership, and workforce development, he brings a practical, field-tested perspective on how Living Learning Labs can function as dynamic spaces for education, action, impact.</p>
<p>11:00 - 12:00</p>	<p>Intro to ATEEG Certification for Environmental Educators Learn about EEA's nationally-accredited certification program and discover how you can begin your journey toward certification and recognition as a leader in the field. Certification requires completion of three courses (including online modules and in-person workshop days) along with a capstone project and 30 hours of continuing education. This program is based on the Guidelines for Excellence in Environmental Education.</p>	<p>Trish Foster, ATEEG Program Administrator works with ATEEG certification-candidates and instructors supporting EEA's nationally-accredited, professional EE certification program in Georgia.</p>
<p>11:00 - 12:00</p>	<p>Native Plants: The Real Reason is. . . This presentation highlights the environmental and financial benefits of installing native plants. Strategies will be discussed for attracting beneficial insects, managing moist soils, reducing erosion, and providing ground cover. Outcomes can include using less fertilizers, conserving water, and reducing labor costs, while supporting wildlife and pollinators, improving biodiversity and soil health, and reducing pollution.</p>	<p>Charlie Monroe, Cobb County Parks, GNPS is a native of Bainbridge, Georgia. He is a former board member and past President of the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA). He serves on the state board of the Georgia Native Plant Society. He is a Certified Arborist, a graduate of the University of Georgia with a BS in Biology and a Masters in Agricultural Leadership. He is a U.S. Veteran, a former Extension Agent, and a Master Gardener. He is a die-hard Georgia Bull-Dawg Fan and a self-proclaimed, "Nature Geek" who believes in connecting people to nature and promoting environmental stewardship.</p>
<p>12:00 - 2:00</p>	<p>Lunch and Keynote Address</p> <p>Senator Rahman was the Chair of the Senate Study Committee on Outdoor Learning, which recommended the creation of GOLD Grants for outdoor learning, now in their 4th year. Senator Rahman - along with Senator Bo Hatchett and Representative Soo Hong - sponsored the Outdoor Learning Spaces Pilot Project, which passed with unanimous, bipartisan support. Senator Sheikh Rahman was elected to the Georgia State Senate in 2018. He serves Georgia's 5th Senate District which covers portions of Gwinnett County--Georgia's most diverse county. Sen. Rahman is the first immigrant and first Asian American to serve in the Georgia State Senate, the first Muslim Georgia Legislator, and the former Chairman of the Gwinnett Senate Delegation. He currently serves as a member of the Senate Committees on Appropriations, Economic Development and Tourism, Government Oversight, Natural Resources and the Environment and Urban Affairs. Sen. Rahman grew up in Bangladesh, where his country was devastated by the Bangladesh Liberation War of Independence in 1971. At age 13, he was kidnapped at gunpoint as a prisoner of war. In 1981, after graduating from high school, Sen. Rahman came to America to attend Central Piedmont Community College and worked as a dishwasher making \$3.35/ hour. In 1995, after a 14-year process, Sen. Rahman became a U.S. citizen and finished his degree in Economics and Global Studies at University of Georgia.</p> <p>Senator Hatchett has served in the Georgia State Senate since 2020. He represents Senate District 50, which includes Banks, Franklin, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and Towns counties, as well as portions of Hall, Jackson and White counties. Senator Hatchett serves as Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Children and Families and Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Reapportionment and Redistricting, and serves on the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Ethics, Health and Human Services, and Judiciary, as well as an Ex-Officio member of the Senate Committee on Education and Youth. Senator Hatchett is a native of Habersham County and graduate of Habersham Central. He received his undergraduate degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology and his law degree from the University of Georgia. Sen. Hatchett currently serves as an Administration Floor Leader for Governor Brian Kemp, and has done so since 2021.</p>	

