

EE State News



EE News at the State Level

Friends & Colleagues,

The PA General Assembly passed SB 356, an amendment to the Environmental Education Act of 1993 that establishes the Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education (PCEE) in legislation. The bill has been signed by the governor and is now formally known as "Act 71 of 2008."



This bill was hammered out in many meetings and was formally supported by all of the Departments involved and the Governor's Office. Nonetheless, it has been under consideration for almost five years. It has been of particular interest to me because it strengthens the existence of the **PA Center for Environmental Education**, confirming the importance of our work and reaffirming our role as the center for environmental education in Pennsylvania. I see that affirmation as an awesome responsibility, because I truly believe that environmental awareness, knowledge and stewardship are more important now than ever. The environment is finally in the public consciousness, with both presidential candidates talking about green jobs, the green economy and energy independence. Growing concerns about the quality of the food that we eat, our children's health, global climate change and urban sprawl are making the news on a daily basis. As a nation, we are beginning to recognize some of the implications of not being on good terms with Mother Nature. This is an important time to be involved in the field of Environmental Education, and I want you to know that we at **PCEE** take that job very seriously.

At the same time, I want to thank you all for your support in passing SB 356 and (personally) for supporting me in the best job that I've ever had. Working with all of you to make a difference in an arena that really matters has been an enormous privilege and a whole lot of fun. Speaking on behalf of myself and the other staff here at **PCEE**, we appreciate the support of the PAEE Board—and rededicate ourselves to providing unique and valuable environmental resources to the people of Pennsylvania.

Kathleen Cowles Paul
Director
Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education



Recent Website Renovations

The Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education (PCEE) recently completed an extensive overhaul of their website (www.pcee.org). Receiving over 3 million hits per year, the PCEE website has been a source for EE materials, information and online activities since 2002. We took this opportunity to interview Kathleen Cowles Paul, director of PCEE, on their newly-released website and other projects now in development.

PAEE: Kathleen—I know that a lot of teachers rely on your website for activities that they can use in their classrooms and information about upcoming professional development opportunities for educators. With so many people visiting the PCEE site already, why did you want to CHANGE it?

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Answer: It's true that the number of people using our website has grown substantially over the last three years—our website hits are up 72% from the summer of 2005! And we absolutely intend to continue to serve our teachers and other educators. In fact, the resources for which most teachers visit our site (the EE Events Calendar, Estion of the Week, BayQuest, and the EE website) so they're even easier to find.

But PCEE's mission is to serve the entire state of Pennsylvania, including professionals involved in business, government, agriculture, and nonprofit organizations. We wanted to create a website that would do a great job of serving teachers and the rest of Pennsylvania as well!



PAEE: I thought the PCEE website was for teachers and nonformal environmental educators. Why are there listings for so many new groups of people?

Answer: In a nutshell, the goal of Environmental Education is to help people understand and appreciate how the environment works so that they can live in harmony with it. That sounds a little "New Age," but what it comes down to is that successful EE results in lifestyles that work with—and not against—the planet. It means that people will make personal and professional decisions that protect healthy environmental functions, such as biodiversity, clean air and water, balanced energy systems and nontoxic living/working spaces. The outcome of successful Environmental Education is a whole planet of people who are good environmental citizens living sustainable lives.

Unfortunately, we mostly offer Environmental Education to children and then leave the adults to muddle through on their own. I think that it's wonderful that Pennsylvania has Environment & Ecology Academic Standards and we at PCEE want to do everything we can to support the dedicated administrators and teachers who are teaching our children how the environment works and how to interact with it in positive ways. AND I want PCEE to provide education, information and resources for adults who need to know how to apply environmental concepts to their daily personal and professional lives.

We're increasingly finding that environmentally-friendly decisions are also economically-friendly decisions in the long run. Businesses that figure out how to significantly save energy are more competitive than those that let the energy meter run wild. Organic and locally-grown agriculture are the fastest growing market segments in the business. Productivity in an office or factory increases when workers are exposed to fresh air and sunlight. Local governments that make sustainable land use decisions end up with communities that attract better jobs and people who care about where they live. Our new website is attempting to make it relatively easy for individuals in each of these fields to find the education, information and resources that they need to make environmentally-friendly decisions like the ones that I just mentioned.

PAEE: How can the new website features be useful to me as an educator?

Answer: Every environmental educator knows about the web of life—the complex network of relationships that make up every system. Your classroom or nature center is also part of a system, including the building within which you operate, the energy that you use to get to work or power the lights, the way that pests are controlled in the building or surrounding lawn, and the way that waste is managed. Your ability to teach children about the natural environment will be much

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more powerful if they can see that you are making responsible decisions about the learning environment as well. Our new website attempts to provide adults with the information and resources that they need to make environmentally responsible decisions in their professional and personal lives whether they're in a home, a school, an office or a farm.

