

GLSI Currents

Spring 2010

News and Views from the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative: Expanding Classrooms, Strengthening Communities

Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative Recognizes Michigan Students for Their Contributions to Healthier Environments, Stronger Communities

By Mary Whitmore, GLSI Program Coordinator

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson recently recognized young people from across the country at the President's 2009 Environmental Youth Awards ceremony. The students were honored for making outstanding contributions to environmental protection through projects that help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and protect America's waters. Some of the projects included collecting a town's cooking oil for recycling into biofuel and distributing it to charities; designing and building an environmental education center made entirely out of green, earth-friendly materials; and starting a recycling program and class on recycling.



Mary Whitmore

Closer to home, Michigan's young people have been involved in dozens of similar projects through the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative. As the 2009–2010 school year comes to a close, this issue of Currents highlights the efforts of students, teachers, and community partners who, with support from the GLSI's eight regional hubs, have learned about environmental resources and stewardship while doing important projects in their communities. Visit our website (www.glstewardship.org) to learn more about their impressive and diverse accomplishments.

From Detroit to the Upper Peninsula, from West Michigan to Thunder Bay, the GLSI hubs are helping people identify important issues and work together to address them. Their actions not only improve the environment but also strengthen our communities. The students who are involved today in the GLSI are the next generation of environmental stewards. By the looks of it, they're off to a great start.

Momentum for the GLSI is growing. It's exciting to see the enthusiasm building as students across our state gain hands-on awareness of waste reduction, wildlife habitat preservation, composting, urban farming, and energy efficiency.

The environmental challenges we in Michigan face today and will encounter in the future are complex. Solving them will require people who are knowledgeable, good at problem-solving, able to work with others, and committed to taking action. The GLSI helps young people develop these skills through firsthand experiences close to home.

The GLSI proudly recognizes the work of thousands of students, hundreds of educators and community partners, and the staff and advisors of our eight regional hubs.

Well done, all!

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Expanding classrooms. Strengthening communities.

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GRAND Learning Network Helps Student Learning Take Flight While Protecting Baby Ducks at Lansing's Potter Park Zoo

Third-graders at Lyons Avenue Elementary School are the delighted proud “parents” of 13 baby wood ducks that hatched in May at Lansing’s Potter Park Zoo. The project was supported by the GRAND Learning Network, a regional GLSI hub at Michigan State University.

More than 50 third-graders worked with teachers, local businesses, and local environmental stewards to build 12 nesting boxes and place them in and around the zoo on the Red Cedar River.

“We’re putting up the wood duck boxes so that when the wood ducks come back, they’ll already have a house they can live in,” 9-year-old Abby Pulido told the *Lansing State Journal* in a story published in February. The feature was accompanied by several photos that chronicled students’ labors.

The children’s efforts were rewarded this spring, said Mark Stephens, the GRAND Learning Network’s co-coordinator and leader of several outreach programs in the Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies at Michigan State University. Lyons Elementary third-graders continued their stewardship connection by returning to the zoo on May 12 to see and experience their work.

“They checked on four of the boxes we had installed,” Stephens said. “One box contained a nest with 13 eggs. The kids really were impressed that the eggs were

warm and they had a chance to see the duck return to its nest. The kids thought it was an incredible sight. They are writing in their journals now about an experience I’m sure most of them will never forget,” he added.

Lyons Elementary teachers, who had taken part in professional development sessions offered by the GRAND Learning Network, received a \$500 grant from the regional GLSI hub and other sponsors.

The kids used the grant to purchase 10-foot steel poles on which to mount the boxes. Local businesses, including MPC Lumber of Lansing, donated the rest of the materials, and Midway Engravers of Williamston donated 32 pairs of safety glasses to the students. The local chapter of Delta Waterfowl, an international conservation organization, helped the children build the nest boxes and showed them how to install them.

“The students were very proud to hear that their project to protect waterfowl was chosen for funding, and that they had a chance to be stewards of our Grand River watershed in the Lansing area,” said Lyons Elementary teacher Jo Trumble, who is a teacher-leader for the GRAND Learning Network. Trumble and other teacher-leaders attend ongoing professional development sessions offered by the GLSI hub, and then work with other teachers, administrators, and school board members in their districts to expand opportunities for place-based education.

“Lyons School is very close to Potter Park, so students are able to see firsthand the impact they’ve had on the environment,” she said.