THURSDAY Afternoon March 26, 2026 Session Descriptions

THURS	Session Title and Description	Presenter(s) and Bio(s)
2:00 - 3:00	<p>GOLD Grantee Outdoor Learning Showcase The three presenters are all GOLD Grant recipients who will share information about their projects and insights they gained regarding outdoor learning. Each of the grant-funded projects is significantly different from the others.</p> <p>Elachee Nature Science Center - a non-profit organization - was awarded a grant to support standards based outdoor learning experiences for students on field trips.</p> <p>Mableton Elementary - a public school in Cobb County - was awarded a grant to engage students in garden-based learning.</p> <p>Georgia Cyber Academy - a public state-wide virtual school - was awarded a grant to pair real-world field trips and nature immersion with online learning activities.</p>	<p>Sarah Bell, Elachee Nature Science Center is the former Deputy Superintendent for the Gainesville City School System and CEO of the Elachee Nature Science Center. A long-time resident of Gainesville, Bell began her career as a teacher, having graduated from Gainesville High School, the University of Georgia, Piedmont College and The University of North Georgia.</p> <p>Sean Splawski, Kemp Elementary STEM Lab Is an elementary school STEM Lab Coordinator. He is also the founder of Eduscize, a research-based curriculum that turns an ordinary classroom into a fun, engaging, learning environment that promotes the health and well-being of children through standards-based kinesthetic learning.</p> <p>Tonette Price, Georgia Cyber Academy Is Assistant Director of Community Partnerships for Georgia Cyber Academy, where she builds partnerships with museums, historic sites, colleges and businesses across the state. She supports grades K-12 with programming and opportunities for students to attend educational classes, field trips, and participate in community service to enhance their academics and wellness.</p>
2:00 - 3:00	<p>ATEEG Showcase: Empowering Environmental Educators thru Community This session will include several presentations given by ATEEG Certified Environmental Educators and the ATEEG 2026 graduates, highlighting EE programs and studies that each have done in the past year with a variety of audiences with successful outcomes.</p>	<p>Laila Hudda, EPA Region 4 Heather Hayes, Forsyth County Schools Rachael Osbourne, Columbia County Environmental Programs Trish Foster, ATEEG Program Administrator Naomi Thompson, ATEEG Instructor</p>
2:00 - 3:00	<p>Think Like a Ranger: Real-World Learning Through the DeKalb County Junior Ranger Program Think Like a Ranger is a highly interactive workshop that demonstrates how the DeKalb County Junior Ranger Program can be used by schools as a real-world learning experience across classrooms, schoolyards, clubs, and community spaces.</p>	<p>Jonah McDonald and Tasha Messer, DeKalb County Parks serve DeKalb County as Parks Naturalists. Together, they implement the DeKalb County Junior Ranger Program with individual families, youth groups, and schools. McDonald is the creator of the DeKalb Junior Ranger Program and Messer was a long-time elementary teacher before being hired by DeKalb County. Together, they bring all the skills of Naturalist and Teacher to this workshop designed to knit together the worlds of informal and formal educators.</p>
2:00 - 3:00	<p>A Wild Lens: Incorporating Nature Photography as a Tool to Engage Students and Develop Scientific Research Skills This presentation will take educators through an introduction into nature photography and how it can be used to further develop scientific research skills such as observation, data collection, classification, and experiment design.</p>	<p>Alex Troutman, N8ture AL Alex Troutman, also known as N8ture AL, is an author (Critters : Pocket guide to animals of your state), wildlife biologist, environmental and social justice advocate, and science communicator. He has several years of experience in the field, working with various wildlife species including endangered species like Kemp's ridley (<i>Lepidochelys kempii</i>) sea turtles and Karner Blue butterflies (<i>Lycaeides melissa samuelis</i>). Alex shares wildlife facts and photos on social media as N8ture AL, in his free time Alex enjoys using his passion for nature to encourage youth and beginners to enjoy the outdoors. leading events that help engage individuals into nature. These events range from birding, teaching individuals how to fish, engaging individuals in hunting, and leading nature walks.</p>

