Celebrate the EnergEE of Excellence!

2009 Awards for Excellence in Environmental Education

Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education
Call for Nominations! 
2010 Environmental Education Awards

Do you know of a successful environmental education program in a school, business, public agency, nonprofit or local community? Do you know of individuals or organizations working together to provide quality environmental education? If so, please nominate your program or theirs for a CAEE Environmental Education Award! Award categories include: PreK-Elementary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Citizen/Community, Media, Business, Nonprofit, Agricultural, Religious/Spiritual, Government, and Best New Program.

Pick up a nomination form today, or visit http://www.caee.org to download a nomination form.

Contact CAEE at 303-273-9527 or info@caee.org for more information.

CAEE Awards for Excellence in Environmental Education

Environmental educators across Colorado are making a difference in their communities. Through service learning, civic engagement, and encounters with the natural world; environmental education helps learners understand their role in the environment. Since 1996, the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education has honored the amazing work done by environmental educators and organizations across the state through the Awards for Excellence in Environmental Education Program.

President’s Award
Each year, the CAEE Board of Directors selects an individual or organization to receive the CAEE President’s Award, in honor of exceptional leadership for environmental preservation, sustainability, and education.

Enos Mills Lifetime Achievement Award
This award for significant achievement is named after Enos Mills, “founder” of Rocky Mountain National Park, and is presented by CAEE to individuals for their long-term, outstanding achievements and contributions to environmental education. Enos Mills spent his life discovering and experiencing nature, and working tirelessly to preserve it by sharing its benefits with others through guiding, writing and photographs. Like Enos Mills, the award recipients have demonstrated leadership and commitment to the field of environmental education through a significant body of work. Past recipients include:

- Georg Ek, 1995
- George A. “Buddy” Wilson, 1996
- Glen A. Hinshaw, 1997
- CeCe Forget, 1998
- Enda Mills Kiley, 1998
- Roxanne Brickell-Reardon, 1999
- Elizabeth Gardener, 2000
- Oakleigh Thorne II, 2001
- Mary Ann Bonnell, 2002
- Shawna Crocker, 2003
- Mike Way, 2004
- Wendy MacPhail-Bigham, 2005
- Dave Sutherland, 2005
- Wendy Hanophy, 2006
- Raymond Tschillard, 2007
- Dave Van Manen, 2008

Recognition for Outstanding Retiring Environmental Educators
This year’s outstanding retiring environmental educators: Karen Hardesty, Renée Herring, and Jeff Rucks all spent the majority of their careers with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW).

Karen Hardesty
Karen's 25 years of service began with “landing her dream job” as manager of CDOW’s Urban Wildlife Education Center at Barr Lake. There she shared her passion for wildlife, developed district correlated field-trip curriculum, and began her career-long enthusiasm for working with and training volunteers. Later, as an Education Program coordinator, she focused on training teachers - teaming with Project WILD facilitators promoting wildlife education in classrooms. Finally, Karen served as a coordinator for the Watchable Wildlife Program initiating and implementing a variety of efforts designed to help people experience and learn about wildlife and habitats. Karen served on national and regional Boards of Directors with National Association for Interpretation and CAEE, including a term as Vice President. Karen adds that she’s “not done yet and asking what’s next?”

Renée Herring
Renée has a passion for people and wildlife and during her 15 years with CDOW as a coordinator for the Watchable Wildlife Program she worked on numerous wildlife viewing projects and programs. For three years she directed the Becoming an Outdoors Woman Program providing women the opportunity to learn outdoor skills in a comfortable environment. Her favorite program to implement, however, is “Wildlife Watch.” This outreach program, which is designed for families, includes a fun, half-day, activity-filled, wildlife viewing skills workshop. Over 8,000 children and adults have enjoyed these hands-on, family oriented workshops in Colorado. Renée was invited to six other states to describe and assist with implementation of the wildlife watch model potentially reaching tens-of-thousands of individuals and families.

Jeff Rucks
For over 30 years, Jeff contributed in numerous capacities to the CDOW. First, as a temporary employee he assisted with the peregrine falcon reintroduction program. Later, his excellent rapport with people and talent for educating them about wildlife and habitat preservation were quickly realized as a District Wildlife Manager in Denver. Jeff’s understanding of conservation education propelled him into becoming the Project WILD Coordinator. He created one-stop shopping for all educators by partnering with the other Projects: PLT, FLP, and WET and communicating diverse information and opportunities through his statewide Connections Newsletter. Jeff’s last transition was to Education Manager. His leadership elevated conservation education to a much higher priority in Colorado and nationally through his work with wildlife agencies in 50 states.

Environmental Education Program Awards
Initiated in 1996, CAEE Environmental Education Program Awards honor leadership in developing effective, cooperative, cross-sector environmental education programs. The 2009 recipients have demonstrated success in implementing innovative environmental education programs and partnerships.

