

# Florida Project Learning Tree Annual Report 2007

## Partnership in Youth Education

Schools • Industry • Nonprofits • 4H • Government • Universities



*PLT uses the forest as a "window on the world" to increase youths' understanding of our complex environment, to stimulate critical and creative thinking, to develop the ability to make informed decisions on environmental issues, and to instill the confidence and commitment to take responsible action on behalf of the environment.*



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## Greetings from PLT Central

Looking back this year there is much to celebrate! Over 1,080 educators and resource professionals benefitted from 45 workshops providing PLT materials to use with students. An additional 8,003 youth and adults interacted with our facilitators at outreach events such as scout gatherings, AgVentures, and school presentations. It is my pleasure to say thanks to our fabulous volunteers and sponsors who make our programs possible.

This year PLT Central focused on diversifying our programs to better meet audience needs. Facilitators and educators were invited to complete a needs assessment about PLT programs and workshops. Responses from the survey indicated a desire for content-focused resources that align with PLT materials, Florida-specific workshops, and more ways to connect PLT to the classroom.

These responses guided the development of our online program. Online programs are the latest form of professional development gaining popularity with school administrators and teachers alike due to limited travel funds and travel time. Educators access training modules on their own schedule. We pilot-tested an online secondary workshop for the "Places We Live" module with success and created supplementary web-based units to meet teacher and facilitator needs on page 6.

Catch a glimpse of this year's Florida PLT Award winners to learn how they are supporting natural resource education on page 3. Our Florida PLT Schools continue to amaze me with the variety of creative teaching techniques they use to engage their students. Three more schools are highlighted in this year's report on page 4. Community partners see the value of working with their local schools. Plum Creek Timber funded an outdoor pavilion for Lake Butler Elementary (Union County) with support from Union County Extension Office and FL PLT on page 5. Teachers joined us for the biannual PLT Schools' Conference for a closer look at native plants in Florida and the opportunity to share ideas with each other on page 5.

Moving into our 32nd year in Florida, we continue to be aware of educational changes affecting teachers, new opportunities for offering programs, and the need to continue evolving as a premier natural resource education program in Florida. The No Child Left Inside campaign has increased educator interest in finding programs with interdisciplinary activities and programs that assist their school in "going green." The Steering Committee is committed to addressing these issues and working through our strategic plan to improve PLT programs with a new professional development series for facilitators and educators, new funding opportunities, and expanding resources to reach more audiences.

Your involvement with Florida PLT is essential to keep natural resource education at the forefront of our children's educational opportunities.

*Jennifer Seitz*

Florida PLT Coordinator

### PLT Memorial and Recognition Giving Fund

Contributions were made during 2007 in memory of:

Edward Eugene Jones, Jr.



*Like the trees, we are visitors, guests of earth.*

*The light shines down, and a bud breaks, branches give way before us, a book's leaves open, and our eyes look, look again.*

*We are a grove, companions spared to be on earth at the same time.*

*The trees - though not our kind - are kin, elder relatives standing to greet us.*

*By Kim Stafford from "Tree of All Trees"*

# Celebrating Excellence

Project Learning Tree applauds all educators, facilitators, and partners whose efforts make our Florida PLT program successful. Jack Vogel, FFA President, and Mike Gaff, FFA President-Elect, presented our annual awards at the Florida Forestry Association (FFA) annual meeting. The 2007 award winners are:

## Educator of the Year: Karen Weigelt

Since her arrival to Florida in 2005, Karen has created a stellar outreach program at Bear Creek Educational Forest with a full schedule of school groups, scouts, 4H youth, and civic groups arriving daily to explore the outdoors. Project Learning Tree activities are a central focus for many of the program options. In 2006, 1,949 youth participated in a variety of PLT activities. Karen also gives outreach presentations to schools in Wakulla County. We are pleased to bestow the 2007 Florida Project Learning Tree Educator of the Year upon Karen.



