



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 26, 2008



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**Susan Ward of Conway 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.

Susan Ward of Conway was one of five educators selected nationwide for their commitment to environmental education, exemplary use of PLT, and exceptional teaching skills. She will be honored at PLT's 22nd International Coordinators' Conference, May 13–16, in Jackson, MS.

Ward is a 7th grade science teacher at Whittemore Park Middle School in Conway. 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 Whittemore Park's outdoor classrooms and gardens that she helped create.

In 2005, Ward worked with the Horry County school district to get PLT activities incorporated into the curriculum as an example of ways to incorporate the environment into the state curriculum standards and increase student achievement and PACT scores. She then trained all the district's middle school science teachers in how to use these activities effectively. She has also conducted many other PLT workshops, training over 200 educators in the Coastal area of South Carolina and Girl Scout leaders.

At Whittemore Park and two other schools where she taught--Daisy Elementary and Loris Middle—Ward has launched school-wide recycling programs for paper, plastics, and metal. She teaches students to conserve energy, and takes them on field trips to the Horry County Waste Management site to make them more aware of their responsibility as citizens to take care of the environment.

“Susan is unique among her colleagues,” said South Carolina PLT Coordinator Jerry Shrum. “Active in her school and community, she instills in her students and peers the need to go beyond the classroom. She goes the extra mile for all students, to meet each student's needs and give them meaningful learning opportunities.”

Each year, Ward organizes an overnight camping trip to the FFA Camp in Little River. She uses PLT activities with students to study the coastal marsh, tidal creeks, and forested areas and invites SC Forestry Commission and SC Department of Natural Resource professionals to present classes. Following Hurricane Floyd, she and her students helped clean up the damaged area. As a member of Waccamaw Riverkeepers

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Association, Ward is dedicated to keeping the Waccamaw river clean and involves her students in river sweeps to clean up litter. She also takes her students to participate in Swampfest and to teach younger children during Baby Animal Day at Playcard Environmental Center.

At Daisy Elementary School, Ward helped develop and maintain a nature trail and her students helped plan and create a backyard habitat. At Loris Middle School she created an outdoor classroom area and worked with her students to create a garden for environmental studies.

For the past seven years, Ward has presented her personal experiences of using PLT to science teachers attending the South Carolina Science Conference. She helped correlate PLT materials to South Carolina's curriculum standards and has continually provided leadership within the South Carolina PLT program. Ward presently serves on the South Carolina PLT Steering Committee as an educational representative, a position she has held for the last two years.

“Susan Ward exemplifies how a great teacher can inspire students and other educators,” said Kathy McGlaufflin, Director of Project Learning Tree and Senior Vice President of Education for the American Forest Foundation. “PLT is known for quality environmental education because teachers like her use PLT in classrooms and outdoors to help students learn about the world around them, their place within it, and their responsibility to it.”

In addition to attending the PLT International Coordinators' Conference, May 13-16, in Jackson, MS, Ward is 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 conservation and education organization, works for healthy forests, quality environmental education, and informed decision-making about our communities and our world. The South Carolina Forestry Commission, South Carolina Forestry Foundation, and South Carolina Department of Education are the PLT state sponsors in South Carolina.

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