Please visit the displays to learn more about these outstanding programs and individuals.
The Board of Directors of CAEE is proud to honor Governor Bill Ritter with the 2009 President’s Award in recognition of his vision for a better future for Colorado’s children, families, and small businesses and his strategies on job-creation, education, energy, the environment, healthcare, transportation, and smarter government. Governor Ritter is moving the state forward through his emphasis on the environment and was recently named the Greenest Governor by Greenopia, a leading environmental consumer interest website and blog.

Despite the worst global economy since the Great Depression, Governor Ritter, his administration, and his partners in the legislature are establishing an internationally recognized New Energy Economy and building new Industries of the Future. He is making Colorado’s New Energy Economy a national model for creating jobs, attracting companies, and producing innovative clean-energy technologies. With Colorado’s abundant supplies of wind, sun, and natural gas, nearly 17,000 Coloradans now work in renewable energy and energy research jobs, the fourth-highest concentration in the country. Governor Ritter also enacted Colorado’s first Climate Action Plan and is affording the state a more diverse, secure, and affordable clean-energy future.

Bill Ritter was elected as Colorado’s 41st governor in 2006 — the first Colorado-born governor in more than 35 years. He is leading Colorado forward by modernizing our transportation system, protecting Colorado’s natural treasures, and improving the way state government does business. Governor Ritter is also bringing people together to tackle some of our state’s biggest challenges. He has:

- Established Colorado as a national and international leader in renewable energy by building a New Energy Economy that is creating thousands of new jobs and establishing hundreds of new companies.
- Enacted an aggressive business-development and job-creation agenda that is focused on knowledge-based industries of the future, such as energy, aerospace, biosciences, information technology, and tourism.
- Initiated sweeping K-12 education reforms to give Colorado children the skills and knowledge they need to compete and succeed in a 21st century global economy.
- Improved access to quality and affordable health care for many of the 800,000 Coloradans who lack health coverage.

The sixth of 12 children, Bill Ritter Jr. was raised on a small farm in Arapahoe County. He was a member of the first graduating class of Gateway High School in 1974, earned his bachelor’s degree in political science from Colorado State University in 1978, and earned his law degree from the University of Colorado in 1981. From 1987 to 1990, he and his wife, First Lady Jeannie Ritter, operated a food distribution and nutrition center in Zambia, Africa. Governor Ritter served as Denver’s District Attorney from 1993 to January 2005. He earned a national reputation as one of the country’s most effective and innovative prosecutors, and several of his programs continue to serve as state and national models.

CAEE’s Board of Directors is honored to recognize Governor Ritter for his ability to control healthcare costs, improve education, and create a clean-energy economy. He is working tirelessly on behalf of Colorado’s children, families, and small businesses to grow jobs, create opportunities, and strengthen communities.
Enos Mills Lifetime Achievement Award
Lisa Evans

For Lisa Evans, collaboration is an art form. During her long and accomplished career with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW), Lisa demonstrated leadership, innovation, and thoroughness as a dedicated, energetic advocate for wildlife and environmental education (EE). Beginning in 1983 as a District Wildlife Manager and later as Northeast Region Education Coordinator, Lisa earned a reputation for creating pioneering programs, engaging diverse audiences, and building strong partnerships.

Lisa was one of the first at CDOW to advocate building strong relationships with educators and school districts. Using Project WILD to integrate EE into mainstream education, Lisa promoted wildlife conservation and reached thousands of students. She was a pillar of support for educators, providing content-based workshops, advice, materials, support, and networking.

Over 25 years, Lisa conducted and/or supported almost 200 Project WILD, WET, and PLT workshops, and helped train and support volunteer facilitators in the region and state. She worked with science curriculum coordinators in northern Colorado school districts to help them integrate wildlife conservation into their programs. She started two TEN (Teaching Environmental Science Naturally) programs, which train educators to take students into nature while supporting their science curriculum. Lisa was a primary founder of Northern Front Range Environmental Education Exchange (NFREEE), an affiliate of CAEE. NFREEE encourages EE providers and educators in the area to share resources and build capacity.

Lisa took to heart the EE principal of “Awareness to Action” by initiating public outreach and education efforts over the course of her career. Her first large project was a wildlife reintroduction program, Operation Osprey, in Fort Collins. This four-year effort in citizen science involved starting a non-profit organization with multiple agencies, then fundraising, training, and coordinating hundreds of volunteers in the monitoring and release of more than 40 ospreys. Lisa also oversaw the production of an educator’s activity guide for schools.

