



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

FS-879

March 2007

Conservation Education Strategic Plan To Advance Environmental Literacy *2007-2012*



Forest Service Mission

Sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of current and future generations.

Forest Service Values

The Forest Service...

- ... cares for the Nation's forests and grasslands;
- ... values the varied skills and contributions of a diverse workforce;
- ... strives for accountability by every employee for the efficient management of the capital resources they use;
- ... is responsive to local publics; and
- ... is focused on the needs of future generations.



Introduction

Since its establishment in 1905, the Forest Service has recognized a role and responsibility to educate people about management and conservation of our Nation's forests and grasslands. Increasing youth and adult knowledge of—and environmental literacy about—forests and natural resources continues to be critical to the accomplishment of the Forest Service mission today.

Providing Environmental Literacy

The Forest Service provides expertise in science, land management, and outdoor experiences as the foundation for environmental literacy efforts. There are a variety of venues for these efforts.

The agency provides many conservation education activities and programs through its three branches: State and Private Forestry, Research and Development, and National Forest System. These efforts reach and educate people of a variety of ages. Private landowners, local community leaders, elected officials, forest visitors, homeowners, and students are among the audiences.

Focusing Educational Efforts

The Forest Service Conservation Education Program focuses its specific educational efforts on children (pre-kindergarten through 12th grade) and their educators in both classroom and informal settings. It also coordinates with other Forest Service educational programs directed toward adults to ensure continuity and consistency of education materials from childhood to adulthood. See Appendix 1 for definitions of programs.

Conservation Education Program staff work with many internal and external partners to coordinate, develop, and deliver educational programs and materials. These partners include in-house programs plus State, tribal, and local agencies; nonprofit organizations; and the interagency Service First aligned services partnership between the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, among many others. The roles and responsibilities of internal partners are highlighted in Appendix 2 .

This *Conservation Education Strategic Plan To Advance Environmental Literacy* was developed with assistance from those internal and external partners, who collectively have over a thousand years of experience in conservation education.

The Conservation Education strategic plan is consistent with Forest Service national strategic goals and objectives. It identifies specific goals, objectives, and means and strategies to guide the Forest Service Conservation Education Program through 2012.

Agency Contributions to Environmental Literacy

Conservation education programs are delivered internally and externally at every level of the organization through the State and Private Forestry, National Forest Systems, and Research and Development branches.



Environmental Literacy

“A person is environmentally literate when they have the knowledge of environmental processes and issues needed to make informed decisions and participate in civic affairs.”

National Environmental
Education and Training Foundation and
Environmental Literacy Council



Vision for the Conservation Education Program

The Forest Service plays an effective role in developing an environmentally literate citizenry to sustain our Nation's forests and grasslands, public or private, for future generations, and to develop the next generation of conservation leaders.

In fostering environmental literacy about forests, grasslands, and related natural resources, the Conservation Education Program:

- **Recognizes** that ecosystems are dynamic, that humans are an integral part of ecosystems, and that human activity has both positive and negative consequences;
- **Aligns** with the Forest Service mission and long-term strategic goals;
- **Coordinates** and supports delivery of conservation education programs with internal and external partners;
- **Reaches** a broad range of students and formal and nonformal educators in rural, urban, traditional, and underserved populations;
- **Employs** best educational practices based on science and technology research and established educational guidelines;
- **Uses** the Nation's forests, grasslands, and experimental forests as opportunities for outdoor education to teach fundamental environmental processes across many disciplines, and encourages place-based education;
- **Encourages** consumer behaviors that sustain natural resources and minimize negative consequences to the environment; and
- **Incorporates** Forest Service science in conservation education programs and products.

Mission of the Conservation Education Program

The Conservation Education Program works with partners to coordinate development and delivery of high-quality, science-based education about forests, grasslands, and related natural resources to pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students and their educators, in both formal and nonformal settings.

