

REGIONAL CONSERVATION EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR THE NORTHEAST AND MIDWEST

VISION: Through focused messages targeted audiences are connected to the environment and enabled to take informed actions related to natural resource management and the sustainability of forests. The Forest Service and the State Forestry partners are key points of contact for conservation education expertise, information and materials.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: Conservation education efforts in the Northeast and Midwest are guided by the following principles:

- There is a wealth of existing natural resource educational materials available. Emphasis is placed on effectively marketing these materials to target audiences.
- Conservation education materials are evaluated against the national standards for excellence developed by the North American Association for Environmental Education and Forest Service standards and learner guidelines, as they are developed.
- Input from our customers is valued and incorporated into program design and delivery.
- The conservation education program is responsive to current natural resource issues facing the Forest Service.
- There are many players in the conservation education field. The unique niche of the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners in conservation education is in our access to natural resource information, our staff with the technical expertise to develop and deliver materials, and having places for learning to happen.
- Collaboration between Forest Service units in conservation education program design and delivery occurs routinely.
- Conservation education in the Northeast and Midwest is a cooperative effort where each partner's strengths are recognized and effectively utilized.

BACKGROUND: The early beginnings of Forest Service conservation education are summarized in the appendix.

In 1991, in response to a task force recommendation, the Natural Resource Conservation Education (NRCE) program was created as a "service-wide focused program jointly sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters." In the Eastern Region a decision was made to pool the Region's limited NRCE financial resources for distribution through State Forestry agency partners. It was felt that the State Forestry agency partners would be able work through their networks to reach the largest number of youth and urban residents. At the same time, there were on-going educational efforts at the national forest and research station levels, but these were not

financially supported through NRCE funding and were not coordinated with state level efforts.

In the mid-1990's concerns were again raised over the uncoordinated nature of conservation education efforts and the potential for better use of resources through a more organized, focused program. In 1996 a national task force was chartered to review the situation and provide recommendations for the future of conservation education in the Forest Service. The task force was specifically asked to address the following questions:

1. Should conservation education be a priority for the Forest Service?
2. If yes, what should be the major themes?
3. Who should be the priority audience(s)?

The information necessary to answer these questions was gathered from 24 internal and external listening sessions held across the country. One of the benefits of the listening sessions was help in defining the Forest Service's unique niche in conservation education:

1. Access to science-based information collected by our land managers and researchers. By including the latest scientific information and tapping it's deep professional expertise, the Forest Service can provide, or contribute to, scientifically credible educational materials and activities representing the current state of natural resource knowledge. Research can also provide science-based monitoring and evaluation systems for conservation education.
2. The land resources to provide experiential learning opportunities. The National Forest system provides outstanding opportunities for place-based learning to occur. In addition, by working with our state and local land managers this authentic, outdoor learning can occur anywhere from nearby urban forests to more remote research or wilderness areas.
3. A large employee base to deliver conservation education. The Forest Service has a delivery network of over 30,000 employees to provide conservation education programming. This number expands greatly if you include the network of state and local land managers whom we work with in managing the nation's state and privately owned forests.

Listening session participants overwhelmingly felt that conservation education should be a priority for the Forest Service because it is consistent with our mission of "Caring for the Land and Serving People." Many themes were suggested, but the most consistent ones were: ecosystems, sustainability, stewardship, and balance and connectedness. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there was no consensus on priority audiences. Participants felt everyone should be the focus of the Forest Service conservation education programs.

The results from the listening sessions were compiled into a document entitled *Vision to Action Strategy: Conservation Education Task Force Report and Recommendations*. This document defined the purpose of the Forest Service's conservation education

program as:

to connect people to the land by providing them the tools they need to take informed actions related to sustaining natural and cultural resources.

This document also identified the primary target audience of Forest Service conservation education efforts as youth, urban communities, and forest visitors.

THEMES: Forest Service conservation education programs will support two key themes:

- Sustainability of natural and cultural resources in forest, grassland, and aquatic ecosystems;
- Awareness and understanding of interrelationships in natural systems and between people and the land.

In the Northeast and Midwest these broad themes have been focused into the following four themes:

1. The value of trees, forests, forest ecosystems and forest products in enhancing quality of life.
2. Caring for trees, forests, and forest ecosystems to ensure forest health and sustainability.
3. Maintaining and restoring the biodiversity of native forest ecosystems.
4. The positive role trees, forests, and forest ecosystems play in protecting water.