Working with District Wildlife Managers in her region, Lisa created the Bear Aware program, which trained volunteers living in bear habitat to act as liaisons between CDOW and their communities. Bear Aware volunteers helped people change their behavior to reduce conflicts with bears. As others saw the success in reducing conflicts with wildlife, this program was duplicated across the state. Lisa continued working to improve the program by incorporating social marketing strategies and new outreach materials.

Colleagues in other agencies and organizations always found Lisa a supportive and creative partner. They could count on her follow-through and her leadership in partnership efforts. She did so with enthusiasm and without being territorial about her agency. Because funding for EE is a critical need, Lisa wrote and presented grant applications receiving funding for educational and youth programs.

Lisa’s demonstrated leadership in EE is well known among her CAEE peers, and is also evident within her agency. She was awarded the CDOW “Jim Jones Outstanding Employee of the Year” award in 2006. Lisa’s work has continued since her retirement in 2008. Still an active Projects facilitator, she continues offering workshops, including those to help educators get students outdoors. She is active on the Steering Committee for the Children and Nature Connection – Northern Colorado and serves on the PLT Advisory Board.

“In my position at Rocky Mountain National Park, Lisa has been my most valuable agency partner... I have relied on her dedication and leadership and had total confidence that whatever we agreed to do would happen. Having witnessed her total dedication to Environmental Education for a good part of her career, I can think of few who deserve the Enos Mills award more than she.”
Mark De Gregorio, Education Program Manager, Rocky Mountain National Park
Enos Mills Lifetime Achievement Award

Patrick Emery

Outdoor environmental education (EE) has a true champion in Patrick Emery. Over his 28-year career with Denver Public Schools (DPS), both as an instructor/resource teacher for 10 years and more recently as manager/administrator of DPS’s Balarat Outdoor Education Center, Patrick is described as an exemplary teacher and inspirational leader. He tenaciously advocates for the Balarat program, not only for its survival but also for its enhancement and expansion.

For Patrick, outdoor EE is a crucial cause within the public school domain. He sees the opportunity to get students out of the traditional classroom and to engage them in the natural world as integral to helping them realize the joy of learning. Under Patrick’s leadership, Balarat hosts over 10,000 DPS students annually for overnight residential experiences and day trips to mountain environments. For many students this is their first experience in the mountains. Balarat is located in Jamestown, which is northwest of Denver. Patrick delights in students grasping a previously uncertain concept or surprising their classroom teachers with their acumen, when set loose from the conventions of classroom education.

Patrick has witnessed great changes in the field of public education. One of the most significant challenges in his work is preserving the integrity of EE through changing times. Over the years, cuts in school district budgets, expansion of statewide high-stakes testing, and elimination of many “extra-curricular” activities have all threatened Balarat and its programs’ existence. As these threats to the mission of EE have intensified, Patrick has fought hard to convince educators and policy makers of the value of outdoor EE.

Early on, Patrick recognized that if the established educational community was going to embrace EE, the programs offered would need to square with standards. He promotes the idea that each Balarat program, for all grade levels, must be aligned with recognized state and school district standards. He inspires his staff to offer more diverse programming customizing the curricular needs of teachers requesting an excursion to Balarat. Patrick regularly reminds his staff that all program changes will adhere to two criteria: 1) every activity developed must address the grade-level curriculum, and 2) every activity must be something not easily replicated inside a classroom. Under his supervision, Balarat curriculum has transformed from a one-size-fits-all approach to the development of a menu of various activities and destinations better meeting the educational needs of classroom teachers and their students.

Beyond his work at Balarat, Patrick enjoys the opportunity to have a hand in other channels for youth to get outdoors and learn about the environment. Seeing a need for better stewardship for Denver Mountain Parks and for coordination between these parks and DPS, Patrick volunteered to serve on the Denver Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. As Dinosaur Ridge was growing into the wonderful geological/paleontological learning spot it is today, he was a board member of the Friends of Dinosaur Ridge. As the old Stapleton Airport was closing, Patrick, along with a few notable others, oversaw the beginnings of what has grown into the Bluff Lake Nature Center. Not only did he serve as a founding board member providing professional expertise, but also resolved that the nascent organization would share Balarat’s office space until it was established.

“Patrick is one of the few leaders who leads without standing ‘up front.’ It is never about Patrick Emery. It is about students, education, and the glorious world in which we live. It is about providing students with first hand, up close, and personal learning opportunities; developing in them an understanding of the delicate and yet powerful balance of nature; and helping students acquire a sense of responsibility for the nurturance of our planet.”

