



16th Annual DAEE Environmental Education Conference
February 28, 2026
Odessa High School, Townsend, DE
 Working Toward a Sustainable Future

8:15 a.m.	Registration, Morning Refreshments, Networking, Silent Auction				
PLENARY SESSION 8:45 - 9:45 a.m.	Opening Remarks: David Christopher, DAEE Chair Keynote Speaker: Dan Hinderliter, Associate Director of State Policy for Advance CTE				
BUSINESS MEETING 9:45 - 10:30 a.m.	DAEE Annual Business Meeting Awards for Excellence in Environmental Education				
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break, Networking, Silent Auction				
STRAND	Connecting People with Nature	Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education	Cultivating Environmental Leaders	Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education	Environmental Education in Action
Location	B123	B124	B128	B129	Greenhouse
CONCURRENT SESSION I 10:45 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Beyond Citizen Science: Building Engaging Partnerships for Conservation Action <i>Lauren Barczak, Brandywine Zoo & Angel Burns, DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation</i>	STEM of Sustainability <i>Mary Schorse, Del Center for Geographic Education, Chris Williams, University of Delaware & Andy Liu, Sustainable Solutions & Insights LLC.</i>	Strategies for Successful Volunteer Engagement <i>Nathan Stewart, Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids</i>	Enhancing Environmental Literacy With Watershed Education in Delaware Schools <i>Tara Muenz & Steve Mahapp, Stroud Water Research Center & Sonia Saunders & Michael Butzgy, Red Clay Consolidated School District</i>	Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning in Action <i>Jeffrey Billings, Agrilience Educator and FFA Advisor, Odessa High School Student members of the Odessa FFA Chapter</i>
11:30 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.	Break, Networking, Silent Auction				
CONCURRENT SESSION II 11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Ethnobotany: Why People Need Plants <i>Mary Osman, Mt. Pleasant High School</i>	Ocean Literacy: What Everyone Should Know about the Ocean and How You Can Help Share it with the World! <i>David Christopher, Delaware Sea Grant/University of Delaware</i>	MWEEs; an Opportunity for In-Demand, Career-oriented Skill Development <i>Bart Merrick, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office</i>	Inclusion in an Environmental Science Classroom <i>Margaret Crosby, Caesar Rodney High School</i>	Repurposing for a Sustainable Future <i>Ellen Benitez, North Star Elementary School</i>
12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Lunch, Networking, Silent Auction				
CONCURRENT SESSION III 1:30 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.	Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World <i>Nancy Striniste, EarlySpace, LLC</i>	School-Based Watershed Restoration Projects and Their Impact on Students and the Community <i>Sonia Saunders, Erin Ahern, & Brian Mattis, Red Clay School District Tara Muenz, Stroud Water Research Center</i>	City of Wilmington Green Jobs Program's Geospatial Education <i>Sharon Ungerer, De Dept of Technology and Information, Mary Schorse & Tracy Dellberty, De Center for Geographic Education</i>	Nature in the Neighborhood: A Community Approach to Regenerative Landscaping <i>Kerry Wilson, Delaware Nature Society</i>	Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning in Action <i>Jeffrey Billings, Agrilience Educator and FFA Advisor, Odessa High School Student members of the Odessa FFA Chapter</i>
2:15 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.	Break, Networking, Silent Auction Silent Auction bidding closes at 2:45 p.m.				
CONCURRENT SESSION IV 2:45 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Student Tree Planting to Enhance Engagement at School <i>Dr. Nathan Falkovitz, Conrad Schools of Science</i>	Environmental Literacy in Delaware: An Update <i>Round-table Discussion Moderator: David Christopher, DAEE Chair</i>	Delaware's 2025 Climate Action Plan <i>Lee Aiken, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control</i>	Rooted Rhythms: Nurturing Growth Through Nature-Based Learning and Play <i>Talon & Travis Holleman, ROOTS Farm & Forest School</i>	Using Art to Visualize Environmental Data <i>Eileen Koenig, Ursuline Academy</i>
3:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.	Conference Evaluations & Silent Auction Check-out				

Click on the session title to view the session description.

