



# The Newsletter of the Environmental Education Association of New Mexico



## CONNECTIONS

Vol. 20, No. 1: Spring 2012

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### Gila Conservation Education Center in Silver City

*By Kathy Whiteman*

Here in the Gila Valley in southwestern New Mexico, the departure of the sandhill cranes marks the beginning of a new season. The cottonwoods and willows are beginning to break bud along the river, the mountain snows are melting, and the poppies are in bloom. The Gila Conservation Education Center (GCEC) is busy coordinating year-end school events and, thanks to funding from a *More Kids in the Woods* grant, we're beginning preparation of our 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Children's Water Festival this September. This season of renewal is a reminder of how much GCEC continues to grow!

This small non-profit GCEC was established in 2004 with a mission to promote natural resource conservation through education, example and involvement. Situated near the Nations' third largest National Forest and world's first Wilderness Area, the GCEC maintains a strong collaborative relationship with the Gila National Forest and primarily serves the three rural counties encompassed by these 3.3 million acres of public land (Grant, Catron and Hidalgo). Staffed by an Executive Director and one part-time staff person, the GCEC provides



*GCEC Education Coordinator Barbara Nuzzi (left) with Silver High School students studying water quality along San Vicente Creek in Silver City.*

classroom visits, field trips, student-centered restoration projects, teacher workshops and local presentations. In 2011, GCEC reached over 5,200 K-12 and adult learners through its programs. Considering that that the total tri-county population in this corner of New Mexico is just under 34,000, with a quarter of people under the age of 18 (US Census Bureau, 2010), GCEC programs demonstrate a broad reach!

Thanks to our strong volunteer base, committed Board of Directors, hard-working staff, and numerous partners, GCEC continues to accomplish a lot on a shoe-string budget. This year, we are beginning to transition from the traditional "teaching is telling" type of program to learning strategies that are student centered and inquiry-

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# EEANM *PRESIDENT*

## From the President:



With Spring on the horizon, the snowy blanket of today (April 3<sup>rd</sup>) seems a step back in seasonal time. The Cottonwoods of the valley have already started their leaf-out and they seem to be hunkering down through the silent pelt of snow. As the seasons shift (albeit reluctantly) and the weather warms, EEANM maintains our commitment to get you, your family and your community outside and educated about the beautiful southwest.

This transition to Spring has landed EEANM with several exciting adventures! As the New Mexico legislature was unanimously passing the **Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights** (House Memorial 3, Senate Memorial 10) we found out we are the proud recipients of an EPA Sub-grant Program that has us partnering with four other southwestern states (TX, AR, LA & OK) and the Albuquerque based Albert I. Pierce Foundation. Thanks to the hard work of EEANM Executive Director Barbara Garrity, we have this great opportunity to not only support our New Mexico programs, but also to help our regional partners make connections with their communities as well.

We've also welcomed Malcolm Siegel, a retired Sandia scientist and current UNM professor, to the EEANM Board. Malcolm's broad background and commitment to education in New Mexico will be a great addition and we are excited to have his help on issues like working on an Environmental Literacy Plan for the state!

Finally, as the outgoing President of EEANM this fall – I'm excited to remind you that our fall conference, held in partnership with the New Mexico Science Teachers Association (NMSTA) and the New Mexico Council for the Teachers of Mathematics (NMCTM) will be hosted at Bosque School October 11-13<sup>th</sup>. With a strong focus and common core curriculum, standards, STEM activities and mixing in all in with the landscape in which we live... I hope to see you there!

Cheers,

Kimi Scheerer, EEANM Board President



*(Continued from page 1)*

based. For example, through funding from New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, we've developed a pilot Biodiversity Project on The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Mimbres River Preserve. Fifth grade students from three schools and two school districts are participating in multiple inquiry-based activities both in the classroom and at the TNC preserve to learn about water, local biodiversity, and the differences between nature preserves and the National Forest system. Students are engaged in collecting real data and analyzing their results.

Like so many other non-profits who are working hard to promote a scientific and environmentally literate citizenry, we've experienced some growing pains as we move toward organizational sustainability. Yet, when we see the joy on a child's face as she splashes in the river for the very first time, we know that our struggles are all worthwhile. Data collected from our 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Children's Water Festival showed that more than one-third of participating students had never been to the Gila River prior to the Festival - a river located just 30 miles west of Silver City. Ouch!

