



PLT[®] 2011 Annual Report

CELEBRATING THE YEAR OF FORESTS

Dear PLT Educators, Partners, and Friends,

For more than 35 years, PLT has been educating about forests—and the water, wildlife, people, and other resources that interact with and depend on them. Luckily for us, the United Nations designated 2011 as International Year of Forests, a theme which we were not only happy to honor, but also excited to help others celebrate.

As you'll read in these pages, we celebrated that designation throughout the year. From creating and displaying Forest Exchange Boxes created by students in each state, to releasing our new secondary curriculum *Focus on Forests*, PLT provided the tools for educators to improve student achievement and foster a sense of stewardship for the future of our planet.

As always, PLT could not have accomplished what we did in 2011 without you. State coordinators, educators, partners, and students and their families bring PLT to life.

It truly was a year to celebrate forests. Next year will be, too, and we look forward to celebrating and learning with you.

Best wishes,

Kathy McGlauffin

2011 at a Glance

- 31,118 educators attended 1,475 workshops nationwide
- Creation of a GreenSchools! student advisory board, and more than 1,300 GreenSchools! registrants from all 50 states and 11 countries (Australia, Canada, India, Jordan, Laos, Malaysia, Nepal, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, South Africa)
- *Focus on Forests*, our new high school curriculum, released and well received, with over 1,000 guides distributed
- A high-visibility role to celebrate UN International Year of the Forests
- Conducted 3 campaigns with the PLT Grassroots Network, resulting in 283 letters sent to the editor at local papers and 281 messages sent to Members of Congress
- This year marked the launch of a new website, an e-newsletter sent to 49,166 subscribers quarterly, 1,976 Likes on the PLT Facebook Page, and 33 PLT blog posts
- Recognition of National Outstanding Educators at our 25th annual International Coordinators Conference
- Strengthened state PLT programs through grants, self-assessments, and exchange of best practices
- Exhibited at 10 national conferences, reaching approximately 35,000 educators across the United States

FOREST EXCHANGE BOXES ON DISPLAY

To celebrate the UN-designated International Year of Forests, many supporters have written to their members of Congress as a result. Year of Forests, we adapted a popular PLT activity in which students create Forest Exchange Boxes to share with others. The boxes reflected the unique forest heritage of each state, containing examples of tree and wood products, student poems, drawings, videos, and much more. Each also reflected the thoughtfulness and creativity of the young people who planned and assembled the contents.

Throughout the year, the boxes were on public display, starting in February at the U.S. Mission to

“We hope you stop, take a look [at the forest exchange boxes] and reflect on America’s incredible biodiversity.”

Ambassador Rick Barton, at a UN reception where PLT Forest Exchange Boxes were displayed



the United Nations in New York City. They were also exhibited on Capitol Hill, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, at the U.S. Department of State, and at many other meetings and conferences in at least a dozen different states. In fact, we received requests to show the boxes above and beyond our original plans!

What was in Florida’s box? Montana’s? Hawaii’s? Some things in common, many others unique to each region of the country.

We created a poster featuring PLT’s Activity 20: Environmental Exchange Box to distribute at national conferences to encourage involvement by students from across the country in ecosystem exchanges. This poster included photographs of some of the boxes, tips for creating them, and a PLT activity to strengthen the learning connections.

In order to promote the exchange box programs and Year of Forests, we posted forest-related news, “walk in the woods” events, PLT workshops, and other activities at www.celebrateforests.com, the official website for International Year of Forests. This helped highlight the good work that state organizations and agencies conduct to sustain America’s forests for today and future generations.



We also celebrated Saturday, May 21, 2011 as National Walk in the Woods Day™! To support the effort, PLT created a “walk in the woods” handbook, with information, ideas, and PLT activities for families and friends to conduct with children while out on a walk.

FOCUS ON FORESTS

PLT’s new secondary school curriculum engages students in big-picture, thought-provoking questions about forests. The nine activities in *Exploring Environmental Issues: Focus on Forests* address many subject areas, including STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), economics, and social studies.