Installing nest boxes at the zoo was a highlight of the Big Zoo Lesson, a week-long program involving tours, observation, and activities. As part of that program,



Lyons Elementary School third-grade teacher Cesar Rivera works with GRAND Learning Network parent-volunteer Felicia Blackman while helping students build wood duck nesting boxes. The boxes were installed this spring at Lansing’s Potter Park Zoo and became home to at least 13 ducklings.

Potter Park Zoo encourages students to do a community service project related to wildlife or conservation, said Dennis Laidler, the zoo’s curator of education.

“It’s a great educational experience for the students because they’re taking a project from conception through completion,” Laidler said.

The Grand Learning Network and teachers at Lyons School are planning to continue their work with wood ducks next year. Students will return to the zoo to clean out and, if necessary, repair the nesting boxes, thereby providing homes for future generations of wood ducks.

“This project will continue to pay dividends, both in terms of student learning and environmental stewardship,” said Stephens. “Learning how to help wildlife by providing some of what they need is part of the process of learning to love wildlife. In order to love something, and appreciate it and care about it later, you need to have some experiences with it. These students have done just that.”

The GRAND Learning Network

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Celebration! Cinema Teams with GLSI to Raise More Than \$10,000 for Environmental Stewardship

New partnership a blockbuster that promises sequels

More than 10,000 people in communities across Michigan are sporting this spring's hottest new fashion accessory: a fluorescent green Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative wristband that was designed by Celebration! Cinema and Groundswell, a regional GLSI hub that serves Kent County.

The wristbands are more than a symbolic sign of support for the GLSI. The partnership between Celebration! Cinema and Groundswell raised a total of \$10,154, which will be split among the three GLSI hubs located in areas where there are Celebration! Cinemas: GRAND Learning Network (Lansing), Groundswell (Grand Rapids), and West Michigan Stewardship Initiative (Muskegon).

"It's great to see how popular the wristbands have become—everybody is wearing them, from two-year-olds to grandparents," said Emily Loeks, Celebration! Cinema's director of community affairs.

The partnership between Celebration! Cinema and the GLSI began when Groundswell wrote a proposal for support from the theater chain. Celebration! Cinema not only accepted this proposal, but generously extended the concept to other GLSI hubs in its service area.

Starting on Earth Day, Celebration! Cinema promoted the GLSI for two weeks (April 22–May 6), both on-screen and in its lobbies. In addition, wristbands were sold for \$1 at ticket booths. Theater patrons learned about the mission of the GLSI and its hubs and the need to be stewards of the Great Lakes.

"I think that people in Michigan really connect with both the desire to save the Great Lakes and also the importance of getting students engaged in hands-on environmental and service-learning projects out of the classroom," said Loeks. "This was a very successful community partnership. We're proud to take part in work with Groundswell and the GLSI and look forward to pursuing future opportunities to work together."

This spring, the theater chain has shared both regional and global environmental stories on movie screens by showing *Mysteries of the Great Lakes* on IMAX screens and the Disney Nature film *Oceans* in all Celebration! Cinema locations. Celebration! Cinema also has 25,000 followers on Facebook who received messaging about the GLSI campaign.

Groundswell had staff and volunteers in four theaters during the busiest weekend times. Members of five partner organizations and four participating teachers informed patrons about watersheds and runoff and gave out temporary tattoos reminding people to keep Michigan's lakes clean.

"We had an activity set up for people to explore how land use can affect water quality, complete with spray bottles to simulate rain, sand to act as runoff, and plastic fish to show how our actions can affect wildlife," said Groundswell coordinator Erin Gallay. "The kids had a great time playing with the dirt and water and definitely got the message that it is up to all of us to keep our rivers and lakes clean."

"The experience not only helped to raise money that will enable our hub to fund school stewardship projects, but also helped to spread the word about the great work of the GLSI as a whole," Gallay added.

The GRAND Learning Network will use its share of the proceeds from the wristband sales to provide grants for stewardship projects at schools in Bath, DeWitt,



This poster greeted patrons at Celebration! Cinema box offices to help promote awareness and spur sales of new Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative wristbands this spring.

Haslett, Holt, Laingsburg, and Lansing, said co-coordinator Mark Stephens.

"We were quite impressed that this cinema took the time and resources necessary to make the whole event very worthy of a contribution by a patron," said Stephens. "The posters they created were very professional and helped promote the cause."

