

**SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE
ESTONOA LEARNING CENTER
LAKE ESTONOA
ST. PAUL HIGH SCHOOL
February 28, 2007**

Present

Amy Cox	Lee County Public Schools
Sarah Cromer	Tazewell County Public Schools
Blaine Delaney	USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
Larry Estep	Smyth County Public Schools
Elizabeth Fairbanks	Washington County Public Schools
Karen Hartsock	Black Diamond Resource Conservation & Development Council
Larry Hartsock	Russell County Public Schools
Travis Pierson	Norton City Public Schools
Kalena Porter	Daniel Boone Soil & Water Conservation District
Jon Rockett	Powell River Project
Stephanie Smith	Buchanan County Public Schools
Ben Talley	Bristol City Public Schools
Diane Tomlinson	Coalfield Rural Systemic Initiative
Terry Vencil	Wise County Public Schools

Absent

Dwayne Edwards	Dickenson County Public Schools
Myron Fields	Scott County Public Schools
Christine Smith	Virginia Department of Environmental Quality

Karen Hartsock welcomed everyone to this second meeting of the Southwest Virginia Environmental Education Task Force. This meeting began at 10:02 AM.

Sarah Cromer moved to accept the November 14, 2006 minutes as written, Larry Estep seconded. Motion Passed.

Karen appointed Terry Vencil to serve as the Vice Chair of this task force. Terry accepted.

Key Outcomes from the 1st Meeting

Blaine Delaney reviewed the key products from the 1st task force meeting, including the list of potential outcomes that the group developed on November 14th through a brainstorming session. Blaine also shared a short PowerPoint presentation highlighting two environmental education programs:

- *Kids in the Creek Day*
- *Envirothon (national environmental education contest for high school students)*

Blaine mentioned that the task force's publication slated for the late fall/winter will devote a section to Kids in the Creek Day and the Envirothon.

Scott County Environmental Education Success Stories

Karen Hartsock shared some of her past environmental education successes over the years with Scott County schools.

- Karen said she started out as a “generalist” by teaching all grade levels as a Title I teacher. She wanted to become a math and science teacher. Otis Bowen, the Principal of Rye Cove Intermediate School at that time, asked her to agree “to complete his vision” of an outdoor classroom if she wanted to get an opening as a math/science teacher at his school. She said yes. This ***outdoor classroom*** utilized a few acres of woodland behind the school. This outdoor classroom when completed consisted of an amphitheater for 30 students, small pond, lots of trails, butterfly garden, various wildlife habitats, etc. Later, they incorporated some “history lessons” into their outdoor classroom by moving the historic “Red Cross building with chimney” to their outdoor classroom. The American Red Cross had used this building during the aftermath of the 1929 “Rye Cove Cyclone” to provide aid during this disaster.
- Next she talked about the successful ***Scott County Earth Camps***:
 - week-long program in summer
 - “waiting list” – takes up to 3 years to “get into camp” for students because of the high demand
 - \$500 total cost for 24 students who bring bagged lunches
 - later she developed an Earth Camp for teachers because they wanted in on the action
 - now has an Earth Camp I – “greenhorns”
 - Earth Camp II – “experienced teachers”
- ***Cove Ridge Center*** provides outstanding environmental education opportunities, only \$12/student (overnight lodging included). (Note: Natural Tunnel State Park’s Cove Ridge Center will be featured as one of the “jewels of the region” in the task force’s upcoming publication.)
- She coached some high school ***Envirothon*** teams (went to the Virginia Envirothon twice!!!)
- She also coached a ***Forestry Judging team***, which went to the national competition twice (4th & 14th place rankings)
- Took students to Costa Rica for two weeks (trip offered through the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service)

Powell River Project – a Regional Treasure

Jon Rockett shared a PowerPoint presentation with the task force highlighting the educational work of the Powell River Project over the years.