PAEE: What if people know of some great products or services that aren't listed under a category—a great classroom presenter, for example—that didn't make it onto your website? How can we get new information and resources included on your site?

Answer: Every page of our website that contains a link to an outside resource also features an "Add a Link" button on the left navigation bar. Clicking on that button brings up a short form prompting the user to enter information and add a new link to our site. (Of course, our office reviews all of these new resources before they are posted to the web.) We are very aware that we are not experts and that we don't know about all of the great resources that are out there—we rely upon our users to help us find the most current and useful links. Educators tend to be very generous folks and we expect that they will gladly share their leads and contacts with the rest of the environmental community.

PAEE: You've been making a lot of changes at PCEE, so I'm sure that you've got something else in the works. What's next?

Answer: We've just completed a brand new online program that we've been working on for a couple of years: "Critter Quest PA." Critter Quest was developed in response to teachers who told us that they need interesting and interactive online projects to engage their middle and high school students. Users are able to map a number of relevant data layers onto a map of Pennsylvania (such as rivers, population density, school districts and watersheds), and then overlay that information with the predicted distribution for one or more of the 468 "critters" (the mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish) that live in Pennsylvania. Essentially, students using the program can find out what critters might be living in their own backyards—and start to develop some hypotheses about why they're there. We've applied for a grant to develop some really exciting online educational materials to accompany this program as well, including educational wikis, webquests and other Web 2.0 technologies. You can find Critter Quest PA under "PCEE Online Activities" on our website, or go to it directly at www.critterquestpa.com.

We're also very interested in the whole conversation about "outdoor learning sites," and are working on the development of an online resource database to support teachers, administrators or members of the community who want to develop school property as an outdoor classroom for teaching about the environment.

Finally, we're not "done" with this website. Within the next year, we hope to convert it to a relational database format, enabling users to personalize the information that they want to see. Our commitment is to make this site as useable and useful as possible.

PAEE: It sounds like you folks have been pretty busy! How do we keep up with these new projects as they roll out?

Answer: Your best bet would be to make sure that you're subscribed to our newsletter: EE Connections. It's a free electronic publication that gets delivered to over 12,500 in-boxes every month. It contains a great deal of information of interest to teachers and non-formal educators, including the dates of upcoming professional development workshops and the announcement of new educational materials and funding opportunities. We also announce any new PCEE projects in the newsletter—so it's a great way to stay in touch with us.

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Folks can subscribe online at http://www.pcee.org/Newsletter/News_Subscribe.asp or send an email to info@pcee.org and request a subscription.

PAEE: Thanks for taking the time to bring us up to date!

Answer: My pleasure, Ruth. PAEE is a terrific partner and I'm especially pleased that our organizations are working together so closely. I welcome comments from the membership and look forward to accomplishing great things with you on behalf of Environmental Education in Pennsylvania.



ENVIRONMENTAL BILL SIGNED INTO LAW THIS SUMMER

On July 9th, a bill was signed into law with little fanfare that will fundamentally reform the Commonwealth's 66 conservation districts.

Senate Bill1020 was introduced by Pennsylvania Senator Rob Wonderling (R-24th) in an effort to better coordinate efforts between districts and establish fair review fees. The measure also increases operating funds for conservation districts.

Conservation districts advise county and local governments on land development issues, work with farmers to comply with land management laws, assist non-profit environmental organizations with watershed and conservation efforts, and review and process land development plans and permits for builders and contractors. Many districts also administer the State's Dirt and Gravel Road Maintenance Program, Nutrient Management laws, Floodplain Management plans, Waterways and Wetlands Protection measures, and a wide variety of environmental education and agricultural conservation programs.

"Today, the Commonwealth's conservation districts have a wide range of environmental responsibilities. The expansion of local, state, and federal environmental protection laws and land use planning requirements over the years has greatly increased the conservation districts' role to serve the growing needs of our communities. My legislation sets forth a comprehensive roadmap that will bring our conservation districts into the 21st century," said Wonderling.

For additional information about this new, important law, please contact John Basial at 717-787-3110 or e-mail him at Jbasial@pasen.gov



PAEE is still looking for volunteers to help with the 2009 Conference at Raystown Lake Conference Center in Huntingdon County Pennsylvania. If you would like to volunteer your time to further Environmental Education throughout this Great Commonwealth and beyond please send an email to Ruth Roperti stating how you could help at rroperti@zoominternet.net Thank You!