Sue Edwards, Executive Director, Community Resources Inc.
Best New Program

SPREE Force

Creating a strong connection to the natural world, at an early age, is the beginning of building a society that cares about and is able to think critically and creatively about protecting our natural resources. SPREE Force was born out of this need in 2008. It is an extended learning program made possible through a partnership between SPREE (South Platte River Environmental Education) and FrontRange Earth Force. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade are given the opportunity to participate in SPREE excursions along the South Platte River using the Earth Force learning model. Students’ learning and relationship to the South Platte River are extended by demonstrating how their home, school, and neighborhood are connected to the river through the storm drain system. This voluntary program challenges students to think critically, be creative, and take action as they build the necessary skills to incorporate environmentally responsible action into their everyday lives.

Each school year, kindergarten through fifth-grade students from Denver’s nine SPREE Schools take an excursion to the South Platte River and are given the opportunity to “Join the Force” to “Protect our River.” The students who Join the Force become Special Agents and receive their Special Agent Identification Badge. Each month, throughout the school year, they receive a top-secret letter from Chompers – the SPREE Mascot – with a special mission they can complete helping to keep the South Platte River safe and clean. Missions are grade specific, completed from home, and lead students through an adapted model of Look, Investigate, Take Action, Make a Plan, and Reflect. Themes include water and energy conservation, storm drain systems, urban wildlife, recycling, and nature in your backyard. When students complete their mission and submit it to Chompers at SPREE Force Headquarters, they earn a special Chompers trading card with reminders about their mission. At the end of the year, all Special Agents are invited to a celebration event along the South Platte River.

SPREE Force exceeded all expectations when over 1,000, or one-fourth, of eligible students signed up to be Special Agents working on “Top Secret Missions” during the first year! Students are able to fully engage in the missions and experience success in taking action on issues within their personal grasp to fix. By being a part of a larger group working to make a difference, students better understand how small actions and changes in behavior are magnified when all the Special Agents work together. The most compelling evidence of program success is in the comments and stories shared by parents about the changes they see in their children.

“My daughter was excited to do the projects. She did it on her own without any prompting from me. I think it made her realize what we do at home affects the river as a whole. I love the Force because it reinforces what they learn on the field trips and brings it home.”
In 2008, Colorado National Monument (COLM) launched a Junior Ranger (JR) Explorer Summer Day Camp engaging local, under-served youth, ages 9-12 years old, from Grand Junction and Fruita in place-based learning and hands-on activities promoting environmental awareness, conservation, and stewardship. Using non-traditional teaching methods, Park Rangers are able to: connect youth to natural environments found throughout COLM; encourage them to become conservationists and participate in the National Park Service’s JR program; provide intriguing and engaging discovery activities; and offer free, safe, and accessible places for youth to recreate and learn.

The goal of the JR Explorer day camp is to engage youth in the natural world within their own community. Although COLM borders the communities of Grand Junction and Fruita, many of the participants have never been inside its gates. COLM partners with Mesa County Valley School District 51 and the City of Grand Junction’s Parks and Recreation Department. Both partners offer summer youth programs. The outdoor nature field-experience component of the JR Explorer day camp offers a summer program extension and a once in a lifetime opportunity for participating youth. Program participants come from five different school sites throughout the Grand Valley and are bused one day a week, for eight weeks during June and July, to COLM.

Each week features a new theme including: raptors, desert wildlife, water ecology, geology, botany, pinyon/juniper forest ecology, amphibians and reptiles, and insects, and is facilitated by COLM Park Rangers, Annie Williams and Briana Board. Day camp participants hike, join in educational games and hands-on science activities, and explore geologic wonders. Participants establish an understanding of the natural and cultural stories of COLM. Many express a great sense of awe at the beauty just miles from their homes and realize they do not have to travel far to hike or experience firsthand encounters with desert wildlife. In coming to an understanding of nature in their own backyard, participants connect the importance of preserving National Parks with caring for nature on a local level. The camp concludes with an award ceremony in which all the participants receive a commemorative patch, certificate, and a memory book as a keepsake.

More than 640 youth living in the Grand Valley have benefitted from COLM’s JR Explorer Summer Day Camp. Funding for this innovative program is made possible by the National Park Service’s Youth Partnership Program, Colorado National Monument Association, and Mountains to Deserts-Young Stewards in the Outdoors Grant.
Citizen/Community Award

WaterSHED

The WaterSHED (Stormwater, Habitat, Education, Development) Program began in 1996 to educate teachers and students in Fort Collins about the importance of healthy rivers and streams. Over the years, the program expanded to an integrated understanding of the land-water relationship comprising the Poudre River Watershed. Supported by Fort Collins Utilities’ 21st Century Sustainability goals, WaterSHED connects citizens through outdoor learning and personal experiences with their water resources, which leads to stewardship of the watershed and conservation for future generations.

Experiential teaching about water connects learners of all ages with the important biological and chemical components of water. Hands-on activities emphasize how water quality is affected by actions taking place on land within the watershed. These discovery experiences create a better understanding of the land-water relationship. By becoming aware of their role within the watershed, citizens become stakeholders and make informed decisions about their impacts on the health of the watershed.