Goals and Objectives

The Framework

This strategic plan sets the framework for the Forest Service's national Conservation Education Program, and for development of conservation education workplans at the national and field levels.

To facilitate effective communication among the varied conservation education efforts and activities in Forest Service branches, and to foster the value of conservation education, this strategic plan establishes an internal Conservation Education Council.

The strategic planning effort included the development of a logic model that defines outputs and outcomes for each objective.

Goal 1: Coordinate the development and delivery of high-quality conservation education programs and materials.

Objective 1.1:

Ensure the availability and distribution of high-quality conservation education programs and materials about forest and grassland ecosystems and their management and conservation to pre-kindergarten through 12th grade youth and educators in formal and nonformal settings.

Means and Strategies

1.1.1. Catalog and analyze current conservation education materials/ programs used by Forest Service personnel.

1.1.2. Ensure that educational programs and materials developed or certified by the Forest Service incorporate the best scientific knowledge; are interdisciplinary and unbiased; support the Forest Service mission; and are correlated with appropriate national, State, and agency guidelines.



***“Reducing that deficit—
healing the broken bond
between our young and
nature—is in our self
interest, not only because
aesthetics or justice de-
mands it, but also because
our mental, physical, and
spiritual health depends
upon it. The health of the
Earth is at stake as well.”***

Richard Louv—*“Last Child in the
Woods— Saving our Children from
Nature-Deficit Disorder”*



1.1.3. Support training and professional development in conservation education for Forest Service personnel, volunteers, nonformal educators, and teachers.

1.1.4. Support professional development in conservation education for future educators through partnerships with institutions of higher education.

1.1.5. Identify and support service learning opportunities for educators and classes.

1.1.6. Infuse Forest Service-based educational resources (curricula, materials, Web sites, etc.) into professional development programs for educators/teachers that are offered by the agency and its partners.

Objective 1.2:

Improve access to Forest Service resources and information.

Means and Strategies

1.2.1. Disseminate Forest Service educational materials and information through educational and scientific organizations.

1.2.2. Renew and update Forest Service conservation education Web sites, including links to partners, to ensure customer service.

1.2.3. Use accessible community outreach, mass media, public programming, Spanish and other language media, the Internet, and other new technologies to increase access to Forest Service educational resources by students and educators, including underserved audiences.

Objective 1.3:

Ensure that the Conservation Education Program supports and enhances the ability of Forest Service employees to achieve excellence in conservation education.

Means and Strategies

1.3.1. Identify basic competencies appropriate at each level and position description and develop a comprehensive conservation education training program for Forest Service employees.

1.3.2. Provide long-term professional development opportunities for conservation education staff within the Forest Service.

1.3.3. Develop tools to improve communications and networking among Conservation Education staff and all branches and levels of the Forest Service.

Goal 2: Provide strong leadership to and management of the Forest Service Conservation Education Program.

Objective 2.1:

Elevate conservation education to mission-critical management status in the Forest Service.

Means and Strategies

2.1.1. Achieve a clear, coordinated message about Conservation Education's role in achieving the agency mission.

2.1.2. Demonstrate leadership support for conservation education by participation by the Chief and other agency leaders in high-profile conservation education efforts, such as Project Learning Tree events, Canon Envirothon, or Head Start Hispanic Institute.

2.1.3. Charter a Conservation Education Council with members from all Forest Service branches to facilitate effective communication among the agency's various environmental literacy programs and activities and to assist in fostering the value of conservation education within the agency.

2.1.4. Include conservation education performance elements in the Forest Service strategic plan.

2.1.5. Develop peer-to-peer leader champions who demonstrate how Conservation Education improves program outcomes and helps achieve the agency's mission.

Objective 2.2:

Ensure adequate resources and operational integrity to accomplish an effective and efficient Conservation Education Program at all levels of the agency.

Means and Strategies

2.2.1. Develop and implement a staffing strategy (position descriptions, career ladders, employee development, etc.) for Washington Office Conservation Education staff.

