

# CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Practical Learning Experiences That Foster  
A Future of Sustainable Ecosystems.

By LISA FLOWERS  
B&C CONSERVATION  
EDUCATION PROGRAM  
MANAGER

Aldo Leopold described conservation as the “state of harmony between men and land.” He went on to say, “By land is meant all of the things on, over, or in the earth. Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend, you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say, you cannot conserve the waters and waste the ranges; you cannot build the forest and mine the farm. The land is one organism. Its parts, like our own parts, compete with each other and co-operate with each other. The competitions are as much a part of the inner workings as the co-operations. You can regulate them - cautiously - but not abolish them.”

Conservation education is the process whereby individuals can have a personal understanding and relationship with Aldo Leopold's concepts. Throughout our lives we encounter information that stimulates our personal growth and decision-making. We each have our own areas of interest and learning styles, which are cultivated by our experiences.

The teachers in our lives may be as close as our own parents, siblings and grandparents, or as distant as a park ranger who leads hikes and teaches us about the resident wildlife. These “teachers” are a few of the many who provide us with information, stimulation and their own personal experiences which consequently broaden our own knowledge base and may yield new perspectives.

# ION

SCHOOL CHILDREN ON  
THE WATCHABLE WILD-  
LIFE TRAIL AT THE TRM  
RANCH CONDUCTING  
INSECT STUDIES.





THE STUDENTS IN THE ADVANCED BIOLOGY CLASS AT CHOTEAU HIGH SCHOOL PREPARED ELK SKULLS FOR THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION'S EDUCATIONAL BOXES CALLED ELK TRUNKS.

Our sense of wonder in the components that make up the rich diversity and complexity of life was easily nurtured when we were children. As we age our responsibilities in life increase. Making decisions and working for a living consumes more and more of our time, leaving less time for contemplating the wonders of the world. Rather than holding on to a grown-ups hand and being led through the fast and slow lanes of life with wide eyes, we are now the grown-up caught in the hurried pace of our world, perhaps holding a young wide-eyed child by the hand.

Individuals must be exposed to the biotic and abiotic elements of the environment in order to make wise decisions concerning sustainable ecosystems. The awareness of the environment enables us to achieve and maintain a dynamic equilibrium between our quality of life and the quality of the environment. The ultimate purpose of conservation education is to produce a citizenry that possesses knowledge, skills, attitudes and willingness to participate in conservation and natural-resource problem-solving. Individuals who possess these attributes are considered ecologically literate. Ecological literacy does not teach an individual what to think or take action on but aims to teach an individual how to think. "Teachers" have an important role to help "students" comprehend the complexity of the environment and what our interactions, as humans, are in it. The process of learning is



often as important as the content being taught.

The future of our world depends on the choices people make and education is a key player in what choices are made today and in the years to come. The Theodore Roosevelt Memorial (TRM) Ranch serves as the base for the Boone & Crockett Conservation Education Program. The working cattle ranch provides an excellent location for students of all ages to learn about the components of the landscape and how different lifestyles can foster a future of sustainability. A unique element of this education program is its focus on the development of sustainable agricultural communities within a specific landscape. The primary question for this geographical region, called the Rocky Mountain Front, (RMF) is, "How do we continue to sustain both people and wildlands within this ecosystem?" The younger students involved with this program might become agency or organization employees, or be private landowners or business owners who will need to ensure our agricultural and wildlife heritage will continue. Bob Peebles, the manager of the TRM Ranch puts it very well; "The future of conservation is dependent not only on wildlife preserves and wilderness, but also must include millions upon millions of acres of private property where mankind, profitable business, and successful wildlife populations coexist."

The RMF is the place where the mountains meet the plains. No true line can be drawn between the two because they meld together. Many land management practices on private and public lands provide healthy habitat for livestock and wildlife. The area is a tremendous "classroom" for learning experiences

that can provide people with an ability to understand who they are and how they might be in the world.

The mission of the Boone and Crockett Conservation Education Program is to develop and enhance conservation education programs in Montana that increase awareness and understanding of wildlife and the ecosystems we share. Three objectives create the framework for the program at the present time:

- 1) To provide students and educators an opportunity to build awareness and understanding of the biotic and abiotic components of the local ecosystems.
- 2) To develop curricula that will be incorporated into and enhance the curricula being used in Montana schools.
- 3) To offer opportunities to high school students to gain further insight by working with researchers.

