Conservation Education Regional Accomplishment Report

Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, Northeast Research Station, North Central Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory

FY01 (October 1, 2000 through September 30, 2001)

INTRODUCTION

This document highlights the fiscal year 2001 conservation education (CE) accomplishments for the Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, Northeast Research Station, North Central Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory. It focuses on how the Forest Service and it's Northeastern Area State Forestry partners worked together to further the conservation education mission of:

> *Connecting people to the land so they take informed actions to sustain natural and cultural resources.*

In the past, conservation education efforts conducted in the Northeast and Midwest have not been well coordinated between the various branches of the Forest Service. This has resulted in inefficiencies in program management and delivery, missed opportunities, lack of program focus, and less than optimal public service. This lack of coordination within the Forest Service has been recognized not only as a regional CE issue, but as a national CE issue, as well.

Recognizing this situation, a team consisting of CE coordinators from the Northeastern Area, Region 9, Northeast Research Station, North Central Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory began work in 2000 to address this issue. Their efforts resulted in a document entitled "Regional Coordination of Conservation Education — Northeast and Midwest". This document focuses on four key issues that have been identified as barriers to reaching the conservation education mission.

In FY01 work had already begun in overcoming some of these barriers. These issues and the progress made in FY01 are:

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

PROGRESS

- Production of a combined FY01 conservation education accomplishment report.
- Coordination through bimonthly conference calls.
- FY02 annual regional CE team work plan in place.

- Mid-Atlantic conservation education cooperatives coordinated CE activities within a six state and District of Columbia area.
- Northeastern Area hosted a regional CE conference in May 2001.

2. Formal and non-formal educators are not aware of the wealth of natural resource education information and materials available from the Forest Service and our State Forestry partners, nor are they aware of the breadth of natural resource expertise that might be available to them as they develop educational products.

PROGRESS

- North Central Research Station and Superior National Forest hosted six journalists from around the country to learn first hand about the impact of a significant blow-down event in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.
- Teachers are introduced to Forest Service and State Forestry educational materials through conferences, workshops, and websites.
- Both Michigan and Wisconsin formed forest resource education alliances to serve as a statewide clearinghouse for materials.

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.

PROGRESS:

- The national conservation education competitive grants process held in FY00-02 greatly increased the awareness of both Forest Service and State Forestry conservation educators.
- For the first time since FY98 conservation education courses were held at the FY02 USDA Forest Service Eastern and Southern Region University.

4. The benefits of conservation education have not been clearly demonstrated to Forest Service or State Forestry leadership; as a result conservation education has received a very low priority in allocation of financial and staff resources.

PROGRESS:

- The Washington Office conservation education staff has sought advice from Forest Service leadership and key partners in reformulating the conservation education strategic plan for FY03-07.

- A natural resource camp visit hosted by the Eastern Region included visiting the Clear Lake Education Center on the Hiawatha National Forests and the Lake Nesbit Organizational Camp on the Ottawa National Forest. Participants in the visit included the Washington Office Director of Conservation Education, the Eastern Region Director of Public Affairs and Acting Deputy Regional Forester, the Eastern Region Conservation Education Conservation Education Program Manager, staff from the Ottawa, Hiawatha and

Chequamegon/Nicolet NFs, and representatives from local school districts. The purpose of the visit was to improve understanding of the role of these and similar camps in meeting the conservation education mission of the Forest Service.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION FUNDING

Conservation education does not have a Forest Service budget line item. It is funded through existing National Forest, Research, and State and Private Forestry programs. The FY01 budget language for each Forest Service Region, Station, and Area directed the units to allocate a certain amount to support conservation education as follows:

Northeastern Area	$60,000
State Foresters	$15,000/state and DC
North Central Research Station	$30,000
Northeast Research Station	$30,000
Forest Products Laboratory	$30,000
Eastern Region	$90,000

This document focuses on only those projects funded through conservation education programs. While there are many other resource specific programs supporting conservation education (e.g. Passports in Time, Leave No Trace, interpretive programs), these are not reflected in this document.