STRAND	Connecting People with Nature	Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education	Cultivating Environmental Leaders	Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education	Environmental Education in Action
<p>Concurrent Session I 10:45 – 11:30 a.m.</p>	<p><u>Beyond Citizen Science: Building Engaging Partnerships for Conservation Action</u></p>	<p><u>STEM of Sustainability</u></p>	<p><u>Strategies for Successful Volunteer Engagement</u></p>	<p><u>Enhancing Environmental Literacy With Watershed Education in Delaware Schools</u></p>	<p><u>Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning In Action</u></p>
<p>Concurrent Session II 11:45 – 12:30p.m.</p>	<p><u>Ethnobotany: Why People Need Plants</u></p>	<p><u>Ocean Literacy: What Everyone Should Know about the Ocean and How You Can Help Share It with the World!</u></p>	<p><u>MWEEs; an Opportunity for In-Demand, Career-oriented Skill Development</u></p>	<p><u>Inclusion in an Environmental Science Classroom</u></p>	<p><u>Repurposing for a Sustainable Future</u></p>
<p>Concurrent Session III 1:30 – 2:15 p.m.</p>	<p><u>Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World</u></p>	<p><u>School-Based Watershed Restoration Project and Their Impact on Students and the Community</u></p>	<p><u>City of Wilmington Green Jobs Program's Geospatial Education</u></p>	<p><u>Nature in the Neighborhood: A Community Approach to Regenerative Landscaping</u></p>	<p><u>Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning In Action</u></p>
<p>Concurrent Session IV 2:45 – 3:30 p.m.</p>	<p><u>Student Tree Planting to Enhance Engagement at School</u></p>	<p><u>Environmental Literacy in Delaware: An Update</u></p>	<p><u>Delaware's 2025 Climate Action Plan</u></p>	<p><u>Rooted Rhythms: Nurturing Growth Through Nature-Based Learning and Play</u></p>	<p><u>Using Art to Visualize Environmental Data</u></p>

CONCURRENT SESSION I

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Session Title: Beyond Citizen Science: Building Engaging Partnerships for Conservation Action

Session Description: Learn about how to build successful partnerships to engage your organization and your community in conservation science and education! During this session you will learn about the exciting new wildlife conservation projects being conducted throughout the state in partnership between the Brandywine Zoo and Delaware State Parks, and how building partnerships like these can help your organization achieve your goals.

Presenters: Lauren Barczak, Curator of Conservation Science and Learning, Brandywine Zoo

Angel Burns, Chief of Interpretation, DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: STEM of Sustainability

Session Description: The STEM of Sustainability Initiative (SOSI) is an education and outreach program launched by Chemours scientists in 2021 and expanded through a partnership with the University of Delaware in 2023. Designed to help students and teachers understand and apply core sustainability concepts, SOSI introduces what sustainability is, why it matters, and how to integrate sustainable thinking into everyday decision-making.

The initiative consists of five instructional modules that highlight the importance of critical thinking and informed choices in building a sustainable future. After exploring product life cycles and assessing risks to human and planetary health, students engage in a culminating problem-based learning scenario in which they must recommend a packaging solution for a local burrito shop.

SOSI modules are currently being piloted in middle and high school science classrooms across Delaware. This presentation will outline the instructional content of each module and share real-time classroom experiences and insights from implementing sustainability education throughout the state.

Presenters: Mary Schorse, Director, Delaware Center for Geographic Education
Chris Williams, Professor of Entomology, UD College of Ag and Natural Resources
Andy Liu, Sustainable Chemistry Strategist, Sustainable Solutions & Insights LLC.

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Session Title: Strategies for Successful Volunteer Engagement

Session Description: For environmental educators and program administrators, the idea of managing volunteers can feel overwhelming. This talk will highlight a strategic framework for assessing and identifying existing needs to build or improve upon a volunteer program. We will explore some successful strategies for volunteer recruitment, management, and purposeful engagement that will make having volunteers work for you. Discover how effective community volunteer support can help generate and sustain momentum for a school garden education organization.

Presenter: Nathan Stewart, Program Coordinator,
Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Enhancing Environmental Literacy With Watershed Education in Delaware Schools

Session Description: Stroud Water Research Center and the White Clay Wild and Scenic River Program have been introducing educators and students in Delaware's Red Clay Consolidated School District to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs). The project began in 2023 and has been funded for three years by an Open Outdoors for Kids grant from the National Park Foundation. Teachers from all of the district's elementary schools participated in professional development focused on increasing environmental literacy among students through hands-on experiences and the MWEE framework. With Stroud Center educators, the teachers co-created four days of student-centered lessons that explore how land use affects stormwater runoff in the White Clay Creek Watershed. This local watershed education instructional unit has been integrated into all 5th-grade classes in the Red Clay Consolidated School District. Partners also created worksheets, a field notebook for student observations in English and Spanish, and a video introducing the lessons and field experiences. Now in its third school year, the project expands its partnership with Delaware State Parks to prepare and sustain the unit of study into the future while disseminating it as a model to other schools in the region. Presenters will share the history and outcomes of the MWEE unit, as well as partnership tips, and hands-on experience with some of the unit lessons.