Mike Gaff and Jack Vogel present Karen Weigelt her award.

## Facilitator of the Year: David Moody

A facilitator since 2004, David has facilitated 13 educator workshops in Leon County, led numerous exploratory field trips for various groups, and organized a GPS training session for both the PLT's annual school and facilitator event. No matter the audience, David's enthusiasm for the topic and his love for the environment are contagious! We thank David for his commitment and congratulate this Project Learning Tree Facilitator of the Year.



David Moody receives his award from Mike Gaff and Jack Vogel.

## Business Partner of the Year: St. Johns River Water Management District

A constant supporter for Florida PLT in their region, the District encourages collaborations between their education program, Project WET, and PLT. In-kind support for PLT conferences, retreats, and workshops is made available without hesitation. The District encourages its employees to get involved in PLT as active facilitators and leaders on the Steering Committee. We honor St. Johns River Water Management District's commitment to supporting Project Learning Tree.



## Outstanding Educator of the Year: Michelle Hunter

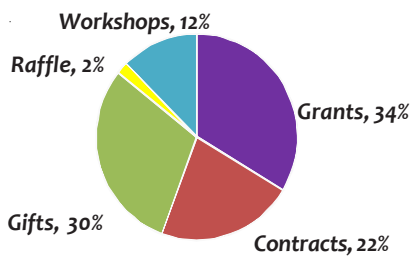
A fourth-grade teacher at Shadeville Elementary School, Michelle was selected by National PLT to receive the National Educator Award. Michelle co-coordinates the annual school-wide PLT Week, leads professional development PLT workshops for her colleagues, and organizes school environmental field trips for students. Her creative science lessons and ability to connect her students in-class experiences to real-world science make her a role model and leader throughout Florida and the nation. Congrats Michelle!



Jenny Seitz, State Coordinator, Michelle Hunter, and Kathy McGlaflin, National PLT Director.

This award marks the sixth time that a Florida PLT Educator has been recognized at the national level.

## 2007 Income Sources



### Total Income

Florida PLT depends on support from private and public funding sources.

## And the Winner is...

Jim Cottingham, with Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation, is this year's winner of our Half and Half Raffle. Excited participants at the Florida Forestry Association's Annual meeting this September hovered around the PLT booth waiting for the lucky raffle ticket to be drawn. 175 tickets were sold providing the PLT program with \$875 to support our PLT School Program and Urban Forest initiative. Thanks to everyone who purchased a ticket!



Jenny Seitz, State Coordinator, presents Jim Cottingham with the winning check.



## Students in Action at PLT Schools

### St. Paul Lutheran School

With leadership by the PLT School Coordinator, Deb Wagner, students began a hydroponics garden using rain barrels for irrigation. Each grade also cares for a conventional garden. To expand student's interest in nature and reading, Deb started literature gardens around campus. The students are writing poetry about nature and posting it outdoors for people to enjoy as they look at the gardens. Future plans include a student-created tree walk incorporating facts and people from history. Since 2004, the annual Creation Week promotes an awareness of living things in our world and the roles students play in their protection.



Science teacher Deb Wagner leading a butterfly session.

### Medart Elementary School

Originating at Shadeville Elementary School Brooke Mohr and Charlotte Hoover brought PLT with them to Medart Elementary in 2005. Continuing the tradition of connecting community resources to the classroom, Brooke and Charlotte organize a yearly PLT Week aligned with an annual theme. Florida's Environment from a Native Perspective and Florida's Wet n' Wild Ecosystems are past themes designed to intrigue students' interest. A sampling of topics presented include: archaeology, astronomy, airplanes, Wakulla County history, music, plant biology, Native Americans, beekeeping, boat safety, blacksmithing, history of St. Marks, signs of fall, and GPS tracking.



Fourth grade teacher Brooke Mohr teaches students about respecting nature as they examine a skin.



Second graders planting the class pizza garden.