Developing a deeper understanding of the watershed is an integral part of WaterSHED’s efforts to support stewardship of local streams and rivers, prevent the introduction of pollutants into the watershed, and meet the city’s requirements for a storm water discharge permit. Integration of environmental and educational objectives highly increase the success of the program.

Following are key components supporting the integrated approach to watershed protection:

**Education in riparian areas and wetlands**
Hands-on, standards-based science and math activities are conducted in local water environments. Over 4,000 students participated in stream and wetland field trips last year. Training and classes for teachers, citizen volunteers, and the public are also provided.

**Community stenciling projects**
CSU students, Larimer County Youth Conservation Corps, and other resident groups stencil local storm drains with a “Dump No Waste, Drains to Poudre” message. A brief introduction emphasizes the importance of preventing pollution on land to preserving water quality.

**Business outreach programs**
An annual storm water business program evaluates current challenges and creates targeted outreach and education campaigns. These campaigns focus on pollution prevention using best management practices for specific business sectors including carpet cleaning, car washes, and automotive centers.

**Outdoor classrooms**
Eight “outdoor classrooms,” wetlands with ponds and boardwalks, in city-owned storm water detention areas were created. They provide opportunities for in-depth studies of aquatic environments within walking distance to schools. These areas, used by students and the community, educate citizens about the local environment and the purpose of detention areas.

**Poudre River Ecology Partnership (PREP)**
PREP works with three Poudre School District mountain schools by offering regular visits to ecological study sites, a two-week summer camp, and year-round teacher support.

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Heart of the Rockies is a standards-based educational program created and offered by Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) and its exceptional education staff. The program enhances participants’ sense of wonder and love of nature by providing engaging ranger-led activities using authentic environmental and outdoor learning experiences. By involving diverse audiences including schools, scouts, area camps, and service and conservation organizations, Heart of the Rockies provides many youth and some adults their first experience in nature, and for many their first experience in a National Park. The hope for this experience is to spark a lifetime relationship with nature and National Parks.

Since its inception in 1992, Heart of the Rockies has emphasized serving those who might never have an opportunity to visit a National Park in Colorado. It has been managed with a realization that if the next generation does not understand, embrace, and come to love National Parks, the future of RMNP and other parks will be in jeopardy. Therefore, Heart of the Rockies goals address seven critical elements: meaningful partnerships; reaching under-served students; transportation funding; pre-, on-, and post-site curriculum; cognitive and attitudinal evaluation; teacher training; and distance learning opportunities.

Inclusiveness is a core value of Heart of the Rockies, which accentuates outreach to groups representing the diversity of people in Colorado. In 1993, a $106,000 Pew Charitable Trust grant to RMNP started a program targeting under-served inner city schools in Denver. In 1996, RMNP merged this effort with the Denver Zoo’s and Colorado Division of Wildlife’s Wonders in Nature -Wonders in Neighborhoods (WIN-WIN) program, thus becoming a charter member of the largest and most comprehensive environmental education partnership in the state. During 2008, 162 programs were provided for 8,005 students from 87 schools, and 43 programs for 4,679 other youth and adults. When WIN-WIN ended abruptly in May 2009, RMNP made a bold decision to continue its part by subsidizing all costs for WIN-WIN schools with which partnerships were established. In 2009, Heart of the Rockies invested $10,000 in transportation funding for these schools to continue visiting RMNP.

Heart of the Rockies relies on and has built an exceptional network of long-term partnerships. Paramount is the Rocky Mountain Nature Association providing substantial financial support. The program delivers content and interaction with rangers and instructional staff while partnering with groups providing infrastructure and participants. Some groups include: Environmental Learning for Kids, CU Science Discovery, the Estes Park After School Program, Sierra Club Inner City Outings, Loveland Good Samaritan Village, and Larimer Youth Corp.

“...You were so courteous even though we got lost coming up and were late. It was a valuable experience for my kids to see the beauty of Rocky Mountain National Park. You were all awesome, my kids are still talking about it.”

Ginger Baldwin, Fourth-grade Teacher, Ft. Logan Elementary School

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Government Award
OSMP and the Arts

“Art is a powerful tool in the evolution of consciousness.”
Terry Tempest Williams, naturalist and author

Boulder is comprised of some of the most aesthetically and biologically amazing land along Colorado’s Front Range. Additionally, the City of Boulder is home to numerous artists and creative projects. The Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) and the Arts Program fills a profound cultural void by creating an innovative bridge between the arts community and the environmental community. In this climate of people living much of their lives indoors, rushed, and disconnected from the natural world, OSMP and the Arts Program introduces participants to the land in an expressive and emotional way. A deep sense of appreciation and connection between participants and the land is created by exploring various artistic mediums. This diverse exploration often attracts new participants who are less interested in more traditional nature hikes and workshops offered by OSMP.