Presenters: Tara, Muenz, Interim Director of Education, Stroud Water Research Center
Steve Mohapp, Watershed Specialist, Stroud Water Research Center
Sonia Saunders Environmental Educator Specialist, Red Clay Consolidated School District
Michael Butzgy, 5th Grade Teacher, Linden Hill Elementary School

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

Session Title: Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning in Action

Session Description: This session highlights how the Odessa High School Agriscience program and Odessa FFA Chapter engage students in hands-on, place-based environmental learning that promotes stewardship, leadership, and real-world application. Through outdoor instruction, community projects, and applied challenges, students connect environmental concepts to meaningful action. Various FFA members will share brief reflections on their immersion experiences and accomplishments in the competitive realm, demonstrating how experiential learning builds confidence, teamwork, and environmental awareness. Attendees will leave with practical ideas adaptable to any environmental education setting.

Presenters: Jeffrey Billings, Agriscience Educator and FFA Advisor, Odessa High School
Student members of the Odessa FFA Chapter

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: Ethnobotany: Why People Need Plants

Session Description: Move beyond photosynthesis and food chains to help your students learn how integral plants are to humans by exploring ways we rely on plants in our everyday life. In this workshop, I will explain what ethnobotany is and give teachers some resources they can use with students in their own classrooms and school yards to help kids connect with nature.

Presenter: Mary Osman, Mt. Pleasant High School

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

11:45-12:30p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: Ocean Literacy: What Everyone Should Know about the Ocean and How You Can Help Share It with the World!

Session Description: Become a part of the Ocean Literacy Campaign! Learn about the Ocean Literacy Framework (Guide, Scope and Sequence, NGSS alignment) and local, regional, national, and international impacts. We will spend time exploring the tools developed to assist with integration of Ocean Literacy concepts inside and out of the classroom with a new comprehensive presentation on Ocean Literacy highlighting the entire suite of resources available to share the Ocean Literacy Framework with all audiences.

Presenter: David Christopher, Delaware Sea Grant/University of Delaware

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: MWEEs; an Opportunity for In-Demand, Career-oriented Skill Development

Session Description: This session will explore how Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) serve as a powerful framework for developing the in-demand skills necessary for success in current and future careers. We'll move beyond traditional environmental education to show how the MWEE, a hands-on, project-based learning model, can integrate technology and data analysis skills that serve as the foundation for student action. This session will start with an overview of the MWEE and a discussion of skills that can be developed throughout the MWEE arc. Using data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics and other sources, we will identify and learn about in-demand skills, highlighting those that are aligned with environmental technology and data analysis. We will then highlight 3 practical technology-driven applications for collecting and analyzing environmental data:

- Using the CoCoRAHs network to collect and track precipitation data
- Using iNaturalist to learn about the presence and spread of invasive Blue Catfish
- Using GIS and location-based tools to assess shoreline and environmental change

Presenter: Bart Merrick, Education Coordinator, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Inclusion in an Environmental Science Class

Session Description: Innovative and inclusive environmental education merges engaging, modern methods with universal access, focusing on hands-on projects, technology, and community involvement to build environmental literacy for *all* learners, regardless of background or ability, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and action for a sustainable future. In this session, participants will learn about high leverage practices to help students with disabilities engage in a problem-based science curriculum. This session will include examples from a high school environmental science class.

Presenter: Margaret Crosby, Teacher, Caesar Rodney High School

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: Repurposing for a Sustainable Future

Session Description: Repurposing for a sustainable future means giving used items new life, transforming waste into valuable resources to cut landfill use, save energy, conserve raw materials, and reduce pollution. Learn various ways in which students can engage in reusing broken crayons and milk caps on campus. This presentation shares how one school in Hockessin, DE, North Star, makes it a habit within the school system to become more conscious of to recycle milk caps and broken crayons in different ways.

Presenter: Ellen Benitez, Earth Club, North Star Elementary School

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Session Title: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World

Session Description: Nature play can awaken children's senses, challenge their bodies, inspire their imaginations and build self-confidence. In order to grow up healthy and happy, children need abundant, unstructured time to play and explore in the natural world, but today's children rarely have the opportunity to roam free outdoors. Bringing nature to the places where children spend their time is an answer. Well-designed nature play spaces are inviting and endlessly engaging for children AND good for the planet. With rich, inspiring images from around the world, author, educator, and landscape designer Nancy Striniste explains why and how to bring the beauty, adventure, and sustainability of nature play to backyards, schoolyards, churchyards, neighborhood parks, early childhood settings, and more.

Presenter: Nancy Striniste, EarlySpace, LLC

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: School-Based Watershed Restoration Projects and Their Impact on Students and the Community

Session Description: Red Clay Consolidated School District, an awardee of a Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund grant, will share their two-year journey of installing watershed restoration projects, such as native pollinator gardens, meadows, and a rain garden on school campuses across the district. These challenges could not be successful without the incredible teamwork of staff at all levels and community partners. Already we have witnessed a positive impact on student environmental literacy and love for nature! It is our hope that the pathways and inroads we are making will serve as a meaningful long-lasting source of inspiration and appreciation for our students as well as for others across the state and beyond!

