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Lee Named Outstanding Educator for Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival

LINCOLN, Nebraska – The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is proud to announce that **Marcia Lee**, Central Platte NRD information and education specialist, from **Grand Island, Nebraska**, has been recognized with an Excellence in Conservation & Environmental Education Award as the 2023 Outstanding Educator. These awards recognize excellence in delivering Project Learning Tree and Project WET environmental education programs to educators, youth, and the public throughout Nebraska.

The Outstanding Educator Award recognizes a Nebraska educator who utilizes Project Learning Tree and/or Project WET regularly in their instruction, curriculum, or educational programming. While educators of all types can be recognized, this award brings to the forefront those individuals whose execution of quality environmental education in their work with youth is more than a “drop in the bucket” and “sets the standard” in the state that other Nebraska educators should strive to emulate and achieve.

“Marcia represents the best of environmental education in our state,” said Jack Hilgert, conservation education coordinator with the Nebraska Forest Service and Nebraska state coordinator for Project Learning Tree and Project WET. “While Marcia does not work within the formal classroom, her education programs impact the instruction and learning for thousands of youths each year within the Central Platte NRD and beyond. She is always happy to explore innovative strategies, partnerships, and collaborations which inspire the next generation of conservation stewards in our great state.”

Within her role at Central Platte NRD, Lee organizes the Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival with partners using the Project WET curriculum to teach lessons on water. Since 1988, more than 31,000 students have been educated at the Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival and it has been replicated in 42 states, as well as Mexico, Canada, India, and the United Kingdom.

"I use the Project WET curriculum each time I present about water to school groups, nature clubs, at outdoor classrooms and for community events. The activities and organization of the curriculum is invaluable," Lee said.

"Marcia Lee and her team at the Central Platte NRD consistently elevate high quality environmental learning opportunities for youth and the public in central Nebraska," said Megan Grimes, Nebraska Association of Natural Resource Districts public relations director and Nebraska Project Learning Tree and Project WET steering committee Member. "Each spring hundreds of fifth graders learn about all aspects of groundwater and its importance to Nebraska by attending fun-filled, hands-on activities."

Lee said many of the presenters selected for the Festival are trained and use the Project WET and Project Learning Tree curriculum to provide in-depth lessons at the Festival.

"The Nebraska Forest Service could not reach its conservation education goals without the vast network of partners who work together to meet the diverse needs of Nebraska's schools, educators, and youth; while connecting them to the natural world," said John Erixson, Nebraska Forest Service state forester.

Project Learning Tree (PLT) uses trees as "windows to the world" to increase understanding of our complex environment. Project WET advances water education to understand global challenges and inspire local solutions. In Nebraska, both programs are coordinated by the Nebraska Forest Service but are supported by a wide network of more than 50 partner organizations including Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) who curate professional development experiences, youth festivals, and other resources to increase and elevate environmental literacy across the tree-planter's state.

Learn more about Project Learning Tree and Project WET in Nebraska including upcoming educator workshops, Tree Trunk curriculum kits, field trip festivals, and other educational programs at nfs.unl.edu/education or by contacting Jack Hilgert, at jack.hilgert@unl.edu or 402-472-9727.

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