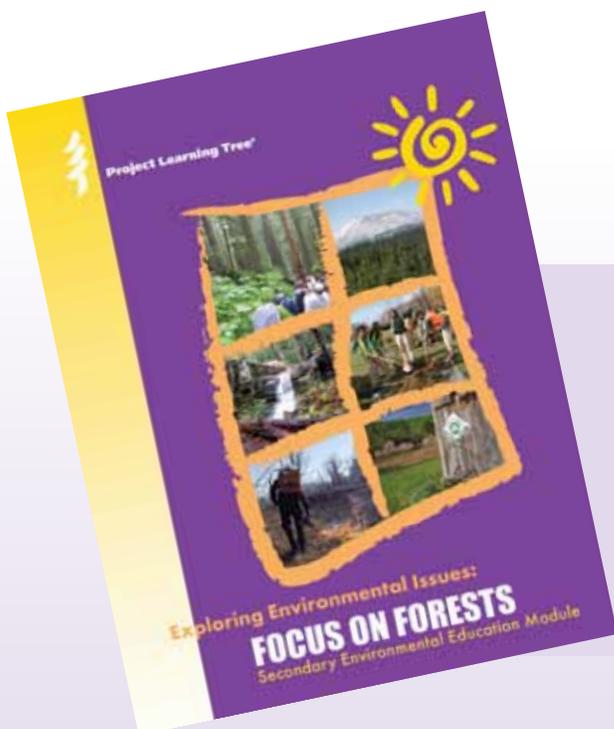
As it always does, PLT involved professional educators and technical experts to develop, review, field-test, and independently evaluate all aspects of the curriculum. Result: rigorous, yet also flexible hands-on activities for teachers to adapt to their own students’ needs and abilities.



“I love you tree, I love you tree/You are the thing I need/You give me air, you give me food/I couldn’t live without you.”

An Indiana student’s poem, included in that state’s Forest Exchange Box

As one example, in the activity “Who Owns America’s Forests?”, students conduct local interviews and collect data to understand forest ownership in their own region, then offer possible solutions for conserving forestland in their community. In another, “Climate Change and Forests,” students analyze their personal effect on atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and explore how trees remove carbon dioxide from the air in a process called carbon sequestration.



“This curriculum allows students to participate in activities that teach them the job skills of foresters and other natural resources professionals. I like to provide my students with career information that covers the entire spectrum, and they loved the hands-on learning outdoors!”

Kathy Roberts, 10-12th Grade Environmental Science Teacher, Lakeside High School, Hot Springs, Arkansas

GREENSCHOOLS!

Through GreenSchools!, PLT provides a blueprint for students, teachers, and their many partners to create a more green and healthy learning environment. The program combines environmental education, service learning, and leadership opportunities.

GreenSchools! is growing, with over 1,300 registered schools and their students involved with the program. What's more, students in schools that have been involved for a few years are seeing the benefits of their research, analysis, and action over time. As students track progress in such areas as waste reduction and energy conservation, they get a powerful lesson in the collective effects of small changes.

From the start, student voice was an important element of GreenSchools! In 2011, a student advisory board formed, which consists of middle and high school students from 11 states and the District of Columbia. Through monthly conference calls, the students have set goals of providing leadership and mentoring to new teams and of providing their perspective on the program.

Several GreenSchools! also had the opportunity to speak publicly about their efforts. Students from



Lowcountry Preparatory School in South Carolina made a presentation at the National Service-Learning Conference, while Barnard Elementary students and staff from Washington, DC, met with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. In other cases, student investigations led to tangible improvements and even additional funding. For example, when students from Bicentennial School in New Hampshire measured how much water the school's current toilets used, they successfully garnered a grant to install low-flow toilets.

We correlated GreenSchools! five investigation areas (energy, school site, waste and recycling, water, and environmental quality) to the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools' "pillars and elements" so that schools have an easy-to-follow way to seek the Department of Education designation.

"When we developed GreenSchools!, we wanted to ensure it could work in rural, suburban, and urban schools, large and small, diverse and underserved. The feedback we get from participating schools shows that the program has the flexibility we were looking for."

James McGirt, PLT Education Programs Manager



GARDENS ARE FOR POLLINATORS—AND KIDS!

Butterflies, bees, and other pollinators like gardens. Students like to plant and maintain gardens. And educators have seen the benefits when students develop gardens for pollinators.

As part of the PollinatorLIVE program supported by the USDA Forest Service and the Prince William Network, PLT awarded GreenWorks! grants to 28 projects in 20 states to develop gardens where pollinators can thrive. PollinatorLIVE also features interactive webcasts, online seminars, and satellite field trips, such as an electronic visit to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Texas.

“Students will learn by creating and doing. They will have the opportunity to learn from community experts in building and gardening, and will learn about civic responsibility in building and maintaining the garden.”