Conservation education programs and materials will build awareness and understanding of interrelationships in natural systems and between people and the land. It will teach the skills needed to sustain forest resources by emphasizing how the decisions each of us make every day impact the forest environment. At the same time our audiences will learn more about the role Forest Service and State Forester land managers play in sustaining our region's forest resource, and become aware of natural resource career options.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Forest Service education efforts will focus on three primary audiences: forest visitors, youth, and urban communities. The primary focus for urban audiences in the Midwest and Northeast will be urban youth. Implementation of conservation education programs will recognize that the most efficient way to reach the youth audience is through formal (K-12) and non-formal (e.g. scouting, after school programs, recreation centers, nature centers, and interpretive programs) educators.

PARTNERS: The partners in the implementation of this strategy include the Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, North Central Research Station, Northeast Research Station, Forest Products Laboratory, and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters.

Roles

Role of Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Because of their location in the heavily populated northeastern section of the country and their partnership with State Forestry Agencies and other local partners, the Northeastern Area plays a very important role in reaching the urban and youth audiences. Their expertise in bringing partners together to work collaboratively is essential. It is vital to coordinate efforts at the regional and state level; in particular building partnerships between the State Forestry agencies, local partners, and any National Forest or Research locations in a state.

Role of the Eastern Region

The strength of the National Forest System in conservation education lies in the resource expertise of its employees and its ability to provide a place for learning. The national forests can provide concrete examples of how the themes of interrelationships and sustainability are put into practice. Their staffs, together with partners, can reach the forest visitor with conservation education messages. By reaching out to local communities through educational projects relationships can be developed and sustained. Opportunities also exist to bring information to urban audiences regarding national forest recreation and conservation education learning opportunities.

To make these things happen, there needs to be coordination between the Regional Offices and the Forests concerning conservation education direction, current activities, and funding. Training needs to be a high priority for decision makers and staff. The employees of the Eastern Region are natural resource experts, who are able to share their knowledge and expertise with the public if given the time, resources and skills to educate.

Role of the North Central Research Station, the Northeast Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory

Research also has a very important role to play in conservation education. The expertise of social scientists can be very helpful in developing evaluation tools that measure if we are reaching the target audiences about the concepts of interrelationships and sustainability in a manner that is comprehended and acted upon by them. Research also has a role to play in lending their technical knowledge as new conservation education materials are developed and revised. Also one of the strengths pointed out at the listening sessions was our access to scientifically accurate and current research results. However, much more work needs to be done to get this information to our target audiences in an understandable format.

Role of State Forestry Agencies and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters

The State Foresters and their staff are recognized as a vital part of the conservation education program. Each State Forester has a designated conservation education contact who is connected to many other non-federal conservation education networks throughout

the state. This network is extremely important in efficient program delivery. There is considerable expertise in this network in the development of conservation education materials, particularly in terms of content and in making materials teacher friendly.

KEY ISSUES: Four key issues have been identified as barriers to reaching the conservation education vision. These issues will be the initial focus of the conservation education strategy. These issues are:

1. Conservation education is not coordinated across deputy areas or disciplines. This has resulted in a lack of message and audience focus and duplication of efforts. Additionally, the role of each of the partners has not been clearly identified.
2. Formal and non-formal educators are unaware of the wealth of natural resource education information and materials available from the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners.
3. Forest Service and State Forestry staff interested in conservation education are not aware of the educational materials available, nor are they adequately trained in effective educational delivery methods.
4. The benefits of conservation education have not been clearly demonstrated to Forest Service or State Forestry leadership, resulting in conservation education receiving a very low priority in allocation of financial and staff resources.

STRATEGY:

Action items are identified below to address these issues. Identification of which action items to implement will be determined through development of an annual work plan.

ISSUE #1 – Conservation education is not coordinated across deputy areas or disciplines. This has resulted in a lack of message and audience focus and duplication of efforts. Additionally, the role of each of the partners has not been clearly identified.

- Charter a region-wide Conservation Education (CE) council with line officer and program management representation from the Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, North Central Research Station, Northeast Research Station, Forest Products Laboratory, and the Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters conservation education committee chairperson.

The role of the council will be to provide overall direction to the conservation education program in the region. The council will meet at least two times a year.

The council will provide direction for developing an annual regional conservation education work plan for regional efforts that focus on the regional themes and target audiences, with consideration for current

natural resource management issues. The council will incorporate direction into appropriate budget advice.