Presenters: Sonia Saunders, Environmental Educator Specialist, Red Clay Consolidated School District

Brian Mattix, Principal, HB Middle School

Erin Ahern, STEM Teacher at Skyline Middle School

Tara Muenz, Interim Director of Education, Stroud Water Research Center

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Session Title: City of Wilmington Green Jobs Program's Geospatial Education

Session Description: The City of Wilmington's Green Jobs program, established in 2011, seeks to provide City of Wilmington youth (14-18 years old) with six-weeks of first-hand and local outdoor experiences while also exposing them to environmental issues, careers, and professional skills. In 2023, the UD Water Resources Center partnered with the Delaware Department of Technology and Information (DTI), the University of Delaware Geography Department and the Delaware Center for Geographic Education ArcGIS Online Organization to introduce the youth to geospatial science and technology. The partnership exposes the youth to the field and provides them with information and tools to develop a detailed geospatial log of their activities. These activities and survey tools are also used to assist the youth in the development of their final capstone projects – a critical piece of the program. This presentation will provide an overview of the program with a focus on the geospatial education component of the program.

Presenters: Sharon Ungerer, Software Engineer, Delaware Department of Technology and Information (DTI),
Mary Schorse, Assistant Research Professor and Director, Delaware Center for Geographic Education
Tracy Deliberty, Deputy Dean, Delaware Center for Geographic Education

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Nature in the Neighborhood: A Community Approach to Regenerative Landscaping

Session Description: Delaware Nature Society is working with communities at the neighborhood level to provide access to nature and nature-based solutions in various ways. We are working with multiple partners including community leaders, preschools, homeowners, Green Building United, City of Wilmington Parks and Recreation and Public Works (to name a few) to identify areas to restore the pollinator corridor, improve drainage, and "bring the butterflies back". Additionally, our Coverdale Farm and Preserve staff is leading the work with our six-food resilience and justice gardens. Through these projects we are connecting the pollinator corridors and food networks providing relevance and resources for both. These spaces are not only serving wildlife, but they also have people at the center of them. The urban interface provides both challenges and opportunities for this work. We will discuss our work from partnering to our on the ground successes and challenges.

Presenter: Kerry Wilson, Habitat Outreach Manager, Delaware Nature Society

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

Session Title: Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning in Action

Session Description: This session highlights how the Odessa High School Agriscience program and Odessa FFA Chapter engage students in hands-on, place-based environmental learning that promotes stewardship, leadership, and real-world application. Through outdoor instruction, community projects, and applied challenges, students connect environmental concepts to meaningful action. Various FFA members will share brief reflections on their immersion experiences and accomplishments in the competitive realm, demonstrating how experiential learning builds confidence, teamwork, and environmental awareness. Attendees will leave with practical ideas adaptable to any environmental education setting.

Presenters: Jeffrey Billings, Agriscience Educator and FFA Advisor, Odessa High School
Student members of the Odessa FFA Chapter

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Student Tree Planting to Enhance Engagement at School

Session Description: Student tree planting boosts school engagement by offering hands-on learning, fostering environmental stewardship, improving focus and behavior, enhancing school aesthetics, and building community, while integrating into STEM/arts curricula and providing health benefits like cleaner air, reduced stress, and better nutrition from fruit trees, making it a powerful tool for holistic student development and a greener campus. This presentation is based on my doctoral dissertation defense, highlighting action research that demonstrates benefits that students experience when they plant trees on their own school campuses.

Presenter: Dr. Nathan Palkovitz, Conrad Schools of Science

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: Environmental Literacy in Delaware: An Update

Session Description: Are you interested in learning more about the environmental literacy movement in Delaware schools? Join us for a round table discussion on current Environmental Literacy efforts in Delaware including school district and state-level capacity-building efforts, recent and upcoming professional development opportunities, and how you and your school can become involved.

Participants: Bart Merrick, NOAA
Sonia Saunders, Red Clay School District,
David Pragoff, Delaware Nature Society
David Christopher, Delaware Sea Grant

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Delaware's 2025 Climate Action Plan

Session Description: After a year-long participatory process, Delaware has released its brand new 2025 Climate Action Plan, including strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build greener communities, and prepare Delaware residents for future climate risks like flooding and heat waves. Join us for a brief overview of what's in the new Climate Action Plan, as well as an interactive activity on ways that DNREC can help support environmental education and climate literacy.

