

## 1999

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **John K. Strickler**

Former Acting Secretary of the Kansas Wildlife & Parks Department, retired Kansas State Forester, co-founder of KACEE, and KACEE's first executive director.

## 2000

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Mary Clark, Dillon Nature Center**

Mary has been delivering quality, non-biased and science-based environmental education to students in Central Kansas for years--she's reached literally thousands with her innovative environmental education.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Kansas Forest Service**

The Kansas Forest Service was responsible for helping to bring Project Learning Tree to Kansas and has supported environmental education for over 15 years. They continue to be a strong partner with KACEE.

## 2001

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Connie Elpers Leger, Great Plains Nature Center**

Connie is a naturalist at GPNC, and was instrumental in bringing Project Learning Tree to Kansas. She has served as co-state coordinator for PLT, and has served on KACEE's Education Committee and Conference Committee. She is also a facilitator for PLT, Project WET, and Project WILD.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Lee Richardson Zoo, Education Division**

This zoo is under the auspices of the City of Garden City, and provides innovative environmental education programs in conjunction with other zoos in Kansas. The zoo's director serves on KACEE's board and the conference selection committee.

## 2002

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Clark Duffy**

Clark is currently the bureau director for the Bureau of Air and Radiation with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. He has also served as director of the Kansas Water Office, and has been a board member of KACEE.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Butler County Community College and Butler County Conservation District**

These entities continue to co-sponsor one of the longest-running water festivals in Kansas.

## **2003**

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Gary Keehn**

Until recently, Gary taught at Jackson Heights High School in Holton. He and his students have attended the Kansas Environmental Education Conference for several years, making presentations, showing exhibits, and assisting with the pre-conference workshop. Gary currently manages Banner Creek Wildlife Area and serves as the Archery in the Schools director for the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks. Gary also serves on KACEE's board.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Westar Energy Green Team**

The Green Team consists of the employees of Westar Energy. It assists schools, nature centers, and wildlife areas in building outdoor habitat and trails. Westar has also been a longtime sponsor of the annual conference and other KACEE programs. The Green Team's leader, Brad Loveless, has been a KACEE board member for several years.

## **2004**

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Dr. Cindy Ford, Pittsburg State University**

Cindy is a biology professor at PSU, and leads a field studies program outside the state each summer. She is also active with the Kansas Wildflower Society. Cindy is currently the president of KACEE's board of directors, and has served as program chair for at least five years. She is also a workshop facilitator for KACEE.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks**

KDWP was the recipient of this award for its longtime support of KACEE and environmental and conservation education in Kansas. KDWP has supported KACEE financially as a conference sponsor since the beginning, and has been a partner in delivering Project WILD and WILD Aquatic. At least one KDWP staff person has served on KACEE's board for several years.

## **2005**

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Dr. Tom Eddy, Emporia State University**

Tom is a founder of KACEE and served as KACEE's board president. He is a beloved instructor at ESU who brings the prairie to life in his classes. He now serves on the Awards Committee and is always in attendance at the annual conference, often as a presenter.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Hillsdale Water Quality Project, Inc.**

HWQP is a non-profit organization working to improve water quality in the Hillsdale Lake area. Its volunteer-based programs provide information and have engaged landowners and stakeholders in activities to protect the watershed.

### **Rising Star Award:**

#### **Carly Adams**

Carly is an environmental program coordinator with the City of Olathe. As an up-and-coming employee of the city, she has implemented several innovative programs to educate the public about water quality and provide teacher workshops.

## **2006-2007**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Roland Stein**

Roland recently retired after many years with KDWP. In his position as education coordinator, he oversaw Project WILD and Project WILD Aquatic, as well as the Wildlife Education Service. Roland was a workshop facilitator, served on KACEE's board, and chaired KACEE's Education Committee.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Dr. Valerie Wright (PreK-16 Educator)**

Valerie teaches at Kansas State University and runs the Konza Prairie Biological Station near Manhattan. A naturalist, she created the docent program at Konza and directs the Konza Environmental Education Program.

#### **Kansas Accredited Zoo Educators (Community/Non-Profit Organization)**

KZE is an informal organization consisting of seven Kansas zoos working to promote a unified voice in conservation. The group develops resources other organizations can utilize, and participates in one statewide event each year focusing on animals, nature, and culture.

#### **Linda Phipps (Community/Non-Profit Individual)**

Linda led the efforts to restore a WPA-era Boy Scout building at Schermerhorn Park in southeast Kansas and develop it into a stunning nature center. It is now a premiere destination for residents of four states. Linda is also a kindergarten teacher in the Galena School District, and is a longtime member of KACEE's conference committee.

