



## CONSERVATION EDUCATION — Success Story Branching Out to the Youth of America

### INTRODUCTION & PROJECT DESCRIPTION

— The Branching Out to the Youth of America Program had three teams of four interns working in the East in the summer of 2001. New Jersey program was funded by a \$15,000 conservation education grant from the USDA Forest Service, the Milwaukee team was funded through regional NFS funds, and the Philadelphia team was funded through S&PF. The Branching Out programs includes hands-on, interactive lessons that introduce urban youth to issues such as: sustainability, invasive species, watersheds, benefits of trees and stewardship. Project Learning Tree served as the framework for the Branching Out lessons and was supplemented by activities from Project Wild, Project Wild Aquatic, Project WET, Ecosystem Matters and NJ Audubon's "Bridges to the Natural World".

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

**New Jersey:** Administered by the New Jersey Forest Service with staff from the Forest Resource Education Center, 45 Branching Out programs were conducted at 27 sites over the summer of 2001 for 2,089 students, mostly in the fourth through eighth grades.

**Milwaukee:** The Milwaukee team provided programs to over 1000 students at 10 different sites over an 11 week period. The team aimed to visit each site 3-4 times in order to maximize the benefits of visiting with the same children on various ecological topics. The interns worked with the Urban Tree House summer coordinator at the Milwaukee Urban Tree House site twice a week throughout the summer to provide consistent programming at the site.

**Philadelphia:** The Philadelphia intern team visited with over 773 students and non-formal educators throughout their summer. Many visits were also repeat-site visits.

**PROJECT EVALUATION** — In New Jersey, a qualitative evaluation tool was used to gauge students knowledge and understanding of the Branching Out subject matter. The evaluations were constructed in a pre- and post-program format, so that prior knowledge, as well as lesson conclusions, could be documented. The Milwaukee team was part of a

study, conducted by the Southern Research Station, to evaluate the Program.

Evaluations showed that the Branching Out program created a bridge between prior classroom knowledge of forests to a positive outdoor experience with forests. The students were focused on the lessons, enjoyed the program activities, and left with an understanding of the main themes.



*Students at Walpack Environment Center having fun with an education activity called "March Munchers."*

**CONCLUSION** — The Branching Out to the Youth of America program was received positively at all the sites. Many camps requested a return visit from the team and asked if the program would continue in the summer of 2002. In New Jersey, students were excited to learn about the NJ Forest Service and the Forest Resource Education Center and enjoyed the hands-on, interactive lessons led by the Branching Out team. After playing the "Birds And Worms" activity from Project Learning Tree as an introductory lesson for an invasive species program, the team repeatedly heard "Can we do that again?" "Wow - I never knew so many things came from trees!" was a response from students time and again after participating in "Tree Treasures" and "We All Need Trees", other lessons used from Project Learning Tree.

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