Presenter: Lee Aiken, Climate Policy Planner, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Rooted Rhythms: Nurturing Growth Through Nature-Based Learning and Play

Session Description: This session explores how intentional daily rhythms grounded in nature can empower children to care for themselves, their community, and their environment—core values of the ROOTS Farm & Forest School mission. Participants will learn how nature-based play, open-ended materials, and project-based learning can support self-regulation, strengthen engagement, and reduce behavioral challenges in early learning environments. The session highlights practical examples of environmental literacy and community service projects that are developmentally appropriate for young children and easily adaptable across programs. Educators will leave with concrete strategies for embedding stewardship, responsibility, and connection into their daily practice through seasonal rhythms and a nature-first mindset.

Key Takeaways:

- Design consistent yet flexible daily rhythms that support self-regulation and well-being
- Integrate environmental literacy into everyday learning through hands-on, nature-based experiences
- Use loose parts and provocations to encourage child-led inquiry and problem-solving
- Incorporate age-appropriate community service projects that build empathy and responsibility
- Understand how unstructured time in nature supports lifelong learning and environmental stewardship

Presenter: Talon & Travis Holleman, ROOTS Farm & Forest School

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Using Art to Visualize Environmental Data

Session Description: In this workshop, participants will learn how to incorporate alternative methods for visualizing data into their lessons. Data doesn't always need to be represented through charts and graphs; when translated into art, it can evoke a more visceral and impactful response. Artistic approaches can be used to represent a wide range of data sets—from personal narratives to environmental and climate data. Example student projects include using fiber arts to illustrate climate change data and creating pour paintings to visualize historical water quality data from major U.S. waterways, highlighting changes over time and across locations.

Presenter: Eileen Koenig

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Session Title: Beyond Citizen Science: Building Engaging Partnerships for Conservation Action

Presenter Bios: Lauren Barczak is the Curator of Conservation Science and Learning at the Brandywine Zoo, where she is responsible for overseeing the zoo's educational programs and conservation initiatives. Lauren is a graduate of the University of Delaware where she received a bachelor of science degree in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. Prior to her work at the Brandywine Zoo, she worked for Disney's Animals, Science, and Environment team as well as Delaware State Parks.

Angel L. Burns, Chief of Interpretation and Programming for Delaware State Parks, brings over 20 years of experience in environmental education, parks leadership, and interpretation. She has a background in wildlife conservation, ecology, and entomology from the University of Delaware. Angel is a certified interpretive planner through NAI and has served on the board of the Delaware Association for Environmental Education (DAEE) as Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: STEM of Sustainability

Presenter Bios: Mary Schorse is an environmental geographer with expertise in human-environment interactions, natural resource management, payment for ecosystem services (PES), and sustainability. Dr. Schorse also has expertise in geography education and works closely with DE K-12 educators to ensure core geographic concepts are part of the K-12 social studies curriculum. Her work in geography education extends to identifying creative strategies for utilizing geospatial technologies such as GIS and satellite imagery as an instructional resource in the K-12 classroom.

Chris Williams is a Professor of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He serves as the Director of the endowed Waterfowl and Upland Gamebird Ecology Center. In addition to his primary appointment in Wildlife Ecology, Chris holds a joint appointment with the Biden School of Public Policy within its Energy and Environmental Policy Program. Chris co-led the University of Delaware Sustainability Council from 2019-2023 and was the Associate Provost for Sustainability between 2023-24.

Andy Liu spent much of his career as a Research & Development chemist for DuPont. In January of 2009, he assumed responsibilities for developing and executing global strategies for gaining regulatory notification and registration approvals for new substance commercialization. With the spinoff of Chemours from DuPont, Andy managed the transition of product regulatory capabilities. As part of Chemours' Corporate Responsibility Commitment goals, Andy led the company's Sustainable Offerings goal, which aspires to maximize the Chemours product portfolio's contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Session Title: Strategies for Successful Volunteer Engagement

Presenter Bio: Nathan Stewart joined the HFHK family in 2025 with a diverse professional background in horticulture, public garden education, and non-profit administration. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture from Oklahoma State University and has lived in Delaware since 2018. Nathan is an active volunteer with the Harlan Park Civic Association and a member of the outreach and engagement committee for Seed Your Future. His strong passion for connecting youth to gardening stems from the long-term mental and physical health benefits that we can all receive from connecting with the land and environment. He believes that green spaces and healthy foods should be accessible for all Delawareans.

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Enhancing Environmental Literacy With Watershed Education in Delaware Schools

Presenter Bios: Tara Muenz is serving as the Interim Director of Education for the Stroud Water Research Center. Formally her role was the Native Landscape Designer, Stroud Water Research Center has been a key partner throughout the design and installation phases of the RCCSD native gardens. Tara Muenz will share the intricacies that have made our journey's impact reach so many children across the RCCSD!

