

The Nature of Learning Program

in New Jersey



What Is The Nature of Learning Program?

The Nature of Learning is a two-year program designed to bring the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its mission into the classroom. Seeking to foster conservation-minded patterns of behavior by engaging schoolchildren in ecologically oriented learning activities, The Nature of Learning integrates conservation topics into the school's curriculum, training faculty on teaching methods in environmental education, and providing wildlife experiences on and off school grounds. The program features integrated, research-based projects with teacher initiation and supervision, encouraging students to consider careers in the sciences.

What Does The Nature of Learning Program Do?

The Nature of Learning began in 1994 as the Earth Stewards program. The New Jersey Field Office (NJFO) was one of five stations within the Service to initiate the program. In all, the NJFO has partnered with four schools: Smithville Elementary School in Atlantic County, Pinelands Regional High School in Ocean County, Washington Elementary School in Mercer County, and the Stafford Township Intermediate School in Ocean County. A start-up grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation helped to ensure outstanding environmental education to some 600 Stafford students.

The Nature of Learning Program Stresses Integrated Learning

The Nature of Learning program is not curriculum-based but seeks rather to be flexible to the setting and needs of each school. It is also integrative, encouraging the introduction of ecological values and subject material into all areas of the curriculum. Thus, an English class might require the reading of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*; a music class might introduce students to Ferde Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*. An American History class might study the effects of European settlement on native ecology. At the same time, Science classes can be used to involve students directly in scientific study of local ecosystems or of specific flora and fauna within them.

The Nature of Learning Program Creates Partnerships

The Nature of Learning program builds on partnerships among the NJFO, the school at which the program is sited, and other governmental groups, environmental organizations, businesses, and even individuals. Partners provide assistance in the form of goods, services, volunteers, and funding. A partial list of Nature of Learning partners over the years might include:

- Public Service Electric & Gas Company
- Smithville Fire Department
- Edwin B. Forsythe NWR
- Benjamin Moore Company
- U.S. Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science
- The New Jersey Audubon Society
- Delaware—Raritan Greenway
- Hamilton—Trenton Marsh Education Committee
- Stafford Township Board of Education
- New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection – Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Stafford Township
- New Jersey Forest Service
- Isles, Inc.



The Nature of Learning Program Provides Professional Development for Educators

The NJFO contracts with an environmental education consultant to advise on teaching techniques that can range from developing a single unit within the year's curriculum to basing the goals of a course wholly or partially on environmental concerns. She also conducts teacher workshops. For instance, at Washington Elementary, she led a 3.5-hour in-service workshop on the Hamilton-Trenton Marsh as an ecological studies resource for 15 faculty members. Participants were awarded New Jersey Professional Development hours for their attendance.

The Nature of Learning Program Involves Students in Stewardship Projects

The Nature of Learning encourages stewardship projects as part of the curricular package. Past projects have included:

- Schoolyard beautification and flower planting
- Development of interpretive trails, including the building of bridges
- Arbor Day tree plantings
- Creation of a butterfly garden
- Creation of a wetlands

Become Involved, Contact Us!

For more information on The Nature of Learning in New Jersey or to start a Nature of Learning site at your school, contact Dr. James Cramer at 609-646-9310 ext. 39 or james_cramer@fws.gov, or write to the address below.



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