The Boone and Crockett Conservation Education Program has partnered with several other organizations and agencies with similar interests in conservation education. We have been working with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Association of Conservation Districts, The Nature Conservancy of Montana and the U. S. Forest Service. I am involved in conducting conservation education workshops at the ranch, at other locations around Montana and will be attending national conferences pertaining to watchable wildlife and conservation education.

A brief description of a few projects will give a quick glimpse of the breadth of the education program.

The Boone & Crockett Club cooperated with the Northern Region, U.S.D.A. Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to provide another 16 page section of

Falcon Magazine (May 1996 issue). The magazine is published bimonthly for young conservationists throughout the nation and is distributed to all 445 fourth grade classes in the state of Montana, free of charge. The magazine is used in the classroom to complement curricular lessons and activities. This 16 page section covered three different subjects. The first article discusses the Boone and Crockett Club from a historical perspective and what the goals of the club are today. The second article is about riparian areas, what they are and why they are important to wildlife and humans. The last article is about whitetail deer, their characteristics and their ability to live in many different types of habitats.

The advanced biology classes at Choteau High School learned about anatomy with a slightly different twist this year. The students and their teacher prepared 11 cow elk skulls for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's (RMEF) educational boxes called elk trunks. RMEF has developed a program with Project WILD (a national educational program), called WILD About Elk. The RMEF will distribute elk trunks to almost every state Project WILD coordinator in the United States. Each trunk contains many educational materials including a cow elk skull that are used by teachers and students. The students' teacher had this to say about the experience; "The cooperative learning was dynamic as each individual picked up a special skill. One student was proficient at removing eyeballs, another at cleaning teeth (she wants to be a dental hygienist),

others were nose and throat people, or tongue removal, hide removal etc.. It became quite a production line when they organized themselves to the task. In fact they were so proud of their accomplishments that clean up was seldom a problem, because during that time the students would expound their knowledge or experiences to each other trying to impress each other with what they had done. The vocabulary they used was that learned during the course of the class. It was impressive to say the least, one would think they were in a surgical prep room". Thanks to the hard work and diligence of these students and their teacher, other people will be able to have the opportunity to learn about the biology and ecology of elk.

The Watchable Wildlife Trail project at the TRM Ranch continues to progress at a steady pace. We had a wonderful group of young people with their teachers, parents and youth leaders come and work on trail construction. There is now a beautiful trail with trail markers to keep the general direction in sight as one weaves their way to an observation point with a breath-taking view.

The youth that were involved in constructing the trail participated in a poster contest that Bob Peebles spearheaded. The categories were wildlife, agriculture, hunting and habitat. Ribbons were given to place holders and the grand prize winner, Evan Lindseth, a third grade student from Dupuyer School received a \$50.00 U.S. savings bond. Each person who helped with the trail was given a Boone & Crockett lapel pin.

Bob Peebles and I are working

on the design and wording for two interpretive sign panels. One will be placed at the beginning of the trail and is entitled *The Good Life A Future For Ranching And Diverse Wildlife Habitat*, the second will be placed near the destination of the trail and is entitled *Rocky Mountains The Backbone of The World*. A local boy scout has chosen to construct two interpretive sign frames for his eagle scout project. He worked with other boy scouts to erect these frames on July 6th. The trail and trail signs were completed in August 1996 as planned, and will be open to the public for hiking and viewing wildlife during the year with the exception of hunting season. This trail has served as an invaluable tool for conducting educational field trips using the Boone & Crockett Conservation Education modules (*Fair Chase*, Summer 1995, Conservation Education on the TRM Ranch).

Our educational program works to stress the integration of literacy, quantitative and scientific skills with practical experiences on conservation issues. The beauty of the program is that "students" have the opportunity to get outside into the natural world and apply the information they have learned in the classroom and make important connections. To be able to see, touch and smell the components and processes is essential for complete understanding and appreciation.

TEACHERS PARTICIPATING  
IN THE PROJECT WILD ELK  
WORKSHOP AT THE TRM  
RANCH.