Steve Mohapp is the Watershed Specialist for the Stroud Water Research Center located in Avondale, PA. Steve has worked at a watershed association, helping manage various restoration efforts, and at the Philadelphia Zoo, working with program animals at their summer camp. He holds a B.S. in Biology and a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Ursinus College in Collegetown, Pennsylvania. He enjoys spending time with his family, playing lacrosse, and hiking through parks.

Sonia Saunders is the Environmental Educator Specialist for Red Clay Consolidated School District. She has taken a leadership role in the administration and installation of RCCSD's National Wildlife Foundation grant projects which range from installing native pollinator gardens, rains garden, and tree /shrub plantings. Sonia works closely with her leadership team which includes RCCSD Admin, Delaware Nature Society, and Stroud Water Research Center.

Michael Butzgy is a 5th grade teacher at Linden Hill Elementary within the Red Clay Consolidated School District.

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CONCURRENT SESSION I

10:45 - 11:30 a.m.

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

Session Title: Soaring to New Heights: Student-Centered Environmental Learning in Action

Presenter Bios: Jeffrey Billings is an Agriscience Educator and FFA Advisor at Odessa High School in the Appoquinimink School District. With nearly two decades in education, he focuses on experiential, environmental, and outdoor learning that connects students to agriculture, natural resources, and local ecosystems. His work emphasizes student leadership, stewardship, and authentic learning through community partnerships and field-based experiences.

Various FFA Student Members: Student members of the Odessa FFA Chapter will contribute firsthand perspectives on their immersion in environmental learning and competitive experiences. They will share how hands-on challenges, applied problem-solving, and team-based competitions have shaped their understanding of natural resource issues while developing leadership, confidence, and real-world skills.

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: Ethnobotany: Why People Need Plants

Presenter Bio: Mary Osman holds a BS in Biology and MS in Science Education in addition to Delaware Teaching certificates in Biology, Integrated Science, Earth Science and Special Education. Mary has taught pre-K, Middle School, High School, and Drivers Education. After taking a graduate course in Ethnobotany at Montana State, she created an elective, high school course in Ethnobotany and has taught it at Glasgow HS and Mount Peasant HS.

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

11:45-12:30 p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: Ocean Literacy: What Everyone Should Know about the Ocean and How You Can Help Share It with the World!

Presenter Bio: David Christopher is the Marine Education Specialist for Delaware Sea Grant at the University of Delaware. David has B.A. in Biology from St. Mary's College of Maryland and an M.Ed. from Goucher College and has over 20 years of experience in the marine education field. David is active in the Delaware Association for Environmental Education, the Mid-Atlantic Marine Education Association, and National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) and formerly served as NMEA president from July 2021-July 2022. In 2024, NMEA honored David with the James Centorino award for outstanding work and leadership in marine education at the local, regional, and national level.

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: MWEEs; an Opportunity for In-Demand, Career-oriented Skill Development

Presenter Bio: Bart Merrick has been an environmental educator for 30 years, working with teachers and students from Massachusetts to Virginia, promoting environmental literacy and fostering understanding, awareness and respect for the natural world while working for state parks and environmental education nonprofits. Upon receiving a Masters in Environmental Science, Bart worked with MD-DNR as the Education Coordinator for CBNERRs. Currently, Bart Merrick is the Education Coordinator for NCBO's Environmental Science Training Center focusing his on integrating the use of environmental science and technology with field-based learning experiences to support environmental literacy.

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Inclusion in an Environmental Science Class

Presenter Bio: Margaret Crosby is a high school science teacher at Caesar Rodney High School. She is currently in her 16th year as a science teacher. She has taught biology previously and now teaches environmental science. She is currently working on her Master's in special education and has co-taught science for six years.

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CONCURRENT SESSION II

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

11:45 – 12:30 p.m.

Session Title: Repurposing for a Sustainable Future

Presenter Bio: Ellen Benitez is a MLL teacher at North Star Elementary for the past 6 years and is a gardener at heart. She gradually became head of the Earth Club when the previous head teacher retired, and has gradually crafted a successful blooming after school team of environmental conscious students at North Star. They've implemented a certified school habitat on campus, given presentations, read alouds and taught students how to reuse and recycle on the school's campus. In her spare time, she loves speaking Spanish and being with her two young kids, gardening as well as painting.