### Learning Gate Elementary School

For six years, Learning Gate faculty have incorporated opportunities for students to interact and explore their environment in their curriculum. The onsite organic garden allows students in all grade levels to tend to their class garden and receive a weekly plant or gardening lesson from their Garden Specialist. The annual Forest Biome Celebration enables students to participate in a variety of PLT activities and demonstrations. Classroom curricula is infused with service learning on campus and within the community. Throughout the year field trips take students on explorations of their communities.

## Lake Butler Elementary School Receives an Outdoor Classroom

Students at Lake Butler Elementary School will be able to take what they are learning in the classroom to a new level with the addition of an outdoor classroom. The outdoor classroom was made possible through a grant from the Plum Creek Foundation. Teachers at Lake Butler wanted a designated area outside to help them use the outdoors to teach reading, math, science, and art.

Over 900 students in pre-kindergarten through fourth grade will utilize this space. In partnership with the Union County Extension Office, the community constructed the pavilion. Future plans include the addition of a butterfly garden, pond, greenhouse, and picnic tables.

Florida Project Learning Tree also partnered with the School to provide workshops and environmental connections to use in the new classroom. This August, 52 faculty members attended Project Learning Tree Workshops. Teachers were led through a series of grade-appropriate hands-on activities integrating reading, technology, and science. Each day ended with a brainstorming session on how teachers can incorporate activities and the outdoor classroom into their lesson plans for the year.



Lake Butler teachers experience the pavilion.

Lake Butler Elementary School is one of nine schools with the PLT School Designation. At all designated schools educators are dedicated to a hands-on exploratory approach to help youth gain an awareness and knowledge of natural and built environments.

To sponsor a PLT school in your community contact Jenny Seitz, State Coordinator, at 352.846.2329 or [jacohen@ufl.edu](mailto:jacohen@ufl.edu).

## PLT Schools' Conference Goes Native

Florida Project Learning Tree hosted teachers and nature center staff at a two-and-a-half day conference at Withlacoochee State Forest with the theme, "Go Native!" The focal point this year was centered on the difference between native and exotic, invasive plants in Florida and their effects on landscape. Participants experienced a variety of hands-on presentations such as identification tips about exotic, invasive plants in Florida by Shaun Stewart (DOF) and Robin Will (USFWS), and how to use GPS to locate native plants in the woods with David Moody (USFWS). Sid Taylor (DOF) shared resources and tips on how to create a colorful butterfly garden with native plants. Representatives from the Hernando County Extension Office explained the benefits of incorporating rain barrels in school gardens (John Korycki) and how Master Gardeners and learning barns can be a resource for the classroom (Jim Moll). The conference ended with smart ways to landscape around school and home to reduce fire danger with Don Ruths (DOF). Throughout the conference, there was much networking around the bonfires each evening and laughter as participants dressed up as Brazilian Pepper, played "hang man" with Melaleuca, and assembled wildflower notecards, plant presses, and leaf crafts. Thank you to the following sponsors for making this event possible: Coastal Plywood Company, International Paper, Packaging Corporation of America, Plum Creek Timber Company, Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation, US Forest Service and US Fish & Wildlife Service. A special thanks goes to Shaun Stewart and the Florida Division of Forestry's Florida Center for Wildfire and Forest Resources Management Training for providing meals and lodging. All folks had a "tree-rific" time!



Summer Zephyr, Bill Kleinhans, and Jackie Graham explain invasive species to the group.



## Expanding Programs to Online

Our initial contact with educators and facilitators is in a workshop. Activities are conducted, connections are made, and people learn about the hands-on and interactive nature of EE. These are excellent opportunities to demonstrate high-quality education. An increase in technology literacy combined with a growing demand for quality professional development options presents a new opportunity for PLT. Educators and facilitators both requested FL PLT offer Florida focused resources to supplement workshops and resources for secondary education.