<p>3:00 - 4:00</p>	<p>Animals Who Plant the Planet: Hands-On Explorations of Plant-Animal Partnerships Plants and animals depend on each other in surprising ways, from pollination to seed dispersal. Experience first-hand how Zoo Atlanta and Metro Atlanta Title 1 schools are partnering through GOLD grants to engage students in hands-on investigations, live animal encounters, and field experiences that explore these ecological connections. After live animal encounters with seed-spreading animal ambassadors, session participants will try hands-on activities like creating seed bombs and bug hotels you can take home while gaining ideas for bringing plant-animal relationship lessons to your own learners.</p>	<p>Jess Wackerman, Zoo Atlanta has worked for 18 years as a science teacher, encouraging students to observe and ask questions by exploring local ecosystems. By designing lessons that resulted in revitalizing nature trails, growing food in school gardens, and planting natives for native wildlife. Now, as a curriculum and program writer at Zoo Atlanta, Jess creates immersive experiences that inspire visitors to take conservation action.</p> <p>Rachel Beltran, Zoo Atlanta has dedicated her career to connecting people to the outdoors and nature while inspiring conservation action. With professional experiences ranging from naturalist to wilderness guide to preschool science teacher, Rachel has spent the past 3+ years as the Manager of School and Family Programs at Zoo Atlanta, overseeing school trips, camps, family programming, and teacher professional development.</p>
<p>3:00 - 4:00</p>	<p>ATEEG Showcase: Empowering Environmental Educators thru Community This session will include several presentations given by ATEEG Certified Environmental Educators and the ATEEG 2026 graduates, highlighting EE programs and studies that each have done in the past year with a variety of audiences with successful outcomes.</p>	<p>Laila Hudda, EPA Region 4 Heather Hayes, Forsyth County Schools Rachael Osbourne, Columbia County Environmental Programs Trish Foster, ATEEG Program Administrator Naomi Thompson, ATEEG Instructor</p>
<p>4:00 - 5:00</p>	<p>The Ugly Butterfly Adapted from the children’s book by local author Jessica Rosa Espinoza, with a lively score by Katie Berger Wood, The Ugly Butterfly is a 30-minute STEM-based musical for early elementary audiences that will be performed for EEA conference participants. Following a young caterpillar whose egg is displaced in a storm, the performance explores life cycles, friendship, and the interdependence of organisms within an ecosystem. Attendees will experience a model of engaging, curriculum-connected theatre that celebrates biodiversity and the unique contributions each creature makes to our natural world. https://discoverystage.org/the-ugly-butterfly/</p>	<p>performance by Discovery Stage Company Discovery Stage Company is a professional theatre company dedicated to producing interactive, engaging theatre for young audiences and families in Cobb County and Greater Atlanta. We invite kids (and their grown-ups) of all ages to imagine, grow, play, and connect as a community; and create theatre experiences that step out of the box of traditional theatre and cover a variety of themes, styles, and forms to promote imagination, connection, empathy and emotional intelligence, and a love for the performing arts.</p> <p>Jodye Underwood, Founding Artistic Director Dr. Porntip Twishime, Board Secretary Dr. Jessica Rosa Espinoza, Arts Integration Specialist; Author, The Ugly Butterfly Nicole Adkins, Kennesaw State University Professor, Playwright</p>
<p>5:00 - 7:00+</p>	<p>Rush Hour Hang If you’ve lived in the Atlanta area very long, you have probably experienced the phenomenon of leaving later and arriving at virtually the same time as someone who drove during rush hour. Avoid a crowded commute and join the fun at a social that includes games, pizza, and festivities. Free.</p>	<p>EEA Board Members and Staff</p>

FRIDAY Schedule at a Glance: EEA Conference Program March 27, 2026

Locations	Auditorium Room 152	Upstairs Classroom 210	Upstairs Classroom 230
8:00	Exhibits / Silent Auction Bidding		
8:30 - 8:55	Welcome and Conference Kick Off		
9:00 – 9:55	Campus Wildlife Habitat STEM Lab Ranger Jerry Hightower	STEM in the Garden Sureka Taylor, Dian Aceves-Amaya	Education and Outreach as Catalysts: How Amphibian Foundation Fuels Conservation through Community Engagement Mark Mandica
10:00 – 10:55			
11:00 – 12:55	EEA Awards Luncheon + Silent Auction Bidding (ends at 1:00)		
1:00 – 1:55	GA Aquarium’s Mountain Stream to Ocean Dream: Rivers to Reef Prisilla Zazueta + Zoo Atlanta’s Wings of Inquiry Rachel Beltran, Jess Wackerman	Integrating National Parks into the Classroom: A Pathway to Environmental Advocacy Zana Pouncey	Be a Habitat Hero Susan Meyers, Mary Beth Cary
2:00 – 2:55	Planting Seeds of Curiosity: Nature Engagement Through School Gardens Dr. Joseph Wang	WAWA’s 5-Point Pedagogy for Dynamic Programs & Activations Anamarie Ngala-Bey, Chanté Lively	Mindfulness for Outdoor Learning Penny Hightower
3:00 - 3:30	Silent Auction Results / All-Conference Session in Auditorium		
3:30 - 6:00	Best Practices in Outdoor Learning: a 3-D Science Interactive Workshop with certificate option		