COMPETITIVE GRANTS

For the second consecutive year the WO conservation education program provided one million dollars for conservation education field projects through a competitive process. The emphasis areas for FY01 included watersheds, invasive species, sustainable forestry, wildlife, underserved youth, forest visitors, and local capacity building to deliver conservation education. The region (Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, North Central Research Station, and the Northeastern Research Station) had a total of 13 competitive projects funded for a total of $156,419.

Northeastern Area:

- Branching Out to the Youth of New Jersey
- Upper Susquehanna Watershed Education Project
- Beyond Your Backyard
- Erie Basin Sustainable Forestry Display

Eastern Region:

- Out Future Decision Makers

- Island Archeology: Forests and People through Time
- Wonders of Watersheds
- Fish Tales
- Relics and Ruins: Investigating the Landscape of Wallingford Pond
- Alpine Stewards

North Central Research Station:

- Native American Forest Conservation Education Program

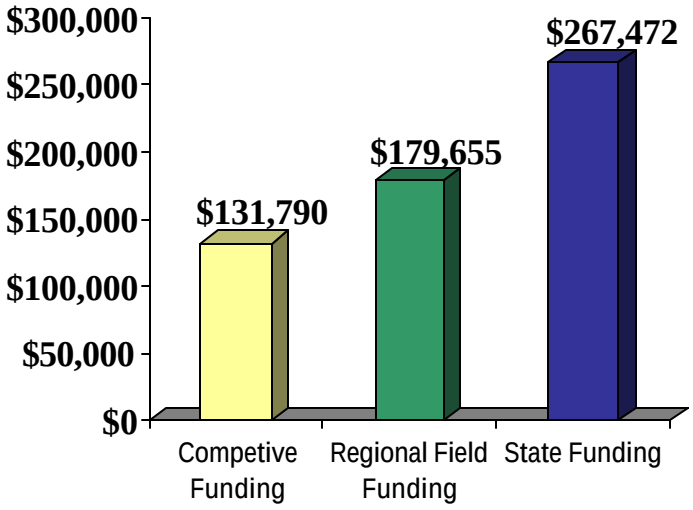
Northeastern Research Station:

- John R. Camp Outdoor Classroom
- Exploring Forest Ecology

FY01 FUNDING SUMMARY

The bar chart below displays the conservation education funds accounted for by the end of FY01.

Conservation Education Funds Spent--FY01



CONSERVATION EDUCATION THEMES AND PROGRAM METHODOLGY

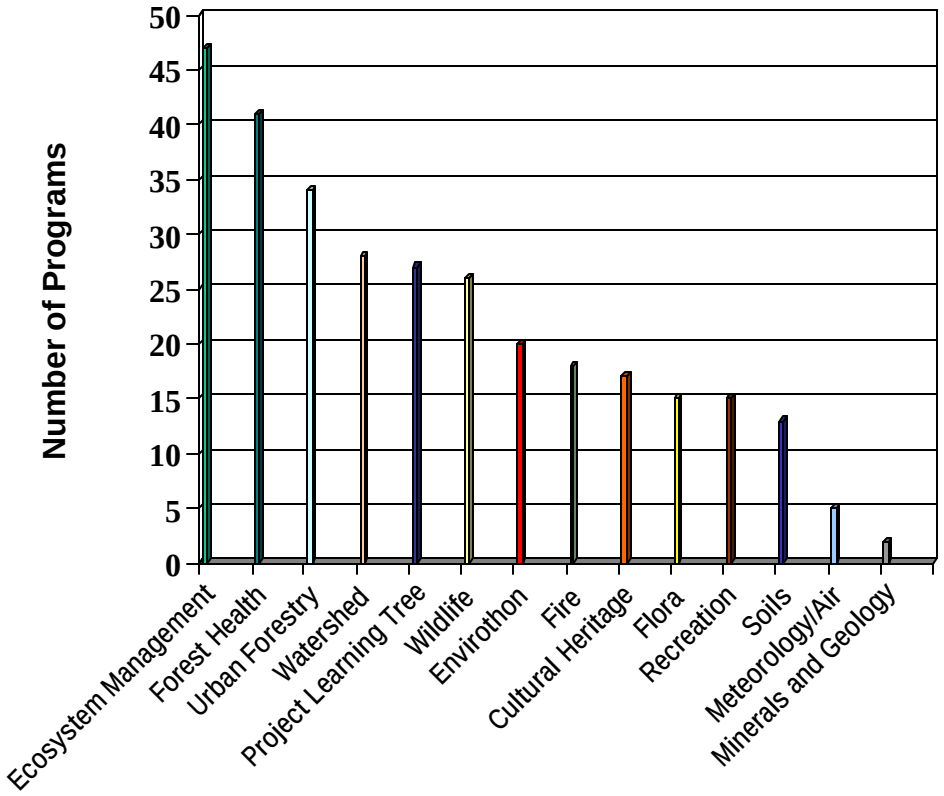
The 1998 *Conservation Education Task Force Report and Recommendations: Vision to Action* lists the core themes for the Forest Service conservation education program as:

1. Sustaining our natural and cultural resources in forest, grassland, and aquatic ecosystems.

2. Building awareness and understanding about the interrelationships in natural systems and between people and the land.

To assess how well the conservation education is doing in addressing these themes, program participants in FY01 were asked to define the content of their CE programs. The results are displayed in the following graph.

Conservation Education Program Content—FY01



Conservation education programs cover a wide variety of content. To the extent possible, the program uses existing, proven, quality programs as much as possible. There is no sense in reinventing the wheel if proven materials already exist.

Two of these programs are Project Learning Tree and the Canon Envirothon.

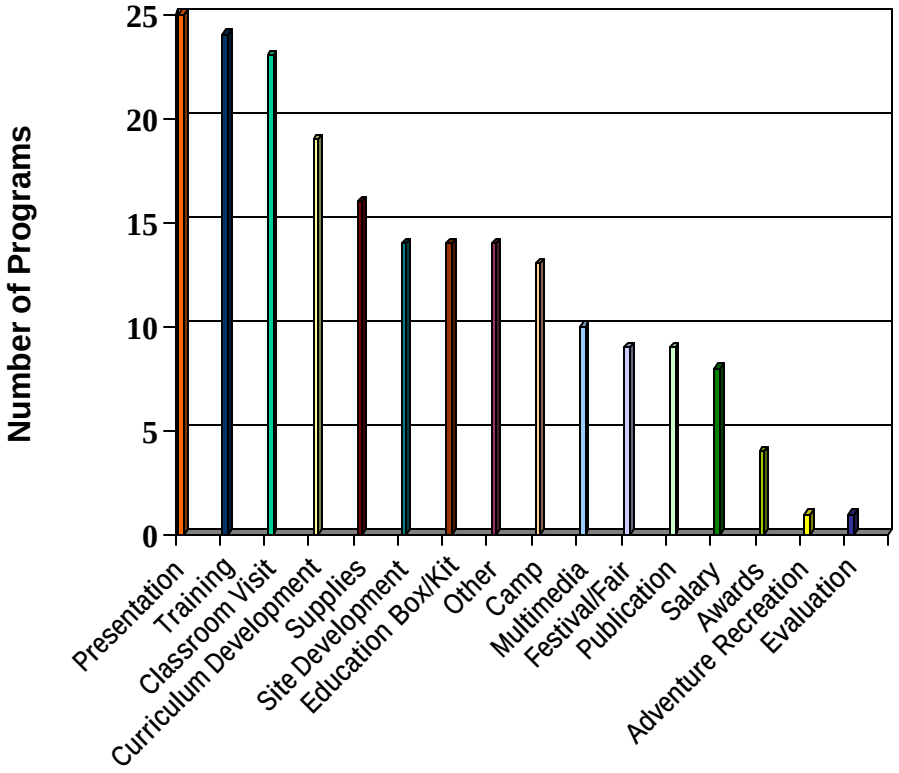
Project Learning Tree (PLT) is designed for use by pre-Kindergarten through grade 12 educators. PLT builds awareness and understanding of trees, forests, and the built environment, and a student's place within it. An evaluation involving 240 teachers and 5,000 students indicated significant growth in environmental knowledge by virtually all students. The average gain for students in grades 2-8 exposed to PLT for 2-3 weeks was equivalent to gains achieved in seven months of traditional learning.

In FY01 10,166 educators were trained in PLT in the Northeast and Midwest states.