- formed in 1980, principal partners are:
 - Penn Virginia
 - Virginia Tech
 - other coal companies

- program driven by “client needs”, not by the academicians
 - UVA-Wise provides office space
 - many state agency partners
 - dominant land use for post-mining land is forestry (planting trees)
 - UVA-Wise students conduct science projects
 - county schools visit Powell River Project (Wise County Public Schools primarily, *but other schools districts are also welcome*)
 - federal partners, such as Office of Surface Mining, U.S. Forest Service and TVA
 - non-governmental organizations, such as The Nature Conservancy, Upper Tennessee River Roundtable and Black Diamond RC&D

- The Nature Conservancy worked with the coal companies and the Powell River Project to develop the innovative “re-mining” program.

- 1,100 acres available at the ***Powell River Project Research & Education Center***
 - supports educational programs
 - cow-calf operations
 - 4th & 6th grade SOLs (all Wise County 4th graders visit each year); Natural Resource Awareness Day (for 6th graders)
 - LEAD Virginia (leadership class out of Richmond spends a day at their center each year)
 - Virginia Natural Resource Leadership Institute visits for a day annually
 - They have hosted several Envirothons over the years. (Jon is the “head forestry judge” of the Virginia Envirothon)
 - 4-H Forestry Judging – Jon is willing to put on a clinic anytime someone is interested
 - Coal to Electricity (week-long training for teachers); Diane Tomlinson said that this is an “Excellent Training Program”
 - 50% of the nation’s electricity is generated from coal
 - 38% of Virginia’s electricity is generated from coal
 - Trees to Products Field Trips (week-long course for teachers)

Powell River Basin Environmental Educator

Kalena Porter shared with the group what she is doing to educate students and citizens within the Powell River Watershed of Lee County and the southern portion of Wise County. Her PowerPoint presentation highlighted the following:

- What is a watershed?
- Info about the Upper Tennessee River Basin (Powell, Clinch and Holston rivers)
- Why should you care about a watershed?
- International significance of the biodiversity of these rivers of the Upper Tennessee
- What is karst?

Kalena shared some handouts on potential grant sources for environmental education projects and about excellent websites for additional environmental education information.

Coalfield Rural Systemic Initiative

Diane Tomlinson informed the task force about the Coalfield Rural Systemic Initiative (CRSI), which services 18 school divisions in southern West Virginia and southwest Virginia. CRSI was established in 2002 through a grant; this 5-year, \$4.5 million, National Science Foundation grant has been extended for one more year through February 2008. Eight Virginia counties and ten West Virginia counties participate in CRSI.

CRSI Design:

- Address the need of an isolated Appalachian region with the purpose of improving local leadership and student academic performance in mathematics and science.

Our Work:

- Strengthen the leadership for math and science within the schools and districts
- Improve the delivery of curriculum and instruction
- Develop a school-community context that will increase the number of local students who enter teacher preparation programs and choose specialties in math and science
- Recruit and support new math and science teachers.

CRSI Goal #1:

- Enable school and district staff, assisted by a cadre of teacher leaders, technical assistance providers, and CRSI staff, to plan and more effectively deliver standards-based programs in math and science.

CRSI Goal #2:

- Increase the quantity and improve quality of the region's teachers by
 1. recruiting outstanding math and science students to the teaching profession, and
 2. reducing the attrition of new math and science teachers by providing teacher leaders to serve as mentors.

CRSI Goal #3:

- Provide a context of solid district policy, leadership, and family-community partnerships so systemic reform in standards-based math and science programs can be implemented and sustained

CRSI at Work:

- Four regional math and science specialists
 - plan and conduct institutes and clinics directed toward the use of standards-based instruction in math and science and data analysis
 - assist in teacher leader skill development
- Thirty-six designated teacher leaders
 - complement and supplement their respective districts with regard to the use of data analysis and standards-based math and science instruction
 - engage in district and school improvement planning
 - facilitate the involvement of other math and science teachers
 - recruit young people to the teaching fields of math and science
- CRSI supports
 - school board members and superintendents by increasing their understanding of, and support, for, higher quality math and science instruction

- district contacts, principals, counselors, teacher leaders, and new teachers through leadership institutes and clinics that help improve math and science instruction
- Higher Education Collaboration
 - CRSI staff and faculty from regional colleges and universities work to incorporate standards-based curriculum materials and instructional practices into staff development and teacher preparation.