FRIDAY Morning Session Descriptions March 27, 2026

FRI	Session Title and Description	Presenter(s) and Bio(s)
9:00 - 11:00	<p>Campus Wildlife Habitat STEM Lab Participants will learn how to turn their campus into a wildlife habitat outdoor STEM learning area. Outdoor wildlife habitat areas serve as the bridge between the textbook and the real world. This session covers evaluating and inventorying, planning and diversifying, creating and developing, prioritizing projects, and uses technology to document, map, and identify various natural resources within your habitat.</p>	<p>Jerry Hightower, Chattahoochee National Recreation Area discovered very early in life that the natural world was the best classroom. Throughout his early life the fields and forests, streams and wetlands of the Chattahoochee River Corridor north of Atlanta nurtured a joy for discovery and learning. Today this nationally recognized naturalist and environmental educator shares this joy through educator training and gardening for wildlife workshops throughout the southeast. He works with dozens of agencies and organizations and thousands of schools. Volunteering with the Georgia and National Wildlife Federations, Jerry pioneered the Wildlife Habitat Certification Program in Georgia and initiated the effort to create Wildlife Habitats as learning centers on school campuses. Jerry and educator Mary "Petey" Giroux developed and implemented the first statewide environmental education program adopted by the Georgia PTA, which included the creation of Wildlife Sanctuary Outdoor Learning Areas. As a result of these efforts, students in Georgia and throughout the southeast can experience the joys of learning in outdoor wildlife discovery areas.</p> <p>Penny Hightower, Advanced Master in Korean Qi gong and Dahn Moo Do is a Master Naturalist, a Certified Interpretive Guide, a forest therapy guide, and an award winning volunteer naturalist and environmental educator with the National Park Service. Penny received her Master of Education at Tufts University.</p>
9:00 - 11:00	<p>STEM in the Garden Come discover the possibilities of STEM in a (school) garden. Let us share with you the success stories of our scholars in designing, building, planting, harvesting, cooking, and even community involvement all revolving around our school garden. Come ready to cook/sample some of our produce from the garden!</p>	<p>Sureka Taylor, Champion Theme Middle School is a middle school science teacher with over two decades of teaching experience. She has experience in presenting garden themed sessions at the GSTA conferences and has further facilitated other environmental themed PL sessions for teachers. She has further been one of the science PL facilitators for DeKalb County's New Hires' PL sessions. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Teaching and Learning with a concentration in Science Education.</p> <p>Dian Aceves-Amaya, Champion Theme Middle School is a middle school educator (ELA) who is experienced in effortlessly incorporating STEM into her ELA lessons. Many think that she is a science teacher due to her scholars designing, building, and cooking in her ELA classes in addition to raising fish in the classroom via their hydroponics systems. She is pursuing her PhD this semester.</p>
9:00 - 11:00	<p>Education and Outreach as Catalysts: How Amphibian Foundation Fuels Conservation through Community Engagement Mark Mandica, Executive Director and Co-founder of Amphibian Foundation, will provide an overview of the global amphibian extinction crisis and what is being done in the Southeast to conserve our most endangered species. Mark will highlight the significance of the education and outreach programs which fuel conservation science.</p>	<p>Mark Mandica, Amphibian Foundation is the Co-founder and Executive Director of Amphibian Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and conservation of amphibians. His work puts him on the front line in the efforts to conserve declining native and tropical amphibians. Mark received his B.S. from UMass (Amherst) where his thesis focused on the ephemeral wetland ecology of amphibians. He then went on to the American Museum of Natural History in NY where he worked as a Curatorial Assistant before moving to South Florida for graduate school at UMiami. Mark's M.Sc. explored amphibian community ecology in the Everglades, photoreception related activity patterns in South Florida toads, and prey detection and feeding mechanics of aquatic frogs. Mark is a professional scientific illustrator, published in textbooks as well as the journals Science, Nature, Journal of Experimental Biology, Zoology, American Zoologist.</p> <p>Tess Yaney, Amphibian Foundation Is the new Programs Manager for the Amphibian Foundation.</p>
FRI	AWARDS LUNCHEON	