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Session Title: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World

Presenter Bio: With a deep understanding of developmentally appropriate practice and a commitment to connecting children to nature, EarlySpace designs are always a response to the site and the needs and culture of the community. Nancy Striniste, founder and principal designer at EarlySpace, LLC, has a unique background as both a landscape designer and an early childhood educator. She has worked with families, schools, childcare centers, municipalities and organizations to create sustainably designed natural play and learning spaces and to teach teachers and others about how to use the outdoors for play and learning. Ms. Striniste is the author of *Nature Play at Home: Creating Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World* (Timber Press 2019). She is a certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional. She taught Landscape Design for Nature Play and Learning at Antioch University New England in their Nature-based Early Childhood Education Graduate Program from 2016-2023. She is the recently retired National Policy Liaison for Green Schoolyards America, where she advocated for equitable access to nature for all children. Nancy has recently moved from the DC area where she lived and worked for two decades, to the suburbs of Philadelphia where she is eager to connect with colleagues.

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

1:30-2:15p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: School-Based Watershed Restoration Projects and Their Impact on Students and the Community

Presenter Bios: Sonia Saunders is the Environmental Educator Specialist for Red Clay Consolidated School District. She has taken a leadership role in the administration and installation of RCCSD's National Wildlife Foundation grant projects which range from installing native pollinator gardens, rains garden, and tree /shrub plantings. Sonia works closely with her leadership team which includes RCCSD Admin, Delaware Nature Society, and Stroud Water Research Center.

Brian Mattix, former RCCSD Supervisor of Science and CTE, and presently Principal of HB Middle School. Brian Mattix had the vision and passion for Environmental Literacy to create the roadmap for RCCSD to address the goals and initiatives set forth by the Chesapeake Bay Agreement by applying for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant which has brought water restoration projects to school campuses across the district.

Erin Ahern is a teacher at Skyline Middle School in Wilmington, DE. She has 25 years of middle school science classroom experience with exceptional teaching skills evidenced by teacher ratings; multi-faceted skill set engineered to effectively teach and engage pre-teen adolescent and older Elementary aged population. Erin is considered a leader in groundbreaking content/curriculum design, piloting, and roll-out.

Tara Muenz is serving as the Interim Director of Education for the Stroud Water Research Center. Formally her role was the Native Landscape Designer, Stroud Water Research Center has been a key partner throughout the design and installation phases of the RCCSD native gardens. Tara Muenz will share the intricacies that have made our journey's impact reach so many children across the RCCSD!

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Session Title: City of Wilmington Green Jobs Program's Geospatial Education

Presenter Bios: Sharon Ungerer is a certified Geographic Information Systems Professional (GISP) and Software Engineer with Delaware Department of Technology and Information's Location Intelligence Team. She holds an AS in Environmental Engineering Technology from Delaware Technical Community College and a BS in Environmental Science and Policy from Wilmington University. In Location Intelligence, Sharon helps manage the State's Enterprise GIS and FirstMap open data platforms. Her work focuses on supporting DNREC with GIS consulting, integrating geospatial data into daily business processes, app development, and GIS training. Sharon is passionate about using data to drive environmental insights and decision-making.

Mary Schorse, Ph.D. is an Assistant Research Professor in the University of Delaware Department of Geography and Spatial Sciences and Director of the Delaware Center for Geographic Education. She specializes in K-12 education outreach, GIS technology integration, and natural resource management, having received the 2022 Delmarva GIS in Education Award. Schorse previously taught the state's first dual-enrollment geospatial science course at Newark High School.

Tracy Deliberty, Ph.D. is the Deputy Dean of the Department of Geography and Spatial Sciences Delaware Center for Geographic Education at the University of Delaware and is on the team of the Delaware Center for Geographic Education.

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CONCURRENT SESSION III

1:30 – 2:15 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Nature in the Neighborhood: A Community Approach to Regenerative Landscaping

Presenter Bio: Kerry has an extensive science background with a degree in environmental science and a master's in marine biology. Throughout her career Kerry has worked in areas of conservation from studying sea turtles to land restoration. Kerry has been teaching for over 20 years in various applications. She served as the Director of Outdoor Education at St. Anne's Episcopal School, where she restored the campus with various habitats to uplift their outdoor education program. Kerry has been working with communities to expand the urban pollinator corridor throughout Wilmington. Delaware Nature Society is currently implementing the City of Wilmington Urban Pollinator Corridor and Food Resilience Project. She loves all things science, especially while engaged in nature. Kerry is passionate about equitable access to nature, immersive educational experiences, and connecting native planting to the food network. Kerry has served on the DAEE Board of Directors and was Chair of the Justice, Equity, Inclusivity, Diversity and Accessibility (JEIDA) Work Committee.

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Connecting People with Nature

Room: B123

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Student Tree Planting to Enhance Engagement at School

Presenter Bio: Nathan is a 23-year Delaware public educator. He began his career as a counselor in a suburban Elementary School and proceeded to a variety of school leadership positions, including assistant principal and principal. Nathan recently earned his doctoral degree in educational leadership and plans to present on the highlights of his research). He is currently a high school counselor and continues to enjoy finding ways to support students in pursuing their passions, including environmental activism.