The West Michigan GLSI set up a display at the Celebration! Cinema Carousel theater in Muskegon that included information on place-based education and WMGLSI; pictures of students, teachers, and community members doing hands-on work in their communities; and logos of funders, according to WMGLSI coordinator Melissa Maxson. The hub also developed a "Your Great Lakes I.Q." poster.

"We created an indoor pond, which had macroinvertebrates that people could search for and examine with magnifying glasses," said Maxson. "The adults, kids, and teens were engaged and interested. Some were grossed out that we had 'bugs' inside with them, but most were amazed that these critters are found in local lakes and streams."

The GLSI is a perfect fit for Celebration! Cinema's commitment to raising awareness about environmental issues. "We are a storytelling business, and that happens both on the screen and off the screen," said Loeks. "The GLSI is an outstanding organization, and we are confident this story will have a sequel."

Groundswell

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Parents and Community Partners Support Place-Based Education in Flint

Parent facilitators at Beecher Community Schools are looking forward to helping more parents get involved in their children's education through a partnership with Discovering Place-based Learning and Community Experience (PLACE), the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative's regional hub in Flint.

Plans are under way for parents to participate in student community-mapping activities, work with teachers and students to help develop place-based education projects, and be available as volunteers to assist in fieldwork.



Dora King (center), co-owner along with her husband of Harvesting Earth Educational Farm, holds her granddaughter while giving a study tour of an urban farm to parents and students from Milton E. Tucker Elementary School.

"Discovering PLACE is committed to bringing diverse groups of people and organizations together in creative ways to address local conservation concerns and to foster civic engagement," said coordinator Danielle Gartner of the University of Michigan-Flint University Outreach department, which houses Discovering PLACE. "Parents are a very important group: we know that their support and involvement has a big impact on students' learning and motivation."

The work of Discovering PLACE is focused on six schools in two districts, Beecher Community Schools and Westwood Heights School District. The hub's community partners are the Flint River Watershed Coalition, For-Mar Nature Preserve and Arboretum, Genesee County Land Bank/Genesee Institute,

Harvesting Earth Education Farm (Karate Ka), Keep Genesee County Beautiful, Michigan Nature Association, Ruth Mott Foundation's Applewood Estate, Six Rivers Regional Land Conservancy, Stockton Center at Spring Grove Museum and Library, Urban League of Flint, and local author/photographer Brian Willingham.

The work is both rewarding and challenging, Gartner said. The population decrease in Flint since 2000 ranks among the nation's highest per capita of any large American city. With a regional loss of 50 percent of manufacturing jobs, Flint struggles to maintain existing infrastructure and services with its declining tax base. Flint's economic milieu has also resulted in greater social segregation and racial disparities.

"Our school partners are located in communities where the residents want safer streets, homes, and schools for their children," Gartner said. "Currently, there are limited options for youth in this area to access safe outdoor space, and furthermore, many do not envision a positive future for Flint. Discovering PLACE is working to nurture the development of a new narrative for the Flint area—one that is centered on the concepts of regeneration, transformation, and sustainability."

With the support of Discovering PLACE, local school administrators, teachers, and parent facilitators such as Courtney Hatter of Beecher Community Schools have been hard at work to provide relationship-building opportunities between schools and parents. "Just because you are a single parent working two jobs doesn't mean you aren't or can't be involved in your child's education," said Hatter, a parent facilitator at Milton E. Tucker Elementary School.

With support from the GLSI and other funders, parents at Tucker Elementary can



Students from Milton E. Tucker Elementary School pet a chicken held by Jacky King, co-owner of Harvesting Earth Educational Farm in Flint.

attend informative and interactive events offered each month at different times of the day, night, and week. These events include morning Sip'N Says, Mid-Day Enrichment, Family Fun Nights with themes ranging from "Going Green" to "Social Media Use and Safety," and the "Fatherhood Project," which aims to increase exposure to positive male role models in students' lives. These opportunities allow parents to voice concerns, exchange knowledge, and be part of school decision-making processes.

At a recent Dinner & Dialogue in April, teachers, community partners, school administrators, parents, and students learned about urban agriculture and food systems from two guest speakers: Erin Caudell of Applewood Estate and Edible Flint, and Stephen Arellano, program officer of the Ruth Mott Foundation.

Discovering PLACE, through its support of strong partnerships that support students' learning, helps parents and local organizations contribute positively to children's education, all while helping to improve the local community's environment.

Discovering PLACE

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