Zayra Soto, 8th grade student, Scuola Vita Nuova Charter School, Kansas City, Missouri



A few examples of pollinator gardens supported by GreenWorks! grants:

- **In Nevada**, students will create a native plant pollinator garden in an urban area, with PLT activities to support “citizen-science” projects back at their own schools.
- **In Texas**, fourth- and fifth-grade English-language learners and their families will create two gardens that are aimed at building community, as well as growing pollinator-friendly plants.
- **In Wisconsin**, high school students will plant and maintain a garden, butterfly house, and beehive at a community center that younger students will enjoy in the center’s after school programs.



“First I got involved because I needed some service hours. But then I began to feel connected to the place, and I saw I could make a difference and do something to help people and the environment.”

Ohio student about her involvement in a GreenWorks!-funded project

DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

That's where the PLT International Coordinators Conference took place in June—for our 25th annual coordinators conference! About 120 coordinators and others exchanged ideas, sharpened skills, and learned about new PLT developments, all in Texas style!

A conference highlight was the announcement of the 2011 National Outstanding Educators:

- **Cindy Kilpatrick**, environmental science facilitator at Oil City Magnet School, Oil City, Louisiana
- **Joy Barney**, Conservation Education Specialist with the USDA Forest Service's Lake Tahoe Basin Regional Unit, South Lake Tahoe, California
- **Sandy Gresham**, recently retired science teacher and environmental education school coordinator at Lowcountry Preparatory School, Pawleys Island, South Carolina
- **Susan Campbell**, Education Coordinator for the City of San Antonio Natural Areas, Texas.
- **Robert Taylor**, science teacher at Jay Middle School, Jay, Maine



Honored for their commitment to environmental education, their exemplary use of PLT, and their exceptional teaching skills, the educators exemplify how PLT works with students of all ages and in all places. As Kathy McGlaufflin said in recognizing the educators, "Increasingly, our country is recognizing the need to involve its young people in learning that challenges and excites them, and that strengthens their abilities to think critically about the world around them. These five educators show how it can be done successfully."

"PLT reaches out and assists the state partners in a very personal manner and this obvious show of assistance is then trickled down by the state partners assisting each other. Rarely have I been a witness to such a true community of professionals willing to assist each other in their efforts."

Sarah Livesay, Illinois PLT State Coordinator

GROWING EE CAPACITY STATE BY STATE

The “roots” of the PLT network are the state programs. State coordinators make the PLT delivery system work, usually while they are wearing many hats and often spending many evenings and weekends on their PLT responsibilities.

To provide support to the state programs, PLT offers Model Program Initiative (MPI) grants. Now in their third year, they are designed to increase leadership skills, improve infrastructure, create and strengthen state-level leadership through steering committees, and build capacity to strengthen state PLT programs and reach more educators.

In 2011, 28 state programs received MPI funding to build their facilitator base, develop strategic plans, conduct trainings with targeted audiences, improve outreach and communications, and strengthen fundraising efforts.



“The Model Program Initiative Grant Program has been very beneficial to the Arkansas PLT program. Grant funding helps provide materials, resources, and professional development to help support the state program to grow into a more sustainable program.”

Rob Beadel, Arkansas PLT State Coordinator





Through the American Forest Foundation, PLT maintained signed Memoranda of Understanding with 48 state sponsoring organizations and the District of Columbia. We welcomed three new Partnering Organizations as state sponsors:

- Illinois Environmental Education Association
- University of Alaska Fairbanks - Cooperative Extension Service
- District of Columbia, District Department of the Environment

In 2011, we unveiled a new-and-improved self-assessment tool for state programs. Six states completed this Best Management Practices Self Assessment and used the results to understand their programs' areas of strength and areas needing improvement. They will use the results of this process in long-range strategic planning and in annual work plan development.

NEW MEDIA, NEW AUDIENCES

The foundation of PLT is people sharing information with each other. So as the way people communicate with each other changes, PLT aims to stay current.

That has meant stepping up our social media presence. On **Facebook** ([facebook.com/projectlearningtree](https://www.facebook.com/projectlearningtree)) and **Twitter** (@AmForestFndn), you'll find the latest PLT and EE news.

"The numbers of educators trained annually is only one measure of our program success. I think an equally important measure is the engagement of our large volunteer network. Over 3,100 hours were given by our volunteers to deliver the Florida PLT program. That is equivalent to 15 full-time staff!"

Nancy Peterson, Florida PLT State Coordinator



We also launched a major overhaul of our website. The new site has a streamlined look, fresh pictures, a new resources database, and online communities for educators and coordinators.