Initially the council's focus will be on program direction and coordination between Forest Service and State Forestry agency partners. Within three years of establishment, the council will explore the viability of expanding council membership to other partners such as other federal land management agencies.

State Forestry partners are a vital conservation education delivery mechanism. Through the Northeastern Area technical and financial assistance is provided that supports regional conservation education direction, including themes and target audiences.

Short-term actions:

1. Select Council members.
WHO: Regional Leadership.
WHEN: April, 2001.

 2. Hold first Council meeting: define purpose for council, organizational structure, and provide direction for drafting the FY02 regional conservation education work plan.
WHO: Teri Heyer, Northeastern Area
WHEN: May, 2001
- Designate a CE Team whose function is to assist the Regional Council in carrying out the regional conservation education program across all units. Team members will include at a minimum representatives from the Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, North Central Research Station, Northeast Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory. This team may expand as needed depending on the tasks identified in the annual regional conservation education work plan.

The role of the CE Team will be to develop and oversee implementation of an annual regional conservation education work plan based on the direction provided by the Council. The team will meet often enough to function effectively as a team in implementing the regional conservation education program.

The team will track regional conservation education funding expenditures and provide a combined annual report of conservation education accomplishments and benefits derived from the projects.

The team will assess newly developed conservation education resources relative to regional themes and target audiences and Forest Service standards and learner guidelines.

Short-term actions:

1. Identify CE Team members from the Northeastern Area, Northeast Research Station, North Central Research Station, the Forest Products Laboratory, and Eastern Region.
WHO: Regional Leadership.
WHEN: April, 2001
 2. Develop a regional conservation education work plan for FY02, using direction provided by the council.
WHO: CE team
WHEN: June, 2001
- The Regional Council, through the CE Team, will monitor and evaluate the implementation, effectiveness and validity of the regional conservation education program through surveys, focus groups, and other appropriate means.

Implementation monitoring and evaluation will ensure that the program is being implemented as directed, reflecting annual emphasis and budget direction. A combined annual accomplishment report will be developed.

Effectiveness monitoring and evaluation will ensure that the methods being used are achieving the anticipated results.

Validation monitoring and evaluation will ensure that the correct emphases are being adapted.

Success stories about conservation education efforts relating to the themes and target audiences are developed and distributed to conservation education providers (Forest Service, State Forestry partners, formal and non-formal educators, etc.)

- Conduct an annual workshop for key internal and external conservation education partners, from field implementers to policy makers, to provide feedback on the annual regional conservation education work plan, to receive training on latest conservation education issues and resources, and to network. This workshop would be coordinated with an existing annual meeting hosted by the Northeastern Area for state forestry conservation education contacts.
- Collaborate with the Southern Region on an inventory of available conservation education resources and the development of a regional clearinghouse available to all partners via the Internet. This effort would be coordinated with the national clearinghouse effort. (This is a high priority item and should strongly be considered for the FY02 regional CE work plan.).
- Facilitate the development of subregional councils involving State Forestry agencies and Forest Service representatives, whose purpose is to facilitate

implementation of the regional work plan, share and coordinate information at a state and local level, and assist each other with conservation education related projects. The Mid-Atlantic Conservation Education (MACE) cooperative is an example of a regional council that has been fulfilling this role for several years.

ISSUE #2 – Formal and non-formal educators are unaware of the wealth of natural resource education information and materials available from the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners.

- Develop a communication strategy to inform target audiences about the availability of natural resource education materials and the availability of partners to deliver conservation education programs and products.

Market the Forest Service library system and the Forest Service conservation education webpage as a resource for teachers for scientifically accurate information.

Develop a regional conservation education website that includes conservation education contact information and links to a database of conservation education resources (refer to the conservation education clearinghouse discussed under Issue #1).

Develop a catalog/spreadsheet of conservation education materials and a display describing what educational resources are available and who to contact for more information (refer to the conservation education clearinghouse discussed under Issue #1). Target this display for use at regional and state education and natural resources conferences.

- Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl are recognized national conservation symbols. These symbols should be used to deliver appropriate conservation messages.

Ensure that Forest Service, State, and other partners are aware of the symbols and trained in the proper use of the symbols.

Incorporate regional conservation education themes in the messages for each symbol.

Develop new partnerships to increase awareness of the national conservation symbols.