The Canon Envirothon uses team competition to teach high school students about forests, water, soils, and wildlife. Different environmental issues are featured each year. A recent evaluation indicated that there was a significant positive difference in the cognitive component of environmental literacy of Envirothon participants when compared to students who had not participated in the Envirothon.

Program partners were also asked about the types of CE programs or projects that were developed with CE funds in FY01. The results are displayed in the following graph.

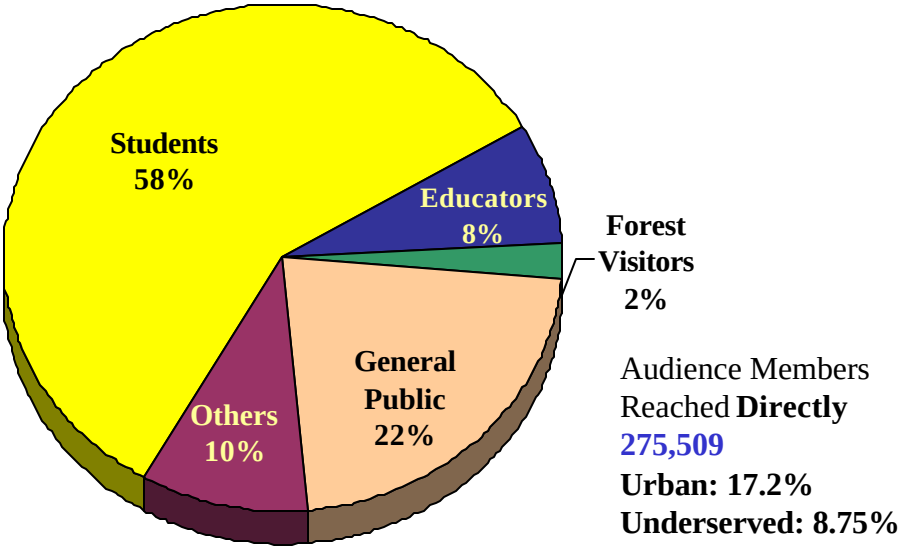
Conservation Education Program Methodology—FY01



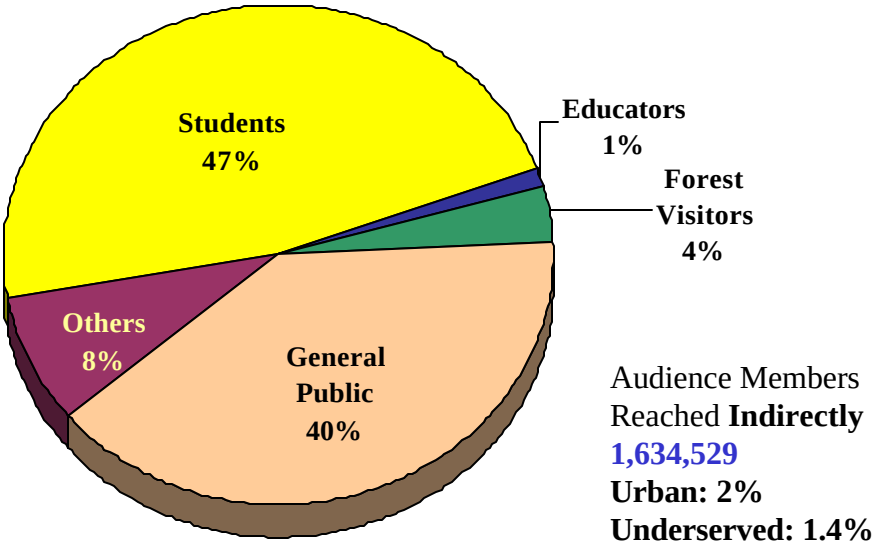
AUDIENCE AND PARTNERS

The 1998 *Conservation Education Task Force Report and Recommendations: Vision to Action* report listed the target audiences for conservation education as: youth, forest visitors, and urban communities. Program participants in FY01were asked to respond to audiences reached both directly and indirectly through their conservation education projects. The results are displayed in the following graph.