And *The Branch*, our newsletter, has undergone changes, too—from print version to a specially designed e-newsletter with new features based on comments from a readers' survey.

OUTREACH, IN PERSON AND IN PRINT

With all the buzz about social media, it's still important to stick to the basics. So PLT staff are often on the road at conferences, where we conduct presentations, staff exhibits, and speak with educators, resource professionals, and others about how PLT strengthens student learning and stewardship.

Some of the highlights in 2011:

- National Science Teacher Association regional and national conferences
- National Association for the Education of Young Children conference
- Green Schools conference
- National Association of Conservation Districts conference
- Tree Farm convention and leadership conference
- National Service-Learning conference
- North American Association for Environmental Education conference
- ASCD conference

And PLT was in the news. Whether about the Forest Exchange Boxes, state and national outstanding educators, GreenSchools! and GreenWorks! activity, and much more, our press releases and other media outreach resulted in local and national coverage.



"As a result of using PLT, my students definitely improved in their application of real-world math skills. As an added bonus, their test scores in science went up significantly, too."

Minnesota teacher Karen Christenson

At the end of the year, Brenda Weiser, associate professor at the University of Houston-Clear Lake and a member of the PLT Education Operating Committee, received the good news that an article she wrote on teaching collaboratives (with PLT as a focus) was accepted for publication in *Science and Children*, NSTA's prestigious journal for science educators.

POLICY INITIATIVES

PLT advocates for three issues that support our mission and that strengthen natural resources and environmental education programs.

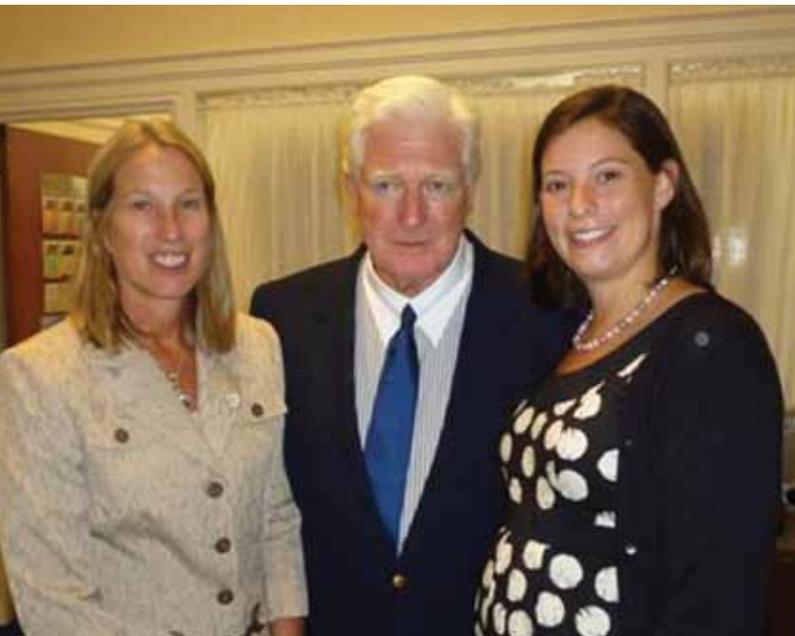
- No Child Left Inside Act, which provides funding for environmental education programs and teacher professional development in states with K-12 environmental literacy plans
- Funding for environmental education
- Research, funding, and promotion of outdoor learning programs

Through our Action Network, we keep supporters up to date as these issues progress through Congress or federal agencies. Many supporters have written to their members of Congress as a result.

In July, we coordinated our first-ever PLT "fly-in." Educators, facilitators, and coordinators from six states (Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington) came to Washington, DC, for face-to-face meetings on Capitol Hill. Our "Grasstops Leaders" also invited the officials to visit PLT schools and see firsthand the value of environmental education in the classroom.

"Using EE to improve student achievement and get students excited about learning was a message that really seemed to resonate on Capitol Hill."

Pat Otto, Washington PLT State Coordinator



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Project Learning Tree® (PLT) uses forests as a window on the world and provides educators with environmental education curriculum resources that can be integrated into lesson plans for all grades and subject areas. PLT teaches students how to think, not what to think about complex environmental issues, and helps them acquire the skills they need to make sound choices about the environment. Developed in 1976, PLT's 50-state network includes more than 500,000 trained educators using PLT materials that cover the total environment. PLT is a program of the American Forest Foundation.

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