FRIDAY Afternoon Session Descriptions March 27, 2026

<p>1:00 - 2:00</p>	<p>GA Aquarium - Mountain Stream to Ocean Dream: Rivers to Reef This session showcases a statewide, immersive professional learning model that brings teachers from all corners of Georgia into direct relationship with the natural environment. In collaboration with Kennesaw State University, the program provides research demonstrating how these hands-on, place-based experiences translate into more outdoor instruction, environmental inquiry, and real-world learning in classrooms across the state. The program also equips teachers with the skills and confidence to lead nature-based learning, ultimately helping cultivate the next generation of environmental stewards. Applications open through April 17.</p> <p>Zoo Atlanta - Wings of Inquiry Zoo Atlanta's Conservation in Action posters are free to educators. This year's poster addresses the decline of bird populations and the collaborative effort to save species. The Motus Wildlife Tracking System connects researchers, educators and students to data that drives solutions.</p>	<p>Prisilla Zazueta, Georgia Aquarium is the Assistant Manager of Curriculum, Instruction, & Programming at Georgia Aquarium, with over six years of experience in aquarium education. She oversees onsite programming, community outreach, curriculum alignment, and professional development, with a strong focus on supporting and empowering educators. Throughout her time at Georgia Aquarium, she helped establish and develop a variety of programs. Prisilla is inspired by the expanding role of aquariums and zoos as trusted educational resources in formal education and in shaping future environmental stewards.</p> <p>Jess Wackerman, Zoo Atlanta has worked for 18 years as a science teacher, encouraging students to observe and ask questions by exploring local ecosystems. By designing lessons that resulted in revitalizing nature trails, growing food in school gardens, and planting natives for native wildlife. Now, as a curriculum and program writer at Zoo Atlanta, Jess creates immersive experiences that inspire conservation action.</p> <p>Rachel Beltran, Zoo Atlanta has dedicated her career to connecting people to the outdoors and nature while inspiring conservation action. With professional experiences ranging from naturalist to wilderness guide to preschool science teacher, Rachel has spent the past 3+ years as the Manager of School and Family Programs at Zoo Atlanta, overseeing school trips, camps, family programming, and teacher professional development.</p>
<p>1:00 - 2:00</p>	<p>Integrating National Parks into the Classroom: A Pathway to Environmental Advocacy You don't have to travel to Yosemite or Yellowstone to experience our National Park Service. In fact, you don't even have to leave the state of Georgia. Join the National Park Conservation Association in conversation on making the national parks a more welcoming and inclusive place for students of all demographics. Using the Georgia Standards of Excellence as a template, we will explore ways to engage youth with the National Park Service in Georgia, in the classroom and beyond.</p>	<p>Zana Pouncey, National Park Conservation Association is a native southerner and has lived in Atlanta for over ten years. Connecting people to nature is her calling. After graduating from Emory University with a degree in Environmental Science, Zana spent several years working in environmental advocacy and education for nonprofit organizations including Trees Atlanta, Zoo Atlanta, and the Atlanta Botanical Garden. She's been featured on National Geographic's education blog and is the co-author of the "Hiking Atlanta's Hidden Forests" book series. Currently, she's the Southeast Outreach and Engagement Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, working to bridge the gap between parks and people.</p>
<p>1:00 - 2:00</p>	<p>Be a Habitat Hero EEA's Monarchs Across GA (MAG) has adopted the Habitat Hero community science program, created to improve urban and suburban pollinator habitat. Patches and corridors of high-quality habitat help native pollinators thrive and navigate. Learn how the program distributes plants and tracks viability as we provide plants to become a gardener.</p>	<p>Susan Meyers, Monarchs Across Georgia is a retired science educator, a Georgia Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, Monarch Watch Conservation Specialist, and Pollinator Partnership-certified Pollinator Steward. She is the volunteer administrator of the Symbolic Monarch Migration, a partnership project between the Monarch Joint Venture and Monarchs Across Georgia, a committee of the nonprofit organization, the Environmental Education Alliance.</p> <p>Mary Beth Cary, Monarchs Across Georgia began learning about environmental education in 1995 after being charged with developing an outdoor classroom at Worth County Primary School, thus beginning a 30 year immersion in content knowledge, lesson development, and best practices for outdoor education as she spearheaded the development of a national award winning outdoor teaching area. After retirement, she began volunteering with Monarchs Across GA and is currently chair of the group.</p>