- Provide technical and financial assistance to established natural resource education programs that support the regional themes and target audiences, such as Project Learning Tree (PLT), Project Wild, Project WET and the Envirothon.

Provide technical assistance to state Envirothon programs, and to the national Envirothon competition when it is held in the region. The assistance level will vary, depending on the annual environmental issue topic.

Utilize established natural resource education programs as a delivery mechanism for educators to use in delivering Forest Service and State Forestry partner natural resource education materials. Examples include Project Learning Tree and the Envirothon.

- Provide technical expertise to the development of new conservation education materials, such as the “Exploring Environmental Issues in the Places We Live” and “The Forests of the World” modules being developed by PLT.
- Survey target audiences or those delivering conservation education programs to target audiences to determine what kinds of programs and materials are most needed.

ISSUE #3 – Forest Service and State Forestry staff interested in conservation education are not aware of the educational materials available, nor are they adequately trained in effective educational delivery methods.

- Work to ensure that all Forest Service and State Forestry agency employees are aware of the importance of conservation education in fulfilling their agency’s mission. Define appropriate levels of involvement and provide resources to those who wish to be actively involved.

Regional Forest Service and State Forestry leadership affirm their support for employee participation in conservation education activities. Conservation education activities are recognized as part of the employee’s position description and annual plan of work.

Designate a conservation education contact at each national forest, Northeastern Area field office, and Research station, and at each State Forestry agency to ensure information flow from the region to the field level.

Ensure that all employees are able to effectively act as a point of contact for the public regarding conservation education requests. At a minimum employees should be able to direct the public to their conservation education contact or the Forest Service or State conservation education websites.

Train those employees who wish to be more involved in developing or delivering conservation education programs. Training content should include what conservation education resources are already available,

presentation techniques, assessment and evaluation methodologies, developing partnerships with educators, and grant writing.

Compile a spreadsheet of financial resources available to support regional and field conservation education efforts.

- Increase the professionalism of conservation education providers by encouraging participation in professional organizations such as the North American Association of Environmental Education, State Environmental Education Affiliates, and the National Association of Interpretation.
- Ensure that employees are aware of and utilize the Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl programs to deliver conservation education messages.

ISSUE #4 – The benefits of conservation education have not been clearly demonstrated to Forest Service or State Forestry leadership, resulting in conservation education receiving a very low priority in allocation of financial and staff resources.

- Conservation education is valuable to Forest Service and State Forestry agency leadership because it is responsive to public education needs regarding emerging natural resource issues.

The council identifies emerging natural resource issues and incorporates the development of programs and materials about these issues into the annual work plan.

Conservation education is incorporated into appropriate yearly program accomplishment reporting such as urban forestry reports, forest health reports, stewardship reports, research accomplishment reports, and research panels.

- Forest Service and State Forestry leadership is aware of the results of program evaluations of key programs such as Project Learning Tree (PLT), Project Wild, Project WET and the Envirothon.
- Forest Service research results are communicated to conservation education target audiences.

Identify research information relevant to conservation education target audiences.

Rewrite and reformat relevant research information to reach conservation education target audiences.

Match technology transfer mechanisms to target audiences. Examples of transfer mechanisms include websites, displays, National Science Teachers Association publications, and “the Natural Inquirer”.

- Conservation education council members serve as ambassadors for conservation education, making managers and employees aware of the role of conservation education in implementing the Forest Service and State Forestry agency missions.

Communicate yearly accomplishments to Forest Service and State Forestry leadership and other key partners.

Identify and communicate the benefits of conservation education to the Forest Service, State Forestry agencies, and to formal and non-formal educators.

- Conservation education has value because of the partnerships that are developed with government organizations, NGO’s, and formal and non-formal educators during program development and delivery.

Identify and prioritize key partners in developing and delivering programs to target audiences.

Develop and incorporate techniques to work with key partners into annual work plans.

- Expand the capacity for program delivery through the use of interns and volunteers.

Survey regional Forest Service and State Forestry agencies to assess who has expertise in working with interns and volunteers. Share this information with conservation education team and other local contacts.

OUTCOMES:

If sufficient resources are given to achieving these issues over the next five years, the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners will make great strides in achieving the following outcomes:

Short-term outcomes

1. The Forest Service and the Northeastern State Foresters work together to develop and deliver conservation education programs. These programs and supporting materials focus on the four core themes and reach target audiences.
2. Formal and non-formal educators see the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners as an important source of conservation education expertise, information and materials.