New partnerships, alliances, and venues are formed through the OSMP and the Arts Program. Since 2006 the program has offered 38 arts-based environmental education programs to the Boulder community. Various talented local artists provide content and the Colorado Chautauqua Association assists with advertising and provides indoor space for presentations, if needed. The program includes photography, drawing, dance, fiber arts, collage, journaling, painting, writing, and more, which draws its participants into the landscape in a very intimate and respectful way. Programs are usually outdoors, free of charge, and include art supplies, with the participants ranging from preschool youth through senior citizen.

The OSMP and the Arts Program emphasizes process instead of product. It is the intimate act of seeing, feeling, hearing, and smelling—generally sensually experiencing the natural world that is paramount. The hikes are filled with encounters sensitizing the participants to the colors, shapes, textures, and sounds comprising the wild backdrop of its programs. How the experience manifests itself on the page or through the lens is far less important than how it is internalized in the hearts and minds of participants. Fundamental to the success of the program is that participants leave feeling inspired and empowered to continue exploring their own sense of place and connection to the land.

To further foster and nurture the public’s artistic exploration and appreciation of OSMP lands, Volunteer Naturalists are trained to fuse the arts and diverse explorations into their educational hikes with local school and community groups. This easily replicated program design and methodology provides inspiration and direction for other organizations interested in offering arts-based programming to their participants.

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Non Profit Award
Project BEAR

Science education does not come easily for many elementary students in Colorado. According to 2008 Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores, over half of the state’s fifth-grade students are below academic proficiency in science studies. Project BEAR (Building Environmental Awareness and Respect) confronts the lack of focus on science in the classroom by building literacy through interactive, inquiry-based classroom and field trip programs, which engage elementary students in learning through nature.

BEAR programs help teachers meet Colorado science standards in their curriculum and serve as a valuable supplement to students’ preparation for CSAP tests. Program topics include Colorado ecology, global climate change, insects, solar power, wetlands, and wind energy. Project BEAR reaches over 12,000 students annually, with an emphasis on low-income, ethnic minority students, often connecting them to nature for the first time in their lives.

Project BEAR has a unique mission of working with under-served schools in need of science support and is an outstanding program for several reasons:

- BEAR programs work with students progressively over three classroom visits encouraging more in-depth understanding of science concepts. It works with the same schools each year building strong relationships with teachers and students. Students learn that nature surrounds them, even in an urban setting, and that personal choices make a difference in their communities.
- BEAR staff is proficient in Spanish allowing programs to be presented in English and/or Spanish, which benefits schools with a high percentage of Hispanic students.
- BEAR programs culminate with a shared writing experience: a class eBook written by students in English and/or Spanish. They are in print for each student to take home sharing it with their families. The eBooks are the best evidence of the program’s success because they are student-authored and an honest reflection of what students have learned. After a program on wind energy one student wrote, “Coal is the main source of Colorado’s electricity even though it is non-renewable and causes pollution. Eventually, coal energy will be replaced by wind because our generation knows that it is important for our future.”

Project BEAR is the in-school program designed by Thorne Ecological Institute, which was founded by Dr. Oakleigh Thorne II in 1954. Thorne is celebrating 56 years of connecting kids to nature and has grown from a grassroots effort devoted to preserving Colorado’s open space to an award-winning environmental education organization touching the lives of more than 199,000 children and adults along Colorado’s Front Range.

“The content completely supports what my class has been studying, is grade-level appropriate, provides meaningful, hands-on experiences and scaffolds for the needs of our ESL (English as a second language) students.”

Gail Becker, Fourth-grade Teacher
A sixth-grade member of Cheyenne Creek Conservation Club wrote, “Creek Club has given me a chance to learn what real scientists do when they are studying a habitat.” Creek Club is an after-school environmental science enrichment program for fifth- and sixth-grade students. David Eick, a fifth-grade teacher in Colorado Springs, created and developed the program at Canon Elementary School after noticing Cheyenne Creek flowing nearby. When Canon Elementary closed last spring, David relocated to a nearby school, Skyway Elementary, where he continues the 13-year-old program. The scientific protocol for Creek Club’s curriculum is supported by the Colorado Division of Wildlife’s (CDOW) River Watch Program.

Fifth-grade students apply and are selected to join Creek Club, which currently accepts 24 members per year. Students often reapply in sixth grade and serve in the club for a second year. Students learn about and follow River Watch guidelines to monitor Cheyenne Creek, while discovering qualities of healthy stream habitats, improving observation skills, learning basic chemistry, and performing community service. To date, over 250 students have participated in Creek Club and many report going on to study environmental law and sciences in college.