2.2.2. Identify staffing needs and roles and develop standardized position descriptions for professional education specialists at all levels of the agency.

2.2.3. Identify resource needs and potential sources, including grants and partnerships, to deliver a more effective Conservation Education Program

2.2.4. Advocate incorporation of Conservation Education into program direction at the station, area, and regional levels of the agency and into National Forest System forest planning efforts.

"...our most significant challenges and opportunities are to serve as a bridge between traditional visitors and the new faces of America—offering experiences that better appeal to a diversity of values and cultures."

Forest Service Deputy Chief
Joel Holtrop, 2006



Objective 2.3:

Improve accountability systems and program evaluation for conservation education in the Forest Service.

Means and Strategies

2.3.1. Identify practical output and outcome evaluation models to measure program results and provide support to increase their use at all levels of the agency.

2.3.2. Coordinate reporting system revision and data entry with internal partners (NatureWatch, interpretive services, etc.).

2.3.3. Provide examples of Forest Service employee performance evaluation in conservation education for use in appropriate line and staff work plans.

2.3.4. Engage scientists and educational experts to develop assessment and evaluation tools for conservation education programs and materials.



Goal 3: Maximize partnerships to ensure mission success.

Objective 3.1:

Pursue new—and improve existing—partnerships with State and Federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the education community.

Means and Strategies

3.1.1. Develop criteria for selecting appropriate partnerships that can assist in the achievement of the Conservation Education Strategic Plan (programs, materials, funding, and so on).

3.1.2. Establish new and strengthen existing linkages with external partners working with underserved groups.

3.1.3. Ensure that funds are identified for the development of new partnerships and/or improvement or enhancement of existing ones at all levels of the agency.

3.1.4. Facilitate delivery of tools and training to develop appropriate agreement instruments, such as memoranda of understanding or participating agreements, for conservation education programs.

3.1.5. Participate in the development and distribution of partner programs and materials.

3.1.6. Support conservation education research efforts of partners.

3.1.7. Work closely with the Forest Service's National Partnership Office to leverage expertise, resources, and partnerships for conservation education programs and materials.

3.1.8. Work closely with the National Association of State Foresters, Project Learning Tree, and National Environmental Education and Training Foundation to enhance delivery of programs.

Forest Service Mission and Strategic Plan Alignment

Managing the natural resources of the Nation's forests and grasslands requires the complex integration of resource assessments, management actions, and cooperative partnerships. In the wise stewardship of public lands, the Conservation Education Program is a unifying force that crosses programmatic boundaries. The Conservation Education Program also has an important role to play in specific strategic goals and objectives of the Forest Service.

Goal 1: Restore, Sustain, and Enhance the Nation's Forests and Grasslands.

Conservation Education Program efforts focus on explaining forest management strategies that are not well understood by many people. This also includes wildfire prevention and neighborhood preparedness, which are important strategies for helping accomplish this goal.

Goal 2: Provide and Sustain Benefits to the American People.

The Conservation Education Program plays an important role in educating youth and the general public about the multiple, sustainable benefits derived from the Nation's forests and grasslands.

Goal 3: Conserve Open Space.

The Conservation Education Program has an important role to play in educating urban communities and landowners about the value of restoring environmental services in their communities.

Goal 4: Sustain and Enhance Outdoor Recreation Opportunities.

The Conservation Education Program provides effective education about safe and ethical recreation use and the ecological and social values derived from wilderness.

Goal 5: Maintain a Full Range of Basic Management Capabilities of the Forest Service.

The Conservation Education Program's emphasis on building strong partnerships, and increasing the capacity of our employees, is an important contribution to this goal.

Goal 6: Engage Urban America With Forest Service Programs.

The Conservation Education Program's efforts are a key factor in the agency's ability to reach and engage urban audiences.