*Dr. Kathy Whiteman, PhD, is the Executive Director of the Gila Conservation Education Center and a member of the Board of Directors of EEANM.*

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## Environmental Literacy Planning Sessions Statewide!

Meetings to develop an Environmental Literacy Plan for NM schoolchildren have taken place in Santa Fe, Taos, Albuquerque, Alamogordo, and Las Cruces. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for:

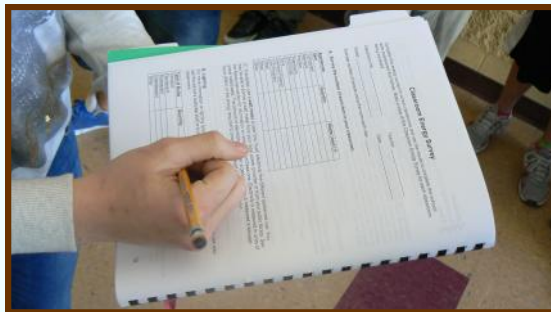
**Belen**, May 8rd, 4pm-6pm, Belen Schools Teacher Resource Center, RSVP to Molly Madden at [mmadden@aol.com](mailto:mmadden@aol.com)  
**Farmington**, May 19, 1pm - 3pm, Riverside Nature Center. RSVP to Becky Kerr at [bkerr@boep.org](mailto:bkerr@boep.org).  
**Moriarty**, May 22, 4pm-6pm, Edgewood Soil and Water Conservation District, RSVP to Vince Case at [case@aps.edu](mailto:case@aps.edu)  
**Silver City**, October 19, 4pm-6pm, Location TBD, RSVP to Kathy Whiteman at [kwhitema@gmail.com](mailto:kwhitema@gmail.com)

If you would like to host a meeting in your town, please contact EEANM, Barbara Garrity, [info@eeanm.org](mailto:info@eeanm.org)!



## Project Learning Tree's *GreenSchools!* Training

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, four NM schools sent representatives to a training by Al Stenstrup of Project Learning Tree and Vicki Arthur of the Forest Service Conservation Education offices in Washington D.C. The schools are Desert Ridge and Madison Middle Schools, Coronado Elementary School and Rio Grande School. To find out more about this program, see <http://www.greenschools.org/> and contact Jean Szymanski, Regional Conservation Educator, USDA Forest Service, NM PLT Coordinator, at [jszymanski@fs.fed.us](mailto:jszymanski@fs.fed.us) or (505) 842-3325. Photos: Deb Thrall





## Project Learning Tree's *GreenSchools!* Implementation Update

After the training, the students have done the following things to green their schools:

**Coronado Elementary School** is creating a documentary with the four original green team members. Each member will specialize in one subject: water, energy, waste, and life cycles. They are also taking field trips and conducting offsite research. This all ties into the *GreenSchools!* onsite investigations, as we gain a better understanding of where our water, electricity, and food come from and where our water, waste and compost end up.

**Rio Grande School** has:

- completed the investigations in the *GreenSchools!* book
- used i-tree to do a tree survey (over 300 trees)
- done an energy audit of several buildings on campus
- formed a partnership with SFCC Energy Star Academy
- graphed their energy use
- adopted a section of the Santa Fe river
- built a compost center on campus
- planned a lights off and a recycling day for the school
- built and planted a window farm (see photos)
- committed to using only green cleaning supplies
- Grades 1-5 will each take on one of the themes and do a project: 1st grade is water, 2nd is school site, 3rd energy, 4th is environmental quality, 5th is waste and recycling.





## **New Mexico Project Learning Tree Facilitator Training—Southern NM**

April 21 in Las Cruces, a small group of Project Learning Tree educators gathered to become certified facilitators of the program. The group included Barbara Nuzzo and Dr. Kathy Whiteman from the Gila Conservation Education Center in Silver City, Helen Fields and Georgina Jacquez from Carlsbad Caverns National Monument, and Phillip Argüello from Hillrise Elementary in Las Cruces. The new facilitators will schedule fall trainings in their regions for other educators. Dates to be announced!