Creek Club members employ math, writing, and science skills during the sampling of Cheyenne Creek, as well as when reporting data to the River Watch Program. They have scientifically gathered samples, each month, for over 13 years and provided over 650 data points to River Watch on the health and stability of Cheyenne Creek in the Fountain Creek Watershed. These data have been used by several groups and agencies beyond the CDOW. In fact, chemistry students at Colorado College asked for Creek Club’s data several years ago to complete a project about the Fountain Creek Watershed.

Following the River Watch motto, “Real people doing real science for a real purpose,” Creek Club is designed to help students become more acquainted with local environmental stewardship. Besides collecting and analyzing samples, students participate in trash clean up and storm drain stenciling exercises raising community awareness about the watershed.

Parent volunteers provide support and transportation for field trips. Small grants and annual member fees help cover most program costs for annual training retreats, T-shirts, creek cleanups, and more. Recent partners include City of Colorado Springs, Green Education Foundation, and Trout Unlimited. Chemicals and required River Watch monitoring gear are supplied by CDOW’s River Watch Program, and the Cheyenne Mountain School District continues to provide meeting space at Canon Elementary along Cheyenne Creek.

“I remember those days. My favorite part was all that we learned about Cheyenne Creek and the importance of water in life. It helped me A LOT through 7th and 8th grade science. Thanks for the experience!!!!!”

Jack Ave, former Creek Club member, current ninth-grade student
PreK-12 Award

School in the Woods

Many children demonstrate a natural fascination with wildlife and the outdoors. School in the Woods was created to meet the educational needs of elementary students with exceptional interest and aptitude in earth and natural sciences and who possess a desire to help protect wild plants, animals, and places for the future.

School in the Woods was the inspiration of two teachers, Jonathan Wuerth and Carol Stansfield, working for Academy School District Twenty in Colorado Springs. These teachers knew the school district held 640 acres of ponderosa pine forest being managed by the Colorado State Land Board. One morning in 1996, Jonathan and Carol were struck with an amazing possibility: “What if there could be a school in that forest where a small group of elementary students would spend a full school year learning in, about, and from the natural world?” School in the Woods opened in 1999 with 52 fourth grade students. The curriculum literally grew from the ponderosa pine forest surrounding the school, and “Learn from the Land” became the school’s motto. From the very first day, students were called School in the Woods Naturalists.

School in the Woods is a public school, not a charter or private school. The study of nature is the foundation for a strong academic curriculum meeting all state and school district standards. As much instructional time as possible is spent outdoors. There is strong emphasis on science, but nature inspires learning in all the subjects. Books in the reading curriculum are related to the natural world. Particularly meaningful to students is their research of and presentation about the life of an American naturalist. Often these naturalists become powerful role models. Writing is a special strength of the curriculum, with much of the writing taking place at personal outdoor “solo spots.” In April, each naturalist selects a natural science topic for a month-long Spring Field Project, which involves extensive outdoor field research.

In 10 years, 512 naturalists have completed their fourth grade year at School in the Woods. The greatest testimony to the impact of the school comes from parents. Teachers hear many times, “This school has changed not only my child, but our family. We are spending more time outdoors, exploring nature together. We can’t get our child to stop talking about school!” Some of the naturalists may go on to become biologists, science teachers, park rangers or environmental lawyers. But even if their careers follow other paths, each naturalist takes with them a deep understanding and love of the natural world.

Info

Carol Stansfield, Co-founder and Co-leader, now retired
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A School in the Woods naturalist examines her recent discovery of a skull nestled in kinnikinnick.

Going eye to eye with a newly unveiled adult dragonfly.

An all-time favorite for naturalists - a healthy pond filled with organisms.

Smiles abound at School in the Woods, especially on a trip to Pikes Peak!
Secondary Education Award

Cairn Stewardship Challenge

Cairn Stewardship Challenge is a youth volunteer program and part of Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC). VOC provides hands-on opportunities for Coloradans to enhance, protect, and sustain the state’s natural resources. VOC engages youth as a vital part of its mission to inspire citizen stewards.

Named for the small rock piles guiding hikers to the summit of a peak, Cairn Stewardship Challenge is designed to give high school students an opportunity to explore local environmental topics, participate in volunteer stewardship opportunities, and engage in positive outdoor activities with their peers. This unlikely demographic, young adults age 14-18 years old, generally do not see outdoor and stewardship volunteerism as relevant to their lives. Cairn uses a highly innovative model for place-based environmental learning and engages culturally, socially, and economically diverse students from across the Denver metro area in a series of challenging and thought-provoking stewardship activities.

