

Project WILD and Schoolyard Wildlife Programs: Promise for the Future

by Carrie Hamby, Project WILD Office, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission

Photo: Cameron Donaldson



Three young Floridians take a break from working in their wild garden. Left to right: Anthony Williams, Kevin Morrison, and Tray Wilson, participants in a "Community Rangers" program funded by the Advisory Council on Environmental Education.

Project WILD is a national program sponsored in our state by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Along with its companion program, Aquatic WILD, Project WILD is an environmental education program emphasizing wildlife and ecosystems. Activity guides, the major tangible benefit that teachers take away from one-day WILD workshops, are provided free

of charge to workshop participants. These workshops also provide a unique array of ideas and models for many teachers to include environmental education in their classes, from kindergarten through twelfth grade, in any type of classroom; and teachers are eligible for in-service credit by attending these workshops. A published correlation of WILD activities and the Sunshine State Standards is currently underway and should be available soon.

We also sponsor the Schoolyard Wildlife Project. This is an environmental education program that shows teachers how to turn their school grounds into effective outdoor classrooms. The one-day Schoolyard Wildlife workshop emphasizes natural history, ecology lessons, and natural science explorations. The more complex Schoolyard Ecosystems workshop teaches about local ecosystems and how to plan and implement the creation, restoration, or enhancement of native wildlife habitats on school grounds. A companion book to the activity guide,

Handbook to Schoolyard Plants and Animals of North Central Florida, is offered as part of both workshops or can be ordered from the Project WILD state office separately.

Project WILD, Aquatic WILD, and Schoolyard workshops are almost entirely provided by a group of committed volunteers who have been to workshops in the past and receive training in workshop facilitation through the state office at one of the Game Commission's training camps. Without the work of this group of volunteers, it would be impossible to reach the volume of educators and students that we are able to reach through these workshops. In addition to the one-day workshops, three weekend workshops are available during the year to provide extensive training in WILD activities as well as outdoor skills that are usually associated with scouting and survival training. Volunteers make up the majority of the staff at these weekend workshops as well.

THE ACTION GRANT PROGRAM

The Project WILD Action Grant Program is based on the idea that students and teachers who have had contact with Project WILD need opportunities to take environmental action. In Florida, action grant recipients have in the past been recognized as "WILD School Sites." Students in such schoolyard sites

are able to learn about wildlife and ecological principles, observe firsthand the dynamics and diversity of living systems, and benefit from hands-on learning experiences that they will carry throughout life. Educators have the opportunity to use the outdoors for interdisciplinary learning activities without having to schedule field trips. Through designing, installing, and maintaining a schoolyard ecosystem, all participants – educators, students, and the community – instill a sense of stewardship and land ethic.

The Project WILD Action Grant Program has been operating in at least 25 states over the past several years. In Florida, the Florida Wildlife Federation has administered the program in cooperation with the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. In the early 1990s, Florida's Project WILD program, which is housed in the Education Section of the Office of Information Services in the Game Commission, ap-

continued on page 10

Project WILD and Schoolyard Wildlife Programs: Promise for the Future

continued from page 6

plied for and received funding to award to educators through this action grant program during the 1994-95 school year. The Phillips Petroleum Company was the corporate sponsor of the program, and matching funds were provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Florida Wildlife Federation assisted the Project WILD grant coordinator in administering the program.

Florida educators who had attended a Project WILD and a Schoolyard Wildlife Project workshop were eligible to apply for grants ranging from \$200 to \$500. The intent of the program was to provide support for improving habitat for people and wildlife on school grounds. Schoolyard improvement projects could range in scope from building and installing bird boxes to restoring a wetland area. Several projects that were funded through the action grant program involved native plantings as part of restoration and outdoor learning areas, such as butterfly gardens. One of the awarded programs even included a control burn as part of its native habitat restoration plan.

RESURRECTING THE GRANT PROGRAM

In the 1999-2000 school year, the action grant program will become available to educators once again, through the cooperation of the Florida Wildlife Federation and the state Project WILD office. Schools (public, private or parochial), non-profit youth groups, non-profit community groups with youth programs – all are eligible and

encouraged to apply. The project coordinator, or at least one key project representative, must have attended a Project WILD or Aquatic WILD workshop as well as a Schoolyard Wildlife Project workshop. Preference will also be given to schools that have participated in a Schoolyard Ecosystems workshop.

Projects will need to show elements of the following, in order to be considered eligible for funding:

- Direct action to benefit wildlife
- Hands-on experiences for students
- Involvement of the students in selecting and designing the project
- Age appropriateness to the students involved
- An interdisciplinary approach to curriculum material
- Partnerships (e.g., Florida Native Plant Society)
- Community involvement
- Matching funds

Grant information packets will be sent out to school districts within the next six months. An application packet will be made available to schools that respond to the query included in the information packet. To give interested parties a “jump start” on fulfilling the eligibility requirements, educators will be given several opportunities during the spring and summer to attend Schoolyard Wildlife and Schoolyard Ecosystems one-day workshops — a four-hour and six-hour time commitment, respectively. A calendar of upcoming

workshops is available through our website (<http://www.state.fl.us/gfc/>). Two additional weekend-long workshops will be offered to provide extended training and information about planning and implementing a schoolyard ecosystem project. The April 23-25 weekend in Vernon will include an advanced program for those who have been through a weekend workshop in the past; the advanced program will explore schoolyard habitats and native plant restoration projects in the Panhandle area. A special weekend workshop will be available to educators in the GFC's Central and South regions, to begin implementing a native plant garden in Polk County and highlight schoolyard projects in the area that have received acclaim.

Hamby, Carrie. 1999. Project WILD and Schoolyard Wildlife Programs: Promise for the Future. Palmetto 19 (1): 6, 10.



For more information on Project WILD and Schoolyard programs, as well as grant opportunities, please contact: Carrie Hamby, Project WILD, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, 620 S Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600, Phone: (850) 488-4679, SunCom: 278-4679, FAX (850) 488-1961, Email: hambyc@gfc.state.fl.us, WWW: <http://www.state.fl.us/gfc/>