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Five Educators Named Project Learning Tree®
2008 Outstanding Educator of the Year

Washington, D.C. – Project Learning Tree® (PLT), the environmental education program of the American Forest Foundation, has announced its 2008 National Outstanding Educators of the Year.

Ina Ahern of Plymouth, NH; Brita Hampton of Virginia Beach, VA; Rob Marohn of Duluth, MN; Susan Ward of Conway, SC; and Cherie Wyatt of Burlington, CO, were chosen for their commitment to environmental education, exemplary use of PLT, and exceptional teaching skills. They will be honored at PLT's 22nd International Coordinators' Conference, May 13–16, in Jackson, MS.

“These five educators teach students in different grade levels in urban, rural, and suburban schools,” said Kathy McGlaufflin, Director of Project Learning Tree and Senior Vice President, Center for Environmental Learning at the American Forest Foundation. “What they have in common is a commitment to helping students learn about the world around them, their place within it, and their responsibility for it.”

Ina Ahern teaches chemistry, physics, and environmental science at Plymouth Regional High School in Plymouth, NH. With a passion for and commitment to the environment, she has made local issues a large part of the curriculum through an integrated, place-based, and hands-on approach. For example, her students conduct field studies in their local watershed--collecting and analyzing data, learning land use history, and making presentations about their findings to the community. A high school science teacher for 25 years, Ahern often makes presentations to other educators about how to incorporate the local environment into teaching. In 2006, she was one of a pioneer group of teachers to participate in the yearlong program A Forest for Every Classroom, cosponsored by PLT, the USDA Forest Service, and Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest.

Brita Hampton teaches science to grades 6, 7, and 8 and is Science Coordinator of Star of the Sea Regional Catholic School in Virginia Beach, VA. First trained in PLT in 2004, Hampton has organized numerous workshops for teachers at Star of the Sea and other Catholic schools in the area. As Science Coordinator, she finds ways to engage teachers and students at all grade levels in PLT and other environmental education (EE) activities. She finds leadership opportunities for her students, such as presentations and exhibits at EE professional conferences. She uses every form of communication to teach about the environment. For example, she recently worked with the local PBS station on a program for middle-school students called “The Forest Files.”

Rob Marohn teaches science and language arts to 5th graders at Bay View Elementary School in Duluth, MN. He was first introduced to PLT while in college and now uses PLT activities with his students every week. Marohn is a tireless advocate for his school forest and has worked with teachers, students, school administrators, parents, and the community to create trails, outdoor classrooms, teaching stations, and other

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improvements. He has organized a two-day PLT workshop and other training for fellow teachers on how to teach in an outdoor setting. He also has used PLT to create two programs for students: Forest Buddies, in which 5th graders help teach younger students, and the after-school Bay View School Forest Club. For the past three years, he has organized 5th grade students and parents in a three-day, two-night program at the Audubon Center. Marohn was appointed to the Duluth Tree Commission and has helped edit several curriculum guides used statewide. His students have made presentations to local city councils on issues affecting forests, watershed health, and land development decisions.

Susan Ward is a 7th grade science teacher at Whittemore Park Middle School in Conway, in South Carolina's Coastal Plain. She has been involved with PLT since the start of her teaching career in the late 1980s, when she helped field test many of the activities that became part of the revised PLT PreK-8 Guides. She uses PLT with her students in the outdoors—on field trips, camping trips, and in the school's outdoor classrooms and gardens that she helped create. At Whittemore Park and other schools where she taught, she launched recycling programs that handle paper, plastics, and metal. In 2005, Ward worked with the Horry County school district to get PLT activities incorporated into the curriculum. She then trained all middle school science teachers in how to use these activities effectively. She has also conducted many other PLT workshops for teachers and Scout leaders.

Cherie Wyatt teaches 7th grade life science and 8th grade physical science at Burlington Middle School in the eastern Colorado town of Burlington. She infuses PLT and other environmental education materials into her teaching, often taking her students outside to reinforce classroom learning. She initiated a now-annual water festival for her students in which 8th graders help teach younger students. Wyatt also has a strong commitment to helping other teachers. She organizes and presents staff development workshops to fellow educators, as well as to pre-service teachers at the University of Northern Colorado. She helped create High Plains TEN (Teaching Environment Naturally), in which teachers learn how to make better use of local resources and experts to improve student learning.

In addition to attending the PLT International Coordinators' Conference, May 13-16, in Jackson, MS, PLT's National Outstanding Educators are invited to attend the World Forestry Center's International Educators' Institute, July 14-19, in Portland, OR.

Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is the environmental education program of the American Forest Foundation. . PLT provides educators with comprehensive environmental education curriculum resources that can be integrated into lesson plans for all grades and subject areas. PLT teaches students “how to think, not what to think” about complex environmental issues, and helps students learn the skills they need to make sound choices about the environment.

Developed in 1976, PLT has an international network of more than 500,000 trained educators using PLT materials that cover the total environment. The American Forest Foundation, a nonprofit 501(c)3 conservation and education organization, works for healthy forests, quality environmental education, and informed decision-making about our communities and our world.

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