2:00 - 3:00	<p>Planting Seeds of Curiosity: Nature Engagement Thru School Gardens</p> <p>This presentation highlights the Garden Club at a Cobb elementary school as a model for fostering meaningful nature engagement through hands-on, outdoor learning experiences. Attendees will learn how school gardens can connect students of diverse backgrounds to nature while supporting academic learning, social-emotional growth, and environmental stewardship.</p>	<p>Dr. Joseph Wang, Cobb County Schools</p> <p>is the Student Support Coordinator at an elementary school in Smyrna, Georgia in the Cobb County School District. In this role, he works to create inclusive, hands-on learning opportunities that support students' academic growth, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. He leads the school Garden Club, where he integrates nature-based learning experiences that foster curiosity, collaboration, and environmental stewardship among students. Through the garden program, he supports meaningful connections between students and the natural world while reinforcing science concepts, responsibility, and community involvement. He is passionate about expanding access to outdoor education and sharing practical, school-based strategies that help students of all backgrounds engage with nature.</p>
2:00 - 3:00	<p>WAWA's 5-Point Pedagogy for Dynamic Programs & Activations</p> <p>At WAWA, we carve out unique pathways to connect people of all ages to nature. Through hands-on, place-based learning experiences, WAWA offers the community the chance to experience a connection to nature (through exposing them to their urban forests and watersheds) and their roles as stewards of it. In this interactive session, learn about how WAWA's five-point pedagogy (power of play, place-based learning, cultural relevance, inquiry instruction, and social constructivism) are rooted in our dynamic environmental education programs.</p>	<p>Anamarie Ngala-Bey, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance</p> <p>has worked closely with environmentally driven organizations for over 10 years to support and promote their mission through non-profit development, cooperative development, environmental education curriculum development, and strategic marketing and brand awareness. She joyfully brings creativity and resilience to the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance as the Deputy Director.</p> <p>Chanté Lively, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance</p> <p>is Environmental Education Manager for WAWA and a marine & environmental science educator. She is a graduate of Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, FL with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Biology and minors in Global Engagement and Spanish. Chanté focuses on cultural and place-based programs and firmly believes that the more people connect and relate with nature, the more they are willing to protect it.</p>
2:00 - 3:00	<p>Mindfulness for Outdoor Learning</p> <p>Discover the importance of mindfulness in your outdoor teaching with exercises in light stretching/ breathing followed by slowly walking paths connecting with nature, some Qi gong (similar to Tai Chi) to deepen our relaxation and connections to nature and ourselves.</p>	<p>Penny Hightower, Advanced Master in Korean Qi gong and Dahn Moo Do</p> <p>is a Master Naturalist, a Certified Interpretive Guide, a forest therapy guide, and an award winning volunteer naturalist and environmental educator with the National Park Service. Penny received her Master of Education at Tufts University. She has been an environmental consultant to the Boston Zoo, taught at the Harvard Museum of Natural History, and is on the education staff at Chattahoochee Nature Center. Ms. Hightower is an advanced master in Korean Qi gong, Dahn Moo Do, and has trained in Korea and Sedona, Arizona. Master Sun Sung (her Korean designation) has taught mindfulness and the Korean style of the disciplines of Tai Chi and Qi gong for two decades.</p>
3:30 - 6:00	<p>Best Practices in Outdoor Learning: a PBL 3-D Science Workshop</p> <p>Learn about research which shows that learning is more effective when it takes place outside. Discover ways to overcome obstacles and provide meaningful, productive outdoor learning experiences. Consider what resources and amenities are needed to transform schoolyards into inspiring settings for learning. Try out instructional strategies that integrate outdoor learning with the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Gain access to free, vetted, and engaging lessons for teaching outdoors. Be ready to implement best practices in outdoor learning with your students this spring. This workshop is offered for free and includes free access to an online course which - together with the workshop - can result in an Outdoor Learning Instructor certificate.</p>	<p>Karan Wood, Environmental Education Alliance</p> <p>has been Executive Director of the Environmental Education Alliance for six years, and leads the organization in its efforts to ensure that every Georgia child will have opportunities to grow up being a problem-solver who is connected to nature, knowledgeable about the environment, motivated to protect the earth, and empowered to create a sustainable future. Karan's previous experience includes serving as Director of the Captain Planet Foundation Institute, Executive Director of Greater Atlanta Conservation Corps, Editor of model environmental education lessons for Georgia Department of Education, Assistant to the Superintendent of Texas Parks and Wildlife, and Special Resources Director for Houston Parks and Recreation. Her background is in Natural Resources Management at University of Michigan.</p>

