

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

## *Education Curriculum Launched*

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The Forest History Society has always been about education. By helping to protect the documents of forest and conservation history, the Society has provided current and future generations with an invaluable record that they can utilize to improve their decision-making. Early in its 60 years of research and publication work, the Society focused on providing students and scholars with research tools and a variety of published materials, including what is now the longest continuously published journal in the environmental history field.

During the 1990s, the Society expanded its vision in some very important ways in order to reach new audiences. The Issues Series books were conceived as a way to reach general audiences, policymakers, landowners, and natural resource managers. The series was successful beyond anyone's expectations, exemplified by *American Forests: A History of Resiliency and Recovery*, which now has reached more than 25,000 classrooms, households, and legislative offices.

Also, during the mid to late 1990s, the Society worked with K-12 teachers to explore opportunities to bring more forest and conservation history into the classroom. The teachers were emphatic: The primary materials in the FHS library and archives represented a treasure for students and teachers. But how to make these available? The teachers thought that the *American Forests* booklet was a great starting point; they suggested that the middle school level was an appropriate place to introduce beginning concepts; and they felt that a teacher's guide to the booklet was needed in order to help teachers feel prepared with the information. As well, they said that it was time to think about environmental education for the social studies classroom.

The Society listened, and through a variety of grants and with ten years of work by numerous educational specialists, teachers, and natural resource managers, the *If Trees Could Talk* curriculum was launched with a set of eight modules loosely based on *American Forests*. *If Trees Could Talk* provides middle school students and teachers with a curriculum that is relevant, exploratory, and developmentally appropriate. It uses multiple learning strategies and allows for interdisciplinary team teaching. The centerpiece of each module is a collection of primary resources—documents, maps, newspaper articles, oral histories or photographs—from which students are asked to gather, examine, and analyze information, and to create insights. The curriculum helps middle school students understand the history of forests and to develop their own environmental ethic. The aim is to foster a more informed and productive citizenry.

For several years, classroom testing of activities conducted in North Carolina, Minnesota, and Oregon has finely tuned the curriculum. *If Trees Could Talk* is available online at



[www.foresthistory.org/education/curriculum](http://www.foresthistory.org/education/curriculum), where several thousand people per month visit the curriculum web pages. The curriculum has earned considerable acclaim from the environmental, forestry, and educational communities. It has been recommended by the North American Association for Environmental Education, Blue Web'n, Gateway to Educational Materials, and ProQuest K-12. An article about it in *Green Teacher* magazine was reprinted in a *Best of "Green Teacher"* anthology published in 2004.

In August 2005, FHS hired a full-time Education Coordinator to develop three new modules and to prepare for the national launch of *If Trees Could Talk*. The curriculum has attracted educators' interest nationwide. Susan Cox, the Conservation Education Coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service in Region 6, sent FHS an e-mail explaining how she used Modules 2, 5, and 6. She used them as designed and also in conjunction with the Forest Service Centennial film *The Greatest Good*. Susan explained that she uses Module 2 due to its excellent review of land use changes on the Harvard Forest. She also discussed how she finds Module 5 (on the early Forest Service) useful when speaking to students about future careers, and Module 6 (on urban forests) to explain community planning issues. Susan is just one of many educators now using the curriculum to reach thousands of students.

These efforts are complimentary to other curricula such as Project Learning Tree (PLT) that are primarily science based. We have signed an agreement with PLT to seek out new opportunities to bring more forest and conservation history into the classroom. One of the ways this is happening is by using the Issues Series as a resource. The books *Forest Sustainability* and *Genetically Modified Forests* are both informing the development of new PLT activities.

This year, three new modules on fire, private forests, and forestry research will be added to the curriculum. Our long-term goal is to endow an education position at the Society. When that is accomplished, the education program will grow at an even faster rate as it will provide a basis for matching funds that will leverage additional investments and a consistent energy for promoting adoption in the classroom. The Society is also planning to continue the teacher institutes that have been so effective in introducing *If Trees Could Talk* to teachers on a state-by-state level.

Please let us know if you have questions or are interested in supporting a teacher institute in your state. You can contact the FHS Durham headquarters or Meg John at [mfry@duke.edu](mailto:mfry@duke.edu). The Forest History Society is about bringing a historical context to environmental decision-making. Our educational efforts are helping to lead the way. □