Next Steps for Task Force?

Gathering school district information:

- Resource inventories
- Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience Coordinators

Sarah Cromer reported that she has already inventoried Tazewell County’s 17 schools. She added that three of their schools already have outdoor classrooms.

Karen stated that she will be sending letters out shortly to the superintendents asking for their help in gathering this vital information.

Suggested agenda items for the 3rd task force meeting (June 5th has been selected):

- ❖ *Virginia’s Governor’s Schools (UVA-Wise is a residential program, not a day program) – Sarah Cromer and Jon Rockett*
- ❖ *Regional Science Fair (environmental education projects) – Sarah Cromer (Sarah added that it covers 30 counties with over \$10,000 in prize money, but very few coalfield projects are ever entered)*
- ❖ *CRSI’s Teacher Leaders (Diane suggested that perhaps Jane Carter and Diana Withen might want to speak to the task force on their role.)*
- ❖ *JASON Project – Sarah Cromer (Sarah is on the board of this international project; they address wetlands, clean water and provide training.)*

Suggested sections of the task force’s publication (env. ed. resource guide with the task force’s regional recommendations):

- ❖ *Task Force Recommendations* will be the “centerpiece” of this estimated 24-40 page publication
- ❖ *Resources*
 - who provides presentations
 - who provides other resources, technical and/or financial (*for example, Sarah uses gifted funds to enable 500 3rd graders (Tazewell County Public Schools) to “run through” 10 soils stations; it takes three one-day events to handle everyone; another resource is “Water Wizards”*)

❖ **“Regional Treasures”**

- Natural Tunnel State Park’s Cove Ridge Center
- Powell River Project
- Hanging Rock
- Burkes Garden

Diane moved to adjourn, Terry seconded. Motion Passed. The meeting adjourned at 2:05 PM.

Chair

Date

Vice Chair

Date

Additional notes from page 2 of these minutes:

This information came from the Virginia Department of Emergency Services website at the following link: <http://www.vaemergency.com/newsroom/history/tornado.cfm>

May 2, 1929, "Virginia's Deadliest Tornado Outbreak": It has been said that tornadoes do not occur in mountainous areas. This is false. It was a warm May day with a cold front moving in from the west. The first tornado hit Rye Cove in Scott County in extreme southwest Virginia. The elevation of Rye Cove is about 1500 feet and it sits between two ridges that rise another 500 feet above. The tornado [struck the school house](#) and the principal described what he saw:

"It was raining at the time, 11:55 a.m., and classes were recessed for noon. About 25 children were in the building, the remainder being on the playground. I was walking down the hall when I saw what looked like a whirlwind coming up the hollow. Trees were swaying and as the whirlwind neared the building, it became a black cloud. It struck the building and I believe I yelled. The next thing I remember, I was standing knee-deep in a pond 75 feet from where the building stood. I was badly shaken up and frightened and surprised that I was able to wade out of the water. Bodies of children were scattered over a wide radius."

Twelve children and a teacher were killed and 42 more were injured. The [school](#) was an oak-framed, well-constructed, two-story building. It contained 10 classrooms and an assembly room. An eyewitness from a nearby hillside saw two clouds rush together about a mile down the valley. They formed the tornado that struck the school just moments later. The school collapsed and pieces were scattered up to 2 miles. The tornado continued on for a few miles, but fortunately, no other communities were in its path. Several buildings in Rye Cove were destroyed. A total of 100 people were injured. [Read more about the incident.](#)