

A HISTORY

Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE) and the County Conservation Districts

Many involved with the county conservation districts, KACD and the State Conservation Commission may have heard of the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE). Some individuals serving with these organizations are active members of KACEE. However, I suspect that few now involved with KACD and the county conservation districts realize how instrumental KACD and the conservation districts were in the creation of KACEE.

The KACD Education Committee, chaired by Robert Dickinson of Gorham, created an Ad Hoc Education Committee to be chaired by Wesley Bittel, Ellis County, who was also a member of the KACD Education Committee. This Ad Hoc Committee met on March 3, 1968 at the State Department of Public Instruction in Topeka to explore the creation of an advisory council for conservation/environmental education. Merle Hayden, Superintendent of Public Instruction, G. W. Tomanek of Fort Hays State College and several others representing the SCS and education interests attended. It was decided to survey educational, higher education and natural resource agencies to determine the level of interest in forming such a council. The Ad Hoc Committee met again on April 25, 1968. In addition to those previously mentioned, Morrie Boline, State Conservationist, SCS and Charles Gray, State Soil Conservation Committee were among those attending. The results of the survey showed a high level of interest in forming an advisory council, so it was decided to call a meeting of all the interests in the fall to proceed with this effort.

That meeting took place on October 17, 1968 with 38 educators and conservation agency representatives attending a luncheon hosted by KACD. Wesley Bittel as chair of the Ad Hoc Committee chaired the meeting. At this meeting, a unanimous vote was taken to organize a conservation education advisory council and that Chairman Wesley Bittel appoint a steering committee to make preparations for formal organization. Charles Gray chaired this steering committee with Gerald Tomanek, Morrie Bolline, Wesley Bittel, Robert Dickinson, George Moore (Director, Kansas Fish and Game Commission), Clay Stultz (KS. Dept. of Education), and John Colyn (McPherson science teacher) also serving on the committee.

The steering committee met on December 18, 1968 and again on April 8, 1969 to draft possible by-laws, solicit suggestions for a formal name and plan for an organizing meeting for the proposed advisory council.

On May 6, 1969, the organizing meeting was held in Topeka. The name of the organization was voted to be the Kansas Advisory Council for Environmental Education (KACEE). A statement of purpose and a set of by-laws were approved and KACEE became a reality. It was decided that KACEE would function through an Executive Committee consisting of three council officers and four elected at large members. The Executive Committee would serve as the direct advisory group to the State Department of Education with advice and counsel from the full KACEE membership. Initial membership of KACEE would consist of the organizations represented at the October 17, 1968 and May 6, 1969 meetings. Additional members would be added on recommendation of the Executive Committee and approval by the Council. Charles Gray was elected chair, Gerald Tomanek, vice-chair, Clayton Stultz as secretary-treasurer, and

Wesley Bittel, Morrie Bolline, Dr. Frank Cross (Kansas University) and John Colyn as at large members. The full KACEE membership would meet twice a year and otherwise function through the Executive Committee.

Charles Gray, Secretary of the State Soil Conservation Committee (predecessor of the State Conservation Commission) served as chairman of KACEE until the 1971 Spring KACEE Meeting. Wesley Bittel served as an Executive Committee member until that same meeting. Paul Hilpman, Kansas Geological Survey, was elected chair, Charles Gray as Secretary-Treasurer, and Bob Dickinson was elected as at-large Executive Committee member. Charles Gray continued to serve as secretary of KACEE until his retirement from the State Conservation Commission in 1982. Bob Dickinson served on the Executive Committee until 1976. Dr. Tom Eddy, Emporia State University, served as the third chairman of KACEE, and is the only one of the original members present at the May 6, 1969 organizing meeting who is still an active member.

From this history, it is obvious the strong role that KACD, the county conservation districts and the State Conservation Commission have played in the creation and continual development of KACEE. The organization has undergone a number of changes including a name change from the Kansas Advisory Council for Environmental Education to the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education in 1996. As KACEE's membership grew and it became more involved in delivering educational programs such as Project Leaning Tree, Project WILD and Project WET, it was decided that its role had expanded beyond that of an advisory council. KACD, the conservation districts and State Conservation Commission have continued to play a strong role in the development of KACEE.

Today, KACEE is nationally recognized as one of the strongest, most innovative state environmental education associations in the country. From an all volunteer organization, it has grown to five professional and two administrative staff members. The membership of KACEE includes over 200 organizations and 300 individual members. One of the strengths of KACEE comes from the fact that it developed as an association of organizations rather than individuals, and represents a tremendous network of partnerships to strengthen conservation and environmental education at the local and state level.

I first became involved with KACEE in 1972, and I developed a deep appreciation for the foresight and leadership that KACD, the county conservation districts and the other initial organizations provided in the creation of such a successful vehicle for quality environmental education. This year, KACEE will celebrate its 40th Anniversary at its Kansas Environmental Education Conference in Lawrence on November 6 and 7. I invite KACD and county conservation districts to join us in celebrating the success of the organization that the conservation community was so key in establishing.

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