Goal 7: Provide Science-based Applications and Tools for Sustainable Natural Resources Management.

The Conservation Education Program plays a key role in technology transfer by interpreting research processes and findings for youth and the general public.

"...conservation education focused on youth is imperative to developing a stewardship ethic, an understanding and connection to natural resources, and, ultimately, to conservation of the Nation's natural resources."

— Former Forest Service Chief
Dale Bosworth, 2005



Appendix 1—Glossary

Community programs: Off-site programs provided by site staff to community audiences, such as clubs, church groups, ElderHostels, or Scouts. *(Source: Adapted from National Park Service Strategic Plan definitions for interpretation programs.)*

Environmental education: A process that promotes the analysis and understanding of environmental issues and questions as the basis for effective education, problemsolving, policymaking, and management.

Its purpose is to foster the education of skilled individuals who are able to understand environmental problems and possess the expertise to devise effective solutions to these problems. In the broader context, its purpose is to assist in the development of a citizenry conscious of the scope and complexity of current and emerging environmental problems and supportive of solutions and policies that are ecologically sound. *(Source: North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) Constitution)*

Environmental literacy: Environmental literacy requires a fundamental understanding of the relationships and interactions between the living and nonliving environment and their functions as systems across multiple scales and the ability to deal with problems that involve scientific evidence; uncertainty; and economic, aesthetic, and ethical considerations. Individuals are environmentally literate when they have knowledge of environmental processes and issues necessary for them to make informed decisions and participate in civic affairs. *(Source: National Environmental Education and Training Foundation and Environmental Literacy Council definitions)*

Forest Service Conservation Education: The Forest Service Conservation Education Program carries out environmental education to help ensure the environmental literacy of youth—from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade—and their educators through formal and nonformal educational means, in concert with our many partners.

Interpretation: A communication process that forges intellectual and emotional connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource. *(Source: National Association for Interpretation)*

Interpretive Services Program: This Forest Service program contributes to the management of national forest resources by increasing visitor knowledge about (1) national forests, research projects, and State and Private Forestry locations and resources; (2) the role of conservation in the development of the Nation's heritage and culture; (3) recreation opportunities and facilities; and (4) where they can experience natural environments. *(Source: Forest Service Manual 2390)*

Nonformal educators: Teaching in nonformal settings such as parks, zoos, nature centers, community centers, or youth camps, rather than in a classroom or school. *(Source: Adapted from NAAEE)*



Appendix 2—Roles and Responsibilities

Conservation education programs are delivered internally and externally at every level of the organization through the State and Private Forestry, National Forest System, and Research and Development branches of the agency, in concert with partners.

State and Private Forestry (S&PF) educates and coordinates with landowners; Federal, tribal, State, and local land management agencies; as well as educational institutions and local officials. It also houses the national Conservation Education Program, which focuses on pre-kindergarten through 12th grade youth and their educators.

National Forest System (NFS) provides hands-on conservation education with direct ties to local communities through the national forests and grasslands.

Nationally, programs like Interpretive Services and NatureWatch and cultural and heritage resources educate forest visitors and have responsibilities closely linked to conservation education.

Regionally, programs like Urban Connections in the Eastern Region and urban national forest outreach activities around the country enhance agency relationships with urban and underserved populations and provide direct conservation education opportunities.

Locally, festivals and events bring conservation education awareness and access to curricula to communities and schools.

Research and Development (R&D) provides the science and scientific expertise for conservation education programs and activities, with direct ties to universities. Efforts like the *Natural Inquirer* and Urban Treehouse have close ties with the national Conservation Education Program.

Office of Communication and the agency's public affairs staffs in regions, stations, and the area provide agencywide internal information and develop external outreach to constituents and stakeholders. In addition to providing public affairs counsel and planning advice to decision makers, they provide products that inform and support these decisions. These offices often house or directly support conservation education programs or coordinators at the national, regional, area, station, forest, or district level.





The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.