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Strand: Engaging Professionals in Environmental Education

Room: B124

Session Title: Environmental Literacy in Delaware: An Update

Participant Bio: Bart Merrick has been an environmental educator for 30 years, working with teachers and students from Massachusetts to Virginia, promoting environmental literacy and fostering understanding, awareness and respect for the natural world while working for state parks and environmental education nonprofits. Upon receiving a Masters in Environmental Science, Bart worked with MD-DNR as the Education Coordinator for CBNERRs. Currently, Bart Merrick is the Education Coordinator for NCBO's Environmental Science Training Center focusing his on integrating the use of environmental science and technology with field-based learning experiences to support environmental literacy.

David Christopher is the Marine Education Specialist for Delaware Sea Grant at the University of Delaware. David has B.A. in Biology from St. Mary's College of Maryland and an M.Ed. from Goucher College and has over 20 years of experience in the marine education field. David is active in the Delaware Association for Environmental Education, the Mid-Atlantic Marine Education Association, and National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) and formerly served as NMEA president from July 2021-July 2022. In 2024, NMEA honored David with the James Centorino award for outstanding work and leadership in marine education at the local, regional, and national level.

Sonia Saunders is the Environmental Educator Specialist for Red Clay Consolidated School District. She has taken a leadership role in the administration and installation of RCCSD's National Wildlife Foundation grant projects which range from installing native pollinator gardens, rains garden, and tree /shrub plantings. Sonia works closely with her leadership team which includes RCCSD Admin, Delaware Nature Society, and Stroud Water Research Center.

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Cultivating Environmental Leaders

Room: B128

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Delaware's 2025 Climate Action Plan

Presenter Bio: Lee Aiken is a Climate Planner IV in the Division of Climate, Coastal and Energy within the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC). Aiken works on state-level climate planning, including contributions to the 2025 Delaware Climate Action Plan and the state's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan.

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Strand: Innovative and Inclusive Environmental Education

Room: B129

Session Title: Rooted Rhythms: Nurturing Growth Through Nature-Based Learning and Play

Presenter Bios: Talon believes in the power of play, mindfulness, and inclusion to create meaningful learning experiences. As a homeschooling mother, she integrates hands-on, experiential learning into daily life, fostering confidence, resilience, and self-discovery in children. She is deeply committed to creating an environment where all children feel seen, supported, and empowered to explore the world around them. Talon Holleman is a Registered Nurse, certified Children’s Yoga Teacher, and 200-hour Yoga Instructor with over a decade of experience in early childhood education, meeting children where they are. Passionate about holistic, nature-based learning, she has completed extensive training, including: Forest School Teacher & Director Certification, Nature-Based Educator Training, Outdoor Inclusivity Training, Therapeutic Skills for Outdoor Leaders. At ROOTS, Talon combines her knowledge of child development with her expertise in mindfulness and wellness to help children build strong foundations for lifelong learning. She believes that nature is the best classroom and works to ensure every child has the opportunity to grow, thrive, and develop a deep appreciation for the environment. Through her leadership, ROOTS is a place where education extends beyond textbooks, allowing children to develop independence, creativity, and a sense of community.

Travis Holleman is a Master Gardener and trained Naturalist with a passion for sustainability, regenerative agriculture, and environmental stewardship. He has completed the Forest School Teacher & Director Training and applies his expertise to create a dynamic, outdoor learning environment at ROOTS. His work focuses on reconnecting children with the natural world, encouraging them to engage with their surroundings through hands-on experiences that inspire curiosity and creativity. Beyond his work with children, Travis is passionate about building a strong and connected community. He collaborates with local organizations, youth groups, and small businesses to create educational opportunities and expand access to nature-based learning. His vision for ROOTS is one where children, families, and educators come together to create a culture of learning, sustainability, and shared growth. With a background in permaculture design, Travis ensures that ROOTS serves as a living classroom where children learn about ecosystems, food systems, and self-sufficiency. His approach emphasizes inquiry-based learning, using Socratic questioning to help students develop problem-solving skills, resilience, and independence. Whether teaching students about sustainable farming, guiding them through outdoor exploration, or mentoring them in environmental stewardship, he is dedicated to fostering a lifelong love of learning and nature.

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CONCURRENT SESSION IV

Strand: Environmental Education in Action

Room: Greenhouse

2:45 – 3:30 p.m.

Session Title: Using Art to Visualize Environmental Data

Presenter Bio: Eileen Koenig is a Middle School Science Teacher and Science Department Chair at Ursuline Academy in Wilmington DE. She is a member of the National Air and Space Museum Teacher Innovator Institute 2023 Cohort.

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