3. Interested Forest Service and State Forestry staff are aware of conservation education materials and are able to effectively participate in the delivery of educational programs and materials.
4. Conservation education is an integral part of the Forest Service and State Forestry mission. Adequate financial and technical resources are allocated and the benefits of the program are clearly demonstrated.

Long-term outcomes

1. Forest visitors, targeted youth and urban communities (our target audience) understand the value of trees, forests and forest ecosystems in enhancing quality of life.
2. Targeted audiences have an awareness of forest health and sustainability, understand how the decisions each one of us make each day impact the forest environment, and have the basic skills to make choices that contribute to sustaining our region's forest resources.
3. Target audiences understand the roles the Forest Service and state forestry agencies play in sustaining forest resources.
4. Target audiences are aware of possible career options in natural resource management.

APPENDIX

Conservation education has had a long history in the USDA Forest Service. The history can be summarized as:

- **The Early Days:** Conservation education in the Forest Service goes back to early efforts focused around catastrophic events such as wildfires and the replanting of overharvested and abandoned private lands, lands which formed the nucleus of the National Forests in the east. In 1928, these early efforts were followed by an institutionalization of conservation education through the Forest Service Manual. This early manual promoted cooperation with schools and publications for children, noting the importance of education in "promoting the best use of all forest resources in the country, public and private."
- **World War II and Smokey Bear:** During World War II it was feared that an enemy attack or sabotage could destroy forest resources. The Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention Program was organized to encourage citizens to make a personal effort to prevent forest fires. On August 9, 1944, the Forest Service and the War Advertising Council introduced Smokey Bear as a fire prevention campaign symbol.
- **Post-World War II - Visitors to the Forests:** Efforts to provide national forest visitors with information and interpretive services began in the 1950's, as automobiles came into their own and Americans began to travel more extensively. The Visitor Information Service Program was formalized in 1962, and over the next two decades 25 major visitor centers, and hundreds of interpretive sites and information centers with educational components, were built and staffed.
- **The 1960's - Environmental Education is Formally Established:** In 1968, Chief Edward F. Cliff formally established the Forest Service environmental education program. He was convinced that wise use of the Nation's natural resources would only be possible if the public was educated about these resources. Chief Cliff established an environmental education training team to teach others both the principles of environmental education and how to teach these principles to others. Thousands of Garden Club members, educators, Forest Service employees, and other Federal and State employees were trained, and in turn taught others.
- **1970's - Forest Service Becomes a Leader in Environmental Education:** Passed in 1970, the National Environmental Education Act specifically identified education as a way to improve the environment. In 1971, the Forest Service developed and published a curriculum called Investigating Your Environment, using science-based activities to develop skills for collecting, recording and interpreting information about different parts of the environment. These

materials, updated in the early 1990's, are considered among the best materials of their type ever produced.

During this period, the Forest Service also began a long-term partnership with the American Forests nonprofit educational organization, Project Learning Tree (PLT). PLT is now a premier provider of conservation educational curricula to teachers. Through the partnership with PLT, Forest Service conservation education has reached thousands of teachers and millions of students over the last two decades. In 1970, Woodsy Owl, under Forest Service guardianship, was established as the Nation's environmental icon. His message of "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute" was learned and repeated by millions of school children and adults during these years.

- **1980's - Expansion and Collaboration:** The 1980's saw the development of more program specific conservation education efforts such as NatureWatch (Wildlife), Passport in Time (Heritage) and Leave No Trace (Recreation). Focused on specific resources, these programs complemented the greater conservation education program.

Collaborative efforts also expanded in the 1980's. Partnerships with State Foresters and State Departments of Natural Resources continued to expand. New partners such as the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) and NACD, joined Forest Service conservation education efforts.

- **1990's - Beginnings of a Focused, Service-wide Effort:** As the 1990's arrived, the Forest Service worked to better coordinate the many diverse education programs that had developed over the years. In 1991, in response to a task force recommendation, the Natural Resource Conservation Education (NRCE) program was created as a "service-wide focused program jointly sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters." Following the 1990 Farm Bill, the Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program was expanded and education became one of its integral components. In response, the Forest Service joined with State forestry agencies and other partners to bring conservation education into urban communities. Listening sessions were held across the country, resulting in the development of a national conservation education strategy. Additionally, Woodsy Owl's image was updated and a new logo of "lend a hand, care for the land" was created.