## **New Mexico Project WET Watersheds and Climate Change Workshop Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park**

Seventeen educators met on April 20 to learn more about the Rio Grande watershed, Project WET's Healthy Water Healthy People Curriculum, and took a tour of the wastewater facility for Las Cruces. The Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park hosted the workshop, sponsored by the Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR).

Presenters included Chris Canavan, head of the SW Area Surface Water Bureau of NMED, Dr. Kathy Whiteman, Executive Director of the Gila Conservation Education Center in Silver City, and Barbara Garrity, Executive Director of the Environmental Education Association of New Mexico. Participants learned about the effect of climate change on our mountain sources of water, issues related to local water quality, and how to develop a hypothesis. The group engaged in a simulation of macroinvertebrate collection (before going out and doing the real thing) using beads and other objects, which involved using the protocols for the dip nets, sorting and using the water quality indexing system. That afternoon the group toured the Las Cruces wastewater treatment plant.



## *The Lorax comes to Jarales, NM*



Jean Szymanski, Education Coordinator with the Forest Service, Southwestern Region, was the guest reader at the National Education Association's (NEA) Read Across America Day. Read Across America Day is an annual event sponsored by the NEA to promote literacy. This year they read "The Lorax," the classic tale of a forest guardian who shares the enduring power of hope.

NEA's Read Across America Program is their signature literacy effort to help children develop a love of reading. "NEA's national Read Across America celebration is not just about one hour or one day of reading," said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel. "It is about cultivating a lifetime of good reading habits in students that will translate into academic success."

Gil Sanchez Elementary School in Jarales was chosen as one of 20 sites nationally to take part in this event. They received an entire Dr. Suess library and a \$1000 check from Mazda, who was sponsoring the event. Senator Sanchez whose father the school was named after was also at the event. Students, parents, educators and the entire community got to share the joy of reading by hearing the Lorax say, "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

In addition to listening to the story, students also got to have their pictures taken with The Lorax.

## ***ECO-ED***

### *The Listserv for New Mexico Environmental Educators*

If you haven't signed on to the eco-ed listserv, you are missing out on a great form of communication regarding environmental education in New Mexico. To sign up, go to our website at [www.eeanm.org](http://www.eeanm.org) and follow the instructions. And don't forget to join EEANM to support this great service!

Problems? contact Barbara Garrity, (505) 715-7021 or [info@eeanm.org](mailto:info@eeanm.org)



## **Carolyn Nesbitt Named New Mexico Project Learning Tree 2012 Outstanding Educator of the Year**

New Mexico Project Learning Tree (PLT) has announced its first annual Outstanding Educator of the Year.

Carolyn Nesbitt is the Fenton Ranch Director for Manzano Day School, where she is responsible for teaching students about the natural environment at a retreat in the Jemez Mountains. State PLT Coordinator Jean Szymanski praised her work, "teachers like Carolyn are the reason we provide Project Learning Tree workshops-so that the curriculum will be used both inside and outside the classroom, to help students learn about our natural environment, by engaging in fun activities."

Before coming to Manzano Day School, Ms. Nesbitt served as an environmental education volunteer for the Peace Corps in Bolivia, earned a Masters degree in Environmental Education and worked as an interpreter for Redwood National Park in California. One of the most useful resources in Peace Corps was the hands-on curriculum in the PLT guides. She adapted the lessons to fit into the culture, resources and learning levels of her students, kids, Bolivian teachers and Peace Corps volunteers. "The PLT curriculum has been immensely useful and relevant whether working in Bolivia, the Redwood Empire in California, or here with Manzano Day School students. The more they know about and engage with the environment, the more they care about it and keep it healthy," asserts Ms. Nesbitt. At Manzano Day School, she uses PLT to meet New Mexico State Standards. She utilizes the Build-A-Tree lesson with a tree costume in her first grade classrooms as well as activities on decomposition. The students learn about the parts of a tree by putting it on in layers.

Ms. Nesbitt received a "tree cookie" engraved plaque and \$200 for her award.

## **EEANM-NMSTA-NMCTM Conference**

October 12 - 13, 2012

Bosque School, Albuquerque

Preconference Field Trips and Workshops on Oct. 11

Look for the Call for Proposals and Registration Information at [www.nmsta.org](http://www.nmsta.org)