

Southern Conservation Education Strategy

Final Draft, 5/30/00

Purpose

Improve efficiency and enhance the capacity to administer high quality conservation education efforts throughout the Southern Region.

Vision

Conservation education in the Southern Region will be a financially supported, partner-oriented and demographically inclusive program which, through a cooperative education effort, connects the public to the environment so they make informed decisions about natural resource management and sustainability of forests and natural areas.

Introduction

A discussion among conservation education (CE) leaders within the USDA Forest Service, Southern Group of State Foresters and Extension Forestry led to interest in combining efforts and resources throughout the South to deliver a more effective conservation education program. The region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Puerto Rico.

A meeting was held at Amicalola Falls State Park in September 1999, with 50 participants representing the 13 states in the region, including representation of State Forestry Agencies, National Forests, Extension Forestry, Research Station, and State and Private Forestry. Participants referenced the Southern Group of State Foresters "Strategic Plan" and "Information and Education Chiefs Issues and Proposals", as well as the USDA Forest Service "Natural Resource Agenda" and "Conservation Education Task Force Report and Recommendations." Direct reference to the plans listed above, combined with the extensive experience within the group, led to creation of a vision statement and identification of current barriers and action items to achieve the vision. The 11-member Southern CE Strategy Team, representing the agencies listed above, was asked to complete the first draft of the *Southern Conservation Education Strategy* for the group. Comments solicited from the entire group and their managers and colleagues were used to revise the document and produce the second draft.

The next phase for achieving the vision will include presentation of the strategy to the Southern Group of State Foresters at their meeting, June 4-7, in Macon, Georgia, and request for approval. Pending approval of the strategy, a meeting of the Southern CE Group will be held to create a plan to implement the action items that follow. That meeting will be held at Paris Landing State Park close to Land Between the Lakes. This will offer an excellent opportunity for the educators at Land Between the Lakes to become part of this region-wide conservation education effort.

Objectives and Action Items

The following six objectives were derived from the list of action items created by the Southern CE Group. Action items include suggestions from the Southern CE Group and from plans listed on the previous page. The criteria for action items are:

- must be of regional relevance
- must meet the objective
- can be best accomplished on a regional scale.
- reflect the vision statement
- can be implemented

Objective 1:

Ensure conservation education materials and programs are accurate, balanced, and science-based, and meet established USDA Forest Service Conservation Education standards, the “EE Guidelines for Learning “ established by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), and applicable state educational standards and guidelines.

Action 1: Inventory and evaluate available materials. Determine which meet educational standards and guidelines and have regional distribution potential.

Action 2: Expand the use of scientific and educational research findings in conservation education efforts.

Action 3: Identify key certified teachers in each state and collaborate with them in the evaluation of existing materials and the review of new materials and programs as they are developed.

Objective 2:

Develop and review evaluation processes to ensure accountability and measurable results of conservation education programs and materials.

Action 1: Evaluate conservation education programs and materials for effectiveness (i.e. do they create knowledge, change behaviors, and/or attain desired results?). Based on effectiveness, determine if the efforts should be continued.

Action 2: Track regional conservation education efforts and costs.

Action 3: Track successes and accomplishments of the Southern CE Strategy.

Objective 3:

Develop, maintain and enhance internal and external cooperation, communication, and leadership in conservation education.

Action 1: Improve technology transfer of research information to conservation education staff.

Action 2: Cooperate on development of innovative, south-wide education materials and techniques that address key natural resource management issues (e.g. benefits of forest products and importance of prescribed burning).

Action 3: Include conservation education in annual programs of work and measure and report conservation education accomplishments in employee performance ratings/evaluations.

Action 4: Establish a region-wide information clearinghouse of educational and interpretive materials.

Action 5: Charter a region-wide Conservation Education Working Group with representatives from Extension Forestry, Research, State and Private Forestry, Southern Forestry agencies, and National Forests to develop, maintain, and enhance internal and external cooperation, communication, and leadership for conservation education.

Action 6: Hold an annual meeting of the Conservation Education Working Group to coordinate strategy implementation and set new direction as necessary. Invite participation in this meeting by selected agency administrators and program managers to enhance internal communication and cooperation.

Action 7: Develop and utilize cooperative information sharing networks to promote more effective conservation education programs (e.g. develop a networking list of key contacts within cooperating organizations).

Action 8: Highlight the beneficial impacts of conservation education on the accomplishment of private and public land management planning, collaborative stewardship, and other management objectives.

Objective 4:

Increase diversity of partners and audiences participating in conservation education efforts.

Action 1: Develop targeted, innovative strategies to reach landowners and motivate them to manage their resources.

Action 2: Develop cooperative efforts to target urban and other non-traditional audiences.

Action 3: Strengthen the relationships between our land grant universities (both 1862 and 1890 schools), the Forest Service, and State Forestry agencies, and Extension Forestry.

Action 4: Maintain and promote the diversity of the Southern CE Working Group to appropriately reflect the various target audiences identified in conservation education efforts.

Objective 5:

Create a fully supported, sustainable, professionally staffed conservation education program.

Action 1: Seek financial and in-kind support from traditional and non-traditional partners such as businesses and special interest organizations.

Action 2: Identify opportunities to use interns and volunteers to develop and deliver conservation education programs and materials.

Action 3: Fund a full time conservation education position in each state, on each national forest, at the Southern Research Station, and continue the existing Forest Service conservation education coordinator position for the Southern Region.

Action 4: Provide grant information and identify additional sources for funding.

Action 5: Develop recommendations for educator certification, position descriptions, and incentives for conservation education personnel that can be used as models throughout the region.

Action 6: Expand professional conservation education training opportunities for field and line staff in conservation education programs, methods, and techniques.

Action 7: Increase availability of training opportunities in conservation education to university students.

Action 8: Identify the annual budget needed to implement the conservation education strategy and report annually on actual funding made available for conservation education. Encourage the Forest Service to make conservation education a budget line item.

Objective 6:

Conduct internal and external marketing.

Action 1: Develop a marketing plan for conservation education that defines conservation education and includes effective approaches for determining messages, defining audiences, and delivering products that meet the needs of our customers, cooperators, stakeholders and partners.

Action 2: Ensure all employees of agencies included in the Southern Region CE Group are familiar with the conservation education program, concepts, and messages.

Action 3: Communicate to resource managers and conservation education professionals the messages and target audiences identified in statewide, regional and national conservation education planning efforts.