Meeting under the guidance of adult volunteer mentors, students participate in a unique environmental challenge each month. Volunteer mentors serve as facilitators during challenges and coach students as they gain new outdoor skills. Challenges require students to conduct walk-ability assessments of a community park, calculate their carbon footprint, and reduce their monthly consumption of water. These monthly challenges are hosted by a diverse group of local partner organizations and agencies. Cairn partners work with VOC to expose students to a distinct range of environmental issues and activities. The final challenge culminates in Cairn students executing their own VOC stewardship project!

Through Cairn’s innovative mix of teamwork, service, and education, students cultivate an understanding of local environmental issues, develop a personal stewardship ethic, gain practical leadership experience, and create lasting friendships. Students report the following highlights after completing the program: 90% report they are more knowledgeable about current environmental issues; 70% indicate they feel more capable of making a difference in the environment; 83% specify they will cut their use of a vehicle by using other transportation such as taking the bus, carpooling, walking, or riding a bike; 100% agree that it is very important to participate in community or volunteer work in the future. Shema Tiger shares, “Being a part of Cairn taught me not only how important the environment is, but it also showed me how I can help resolve environmental issues.” Katie McGowan explains, “I’ve learned about what people are doing to help the environment, where our water comes from, and how to lead a group on a conservation project.” Cairn Stewardship Challenge has proven to be a comprehensive program cultivating future community leaders, knowledgeable environmental citizens, and active young adults.

“We are an elite squad of environmentally aware teenagers, who are bused all around the Denver metro area to kick butt with shovels and picks. And instead of just being extra hands in these massive day-long volunteering adventures, we also plan a big service project at the end!”
Sam Jaffe, 15-year old Cairn student

Info
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What is CAEE?
Within the enormous array of environmental education (EE) programming, the effectiveness of that collective effort is as important as are the separate results of any individual program or project. CAEE enhances Colorado’s EE community by providing professional development opportunities, coordinating support services, and facilitating communication and networking between Colorado’s EE providers and the public. CAEE was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to serve the shared interests of public agencies, businesses, teachers, community organizations, and individuals distributing and using EE.

Priority Programs and Activities
CAEE is a national leader in innovative, state-of-the-art approaches to statewide EE capacity building. CAEE is a vibrant and growing community of more than 700 members, including teachers, non-formal educators, community organizations, public agencies, businesses, non-profits, and individual stakeholders who support a common vision of improving environmental literacy in Colorado. CAEE provides professional development opportunities, coordinates support services, and facilitates communication and networking between educators, Colorado’s EE providers, and the public. To fulfill this role in the wide-ranging EE community, CAEE manages several programs and projects, including:

- Teaching OUTSIDE the Box - the annual statewide EE professional development conference
- Resource Review System - a quality assurance review process for EE programs/materials
- EE Directory – the state’s on-line “yellow pages” of EE resources
- EE Program Awards - a statewide, annual recognition program
- Hosting the state’s EE Advisory Council - made up of key leaders from Colorado’s EE community
- Diversity and Inclusiveness Initiative
- Maintaining close working relationships with community-based regional EE networks
- Certification of Environmental Educators
- Environmental Literacy Planning - Efforts to create a statewide, coordinated plan to advance K-12 EE

CAEE Staff
Katie Navin, Executive Director
Emily Wiseman, Program Coordinator
Crystal Reed, Environmental Literacy Coordinator
Kaytee Duskin, Diversity Outreach Coordinator

2010 CAEE Board of Directors
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Michelle Finchum, Fort Collins Utilities

CAEE Membership
You are invited to join the largest professional organization for environmental educators in Colorado. By supporting CAEE as a member, you will receive the following benefits:
- Monthly newsletter
- Announcements of upcoming EE events and EE job openings
- Discounts to CAEE functions
- Invitations to networking functions
- Professional development workshops
- Free placement on the Colorado Environmental Education Directory (for organizational members)

Membership Rates
Student or Teacher: $15/year
Individual: $35/year
Organizational: $65/year
Corporation: $500/year

A membership form is available at www.caee.org or by contacting the CAEE Office.
2009 Awards For Excellence in Environmental Education

The Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education wishes to thank the Colorado State Forest Service, CH2M HILL, and Frederic Printing for their generous support of the Twelfth Annual Awards Celebration.

CAEE would also like to thank the volunteer members of the 2009 Awards Committee:
Kristin Libberton, Chair, Colorado Division of Wildlife
Roxanne Brickell-Reardon, Impact Conservation Services
Pam Collins, Windsong Environmental Education Foundation
Kim Glatz, Environmental Learning for Kids
Wendy Hanophy
Karin Hostetter, Interpret This
Sharon Moore, CSU Extension Jefferson County
Kathleen Okon
Daniel Parker
Tim Sandsmark, Lookout Mountain Nature Center, Jefferson County Open Space
Liz Wickard, City of Aurora Parks, Recreation and Open Space