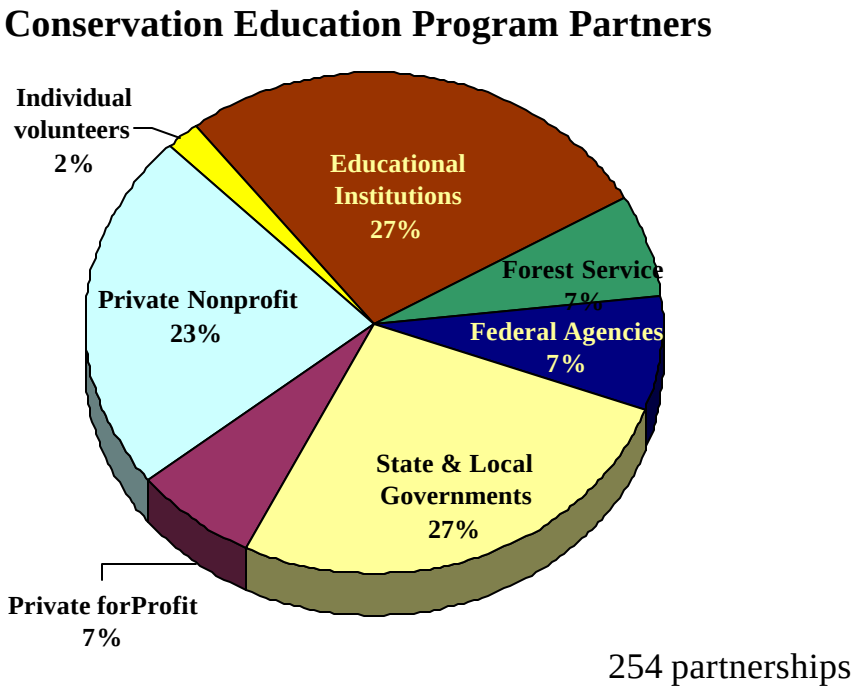
Conservation Education Audience Reached DIRECTLY



Conservation Education Audience Reached INDIRECTLY



The Northeastern Area, Eastern Region, Northeast Research Station, North Central Research Station, and the Forest Products Laboratory need to work through many partners to reach our audience. In FY2001, 254 partnerships facilitated delivery of CE programs, as summarized in the following graph.



CONSERVATION EDUCATION SUCCESS STORIES

The following list highlights conservation education success stories for FY01. These success stories are described in detail in the appendix. Information regarding the others can be found on the conservation education website: http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/ce/web_new/content/special/program_providers/index.cfm

Northeastern Area:

- Wisconsin Forest Resources Education Alliance (FY00 competitive funds)
- Mid-Atlantic Conservation Education Cooperative (FY00 competitive funds)
- New York Green Connections (FY00 competitive funds)

Eastern Region:

- Island Archeology: Forests and People Through Time (FY01 competitive funds)
- Fish Tales (FY01 competitive funds)
- Alpine Stewards (FY01 competitive funds)
- Cranberry Mountain Nature Center-Urban Outreach (FY00 competitive funds)

North Central Research Station:

- North Country Media Tour—Low Down on the Blow Down (NC CE funds and University of Minnesota)

Northeastern Research Station:

- Frost Valley Environmental Education Center (Research CE allocation)

Forest Products Laboratory

- Camp Badger (University of Wisconsin, FPL)

R9-NA-NE joint project

- Branching Out to the Youth of America (Eastern Region funds, NA CE funds, FY01 competitive grant)

SUMMARY

FY2001 began a new era for conservation education in the Northeast and Midwest for the Forest Service and it's Northeastern Area State Forestry partners. Addressing barriers that in the past had hindered effective delivery of conservation education programs, the various branches of the Forest Service began to work together more closely to deliver CE programs.

Collectively, our successes included

- successfully competing for $156,419 in WO funding to support 13 conservation education field projects,
- supporting numerous high-quality conservation education programs, including several highlighted "success stories",
- leveraging the support of 254 partners in carry out our programs,
- improved coordination of CE efforts, including hosting a regional CE meeting,
- increasing educators awareness of CE materials,
- improving CE staffs skills and awareness of CE materials by hosting CE training courses at the Eastern and Southern Regions University, and
- increasing leadership awareness of the values of CE, including hosting a natural resource camp visit.

In FY2002 we will continue to be guided by our regional coordination strategic document and further improve the delivery of high-quality conservation education programs to the public.