A training program for secondary teachers utilizing the PLT *Places We Live* activity guide and 14 Florida topic modules were designed by students in UF's Environmental Education Program Development Course. The secondary unit focuses on a sense of place and community change particularly at the wildland-urban interface. The Florida modules cover a variety of topics from trees and ecosystems to using PLT with special education students. These modules will be grouped into units such as ecosystems or watershed 101 to allow viewers to build upon what they learn.

Pilot-testers suggested the modules had engaging videos and could be used with students in the classroom. This Spring, the *Places We Live* training program will be available to educators statewide. Teachers will be able to receive the activity guide by using the module and sending their worksheets and a check to PLT Central. The web portal for the other modules is in development.

We will always offer one-day traditional workshops as part of our program. Online modules are one way to extend learning opportunities to audiences where there are few PLT opportunities.

*“My students and I are doing a community action project on Stormwater pollution and wetlands. We went through this website and broke all parts down into usable information, dissecting the larger words, making lists, and viewing the graphics. They liked it because it gave them concrete, organized information.”*

—High School Educator at AD Harris High

*“I am impressed about all the great links and excited about adding this technology to my workshops and certain activities. Thank you for this new resource!”*

—PLT Facilitator

### **The Steering Committee extends their most sincere thanks to the following organizations who generously support educating our youth about the environment.**

#### **up to \$1000**

Coastal Plywood Company  
Florida Society of American Foresters  
Smurfit-Stone Container Corp.  
St. Johns River Water Mgmt. District

#### **\$1001- \$5000**

Florida Forestry Association  
Florida Sustainable Forestry Initiative  
State Implementation Committee  
International Paper Company  
Leon County Extension Office/ IFAS-UF  
Packaging Corporation of America

Plum Creek Timber Company  
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#### **\$5,001 and above**

American Forest Foundation  
Florida Division of Forestry  
Renewable Resources Extension Act.  
UF/IFAS School of Forest Res. and Con.

#### **In-Kind Support**

Bielling Site Prep. & Reforestation  
Florida Dept. of Education  
Florida Dept. of Env Protection  
Florida Division of Forestry

Florida Forestry Association  
Florida Power and Light  
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Smurfit-Stone Container Corp.  
St. Joe Company  
St. Johns River Water Mgmt. District  
UF/IFAS 4-H Youth Program  
US Fish and Wildlife Service  
US Forest Service

### **A special thank you to our volunteers for engaging youth and adults in PLT:**

Christine Allen, Dale Armstrong, Megan Auchter, Florie Babcock, Mary Bahr, Karina Becerra, Marcia Bisnett, Sherrie Blackwater, Shelia Bolin, Marcus Boston, Heather Callahan, Catherine Carey, Authur Clothier, Colan Coody, Carolyn Durbin, David Finney, April Frederick, Cheryl George, Glen Harris, Lori Haynes, Mark Hebb, Linda Hebb, Gayle Hoffman, Joan Hourican, Michelle Hunter, Dawn Hurley, Todd Ireland, Craig Iversen, Karen Johnson-Folsom, Becky Jordi, Bill Kleinhans, Jane Kriegbaum, Debbie Lawrence, Joe MacKenzie, Nonie Maines, Cindy Maytrott, Jan McCurdy Schultz, Neal McDonald, Mark Miller, Martha Monroe, David Moody, Elizabeth Moore, Jennifer Oetting, Jody Owens, Annie Oxarart, Tara Powers, Robert Raze, Jr., Christina Reategui, Mike Renwick, Royanne Reusch, Kathie Roberts, Jean Rogalsky, Stan Rosenthal, Teresa Schroder, Deb Sparbeck, Shaun Stewart, Elaine Suber, Audrey Swindal, Amy Taylor, Chris Verlinde, Karen Weigelt, Zulema Weiher, Kelley Weitzel, Fred Wiechmann, Robin Will, Kelliann Whitney.