SATURDAY At a Glance: March 28, 2026 - Field Sessions & Stewardship Projects

	NO SESSION AT KENDEDA BUILDING / PARTICIPANTS MEET AT PROJECT SITES / REGISTER HERE FOR THESE ADD-ON SESSIONS	
9:00 – Noon	Exploring Tiny Monsters at Sibley Pond Jerry Hightower, National Park Service	Tree Planting Pittsburgh community Starr Whitten, Trees Atlanta

SATURDAY Session Descriptions

Time	Field Excursions and Stewardship Projects	Presenter
9am-12pm	<p>Tiny Monsters Lurking in the Pond Educators will experience first-hand the methods for the National Park service's very successful pond water investigations at Sibley Pond. Using nets, trays, tubs, microscopes and more, participants will discover the amazing macroinvertebrate and macrovertebrate life in an aquatic community.</p> <p>FEE: This event is free. Park entrance pass (\$5 daily or \$40 annual) required. Purchase a pass online at nps.gov/chat/planyourvisit/fees.htm</p> <p>LOCATION: Sibley Pond, Sope Creek Unit - Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area 3670 Paper Mill Road Marietta, Georgia 30067 From the parking lot follow the old farm road down the hill to Sibley Pond.</p> <p>REGISTER HERE for this Saturday March 28 event.</p>	<p>Jerry Hightower, National Park Service discovered very early in life that the natural world was the best classroom. Throughout his early life the fields and forests, streams and wetlands of the Chattahoochee River Corridor north of Atlanta nurtured a joy for discovery and learning. Today this nationally recognized naturalist and environmental educator shares this joy through educator training and gardening for wildlife workshops throughout the southeast. He works with dozens of agencies and organizations and thousands of schools.</p> <p>Hightower has been recognized with awards from Project WILD, Project WET, as well as from agencies, organizations, and educational institutions nationwide. Additionally he has received environmental education lifetime achievement awards from the Environmental Education Alliance and the Georgia PTA, both in the same year.</p> <p>The U.S. National Park Service presented him with the 75th Anniversary Outstanding Ranger Award for the Southeast Region. The Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy has created the Hightower award to honor persons that have contributed significantly to the Chattahoochee River. President Jimmy Carter was the 2025 posthumous recipient. The National Park Service at the Chattahoochee River has been his employer for 48 years where he serves as Senior Naturalist and Environmental Education Coordinator. However, Jerry has been active in environmental education for over 55 years.</p>
9am-12pm	<p>Tree Planting Project with Trees Atlanta: Planting in Pittsburgh Since its founding in 1985, Trees Atlanta has planted over 180,000 trees. Trees are planted along neighborhood streets and front yards, in schoolyards, and in city parks, as well as the Atlanta Beltline Arboretum. Every year, Trees Atlanta plants over 9,000 trees with the help of thousands of volunteers and community members. Come participate in a tree planting to be part of an effective environmental stewardship project; learn how to increase survivability; and gain insights into how such events are effectively organized.</p> <p>LOCATION: This event will take place in Atlanta in the Pittsburgh neighborhood. Register to receive more information.</p> <p>REGISTER HERE for this Saturday March 28 event.</p>	<p>Starr Whitten, Trees Atlanta recognizes the importance of passionate educators in environmental science. For him, pursuing a career in environmental education was a natural progression from a childhood spent exploring the wonders of the outdoors. As Trees Atlanta's Education Manager, Starr's passion shines through as he develops fun and informative environmental education programs for children. At the heart of his role is planning the Junior TreeKeeper Summer Camp.</p>