



Sandra Turner

Hands-on Nature

New resources help educators connect youth with the outdoors.

by Gina Jack

If you look at any outdoor educator's bookshelf, you're sure to see an array of materials: essentials like Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder* and Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting our Heritage*, modern classics like Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, plus

Early childhood is a crucial time...to build on natural curiosity through hands-on experiences.

field guides to anything and everything under the sun, and even to the sun and the stars themselves.

On my bookshelf, sandwiched between Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* and Palmer and Fowler's *Fieldbook of Natural History*, are a few other indispensable resources: curriculum and activity guides from Project WILD (Wildlife in

Learning Design), Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), and Project Learning Tree (PLT). I refer to all of them frequently. They are invaluable to me, and to many of my colleagues, as we strive to connect children and youth to the natural world.

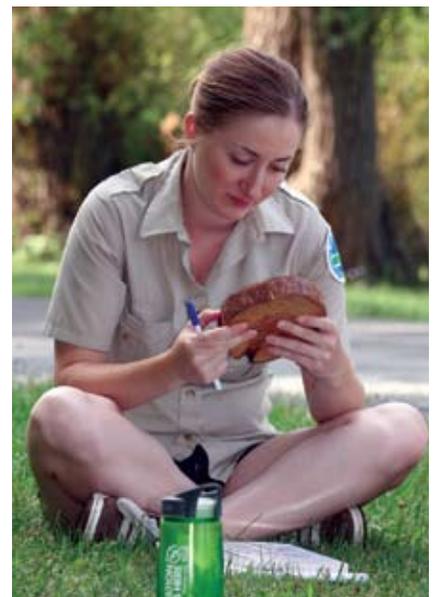
This year I added two new manuals to my collection: Project WILD's *Growing Up WILD* and Project Learning Tree's *Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood*. Both give adults who work with young children (aged three to six years old) the tools to feel comfortable taking them outdoors to explore the natural world. Early childhood is a

crucial time of life for exposure to the outdoors: a time to build on natural curiosity through hands-on experiences.

These and other resources are available to educators simply by participating in a lively hands-on professional development workshop, each focused on a single curriculum and activity guide. Project WILD, Project WET and PLT are internationally acclaimed resources for educators. In New York State, DEC is the agency which coordinates program delivery and offers the workshops. Workshops are free, are generally three to six hours long, and are offered year-round. During the workshops, participants try out some of the activities and learn how to integrate the curricula, aligned to New



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During workshops, teachers learn about different activities and projects designed to help connect kids to the outdoors. Teachers are even able to test out some of the activities and learn how to incorporate the curricula into present learning standards.

York State curriculum and learning standards, into their existing lessons. These programs meet state and national standards for early childhood education.

The addition of resources for use with younger children extends the range of WILD's and PLT's programs, already acclaimed for their value in developing an understanding of the outdoors and natural processes among youth. Activities for younger students—early childhood and elementary grades—build awareness of the world around them. For middle and high school students, a greater proportion of the activities relate to the effects that people have on their environment and what we can all do to minimize negative effects while promoting the positive.

DEC has been offering professional development workshops for teachers for almost 25 years. In recent years, DEC educators and workshop facilitators trained by DEC have introduced more than 4,000 teachers to these resources annually. With each of these individuals reaching 20 or more students each school

year, the multiplier effect is tremendous. If you are a classroom teacher, youth group leader or daycare provider and are interested in taking part in a workshop, visit www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html for information and a list of scheduled workshops.

Gina Jack is an environmental educator with DEC in Albany, and is the editor of *Conservationist for Kids*. She was a Project WILD facilitator in the 1990s in Ontario, Canada, and has been a Project WILD facilitator in NY since 2009.



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DEC offers Project WILD, Project WET and PLT workshops year-round. The hands-on workshops are free and generally run three to six hours long.

DEC's Workshops for Educators



These workshops are for classroom teachers, youth group leaders and daycare providers. Workshops are free (see exception below), and are three to six hours long. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html for complete information.



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Project WILD (Wildlife in Learning Design): Project WILD, for teachers of grades K through 12, focuses on building awareness and appreciation of wildlife, leading to responsible human action. *Growing up WILD* provides teachers of pre-school through first grade with activities to introduce students to wildlife and the outdoors. *Aquatic WILD* deals specifically with aquatic wildlife. *Flying WILD*, with a service-learning component, is a bird program for middle school students, and *Science and Civics: Sustaining Wildlife* is for high school students and involves environmental action projects that benefit wildlife.

Project WET (Water Education for Teachers): The *Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide* is a collection of hands-on, water-related activities for teachers of grades K through 12. Through the activities, students learn that water is a shared resource as well as a shared responsibility. Supporting materials from Project WET include a new booklet in their *Kids in Discovery* series, *Discover the Hudson River*, for grades four through six.



Chris Bowser



Rich Clauss

Project Learning Tree (PLT): Topics addressed by *Project Learning Tree* range from forests, wildlife and water, to community planning, waste management and energy. The basic manual covers grades pre-K through eighth and takes an interdisciplinary, hands-on approach to learning about the environment with more than 90 lesson plans. *Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood* is geared specifically for teachers of children ages three through six. Seven separate modules are designed for use with high school students, each focused on forests or exploring an environmental issue.

Teacher Institutes: For those looking for a longer and more in-depth workshop, DEC's teacher institutes are a sure bet. They are generally three to five days long and follow a particular theme. Throughout, they address how to use the outdoors and environmental education curriculum to meet New York State learning standards for science. Institutes provide more hands-on experience in the field than is possible during the workshops alone. Nominal fees may be charged for DEC's teacher institutes.



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