#### **Wichita Area Treatment, Education, and Remediation Center (The WATER Center)**

(Government)

The WATER Center was founded to remediate groundwater pollution in downtown Wichita and to educate the public about water issues. Education programs are offered, such as kits on topics including wetlands, geology, and rivers; and Family Adventure Packs that visitors may use as they explore the center.

## 2008

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Ron Klataske, Executive Director of Audubon of Kansas**

A leader in Audubon's efforts to educate citizens about the ecological value and cultural settings of Kansas birding and nature trails, and was instrumental in developing the proposal that led to the establishment of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Dr. Larry Erickson, K-State Chemical Engineering Department (KACEE PreK-16 Educator)**

Larry has maintained an exemplary career in environmental education and service. He has taught over 1,000 chemical engineering students and has served as director of the Great Plains/Rocky Mountain Hazardous Substance Research Center since 1985. In 2007, he established the Consortium for Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability at KSU.

#### **Great Plains Nature Center (Community/Non-Profit Organization)**

Committed to the idea that only through the appreciation of nature will people see the necessity to conserve our environment, Great Plains Nature Center has spent the past 11 years introducing students, families, and community members to the natural heritage of Kansas. Its unique cooperative partnership provides a model for other organizations sharing compatible goals to educate our citizens.

**The Kansas Chapter of the Nature Conservancy (Community/Non-Profit Organization)** Since 1989, the Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has been at the forefront of protecting the plants, animals, and natural communities of Kansas. By providing educational materials and programs and, in some locations, public access to natural areas, TNC plays a vital role in increasing the environmental literacy of Kansans.

### **Rising Star:**

#### **Andrea Johnson, Ernie Miller Nature Center**

As a park naturalist and interpreter presenting 26 different programs at Ernie Miller Nature Center in Olathe, Andrea Johnson brings professionalism and dedication to every task. A certified challenge course facilitator, summer camp director, and president of the Kansas City Metro Interpretive Site Coalition, she shows her passion for environmental education every day.

## 2009

### **Strickler Award:**

#### **Rex Buchanan**

No one can describe the varied landscapes of Kansas with as much meaning as Rex Buchanan. A Kansan through and through, Rex grew up near Little River, in Rice County, on the edge of the Smoky Hills. Rex has devoted decades of exceptional service to environmental education in Kansas. He twice served as President of KACEE, and also served as Secretary and editor of the KACEE News. An accomplished editor and author of several books (including Kansas Geology and Roadside Kansas).

## **KACEE Award:**

### **Tim Oberhelman** (PreK-16 Education)

Passionate about ecology is one way to describe Tim Oberhelman, science and biology teacher at Olathe South High School. Thanks to a few good teachers in Gardner, he learned to apply what he was learning in science to real-world problems while in high school in the 1970s. Tim is dedicated to motivating his students to become active in solving challenges to our community and world. He has been instrumental in a successful school cell phone collection program, promoting conservation careers, and in all of Olathe South's efforts to "think green."

### **Denise Scribner and Marylee Ramsay** (PreK-16 Education)

With a combined 40+ years of experience, Marylee Ramsay and Denise Scribner provide the leadership for Goddard High School's ecology and environmental science classes. Ecology class students provide support for a district-wide recycling program, which collected 20 tons of paper, 28,000 plastic bottles, and nearly 10,000 aluminum cans last school year. The school's ECO-Meet team, wins top honors in district, regional, and state competitions and students maintain the school's Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site. Goddard High School was one of the first schools to join the Kansas Green Schools Program, and qualified for an air quality grant earlier this year to aerate a pond that receives runoff from a parking lot

### **Jim Mason** (Community and Non-Profit)

Jim Mason is a staff naturalist at Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita. His work there combined with volunteer efforts for the website Natural Kansas and the Kansas Natural Resources Council make him a perfect fit for this award. Jim's service includes serving as webmaster of the GPNC website, which received 2.1 million page reads last year. Jim has presented approximately 2,500 nature education programs since 1988, and is the co-author of The Pocket Guide to Kansas Fresh Water Mussels, published by the Friends of GPNC in 2008. As a member of the Kansas Nature-Based Tourism Alliance, Jim created and maintains the Natural Kansas website ([www.naturalkansas.org](http://www.naturalkansas.org)). His combination of computer expertise, knowledge of the natural world, and motivation to communicate that information has resulted in a website that has an amazing amount of environmental content and receives an ever increasing number of hits.

### **Roberta Spencer** (Agriculture)

Roberta Spencer is well-known among agricultural and livestock producers as well as students and teachers in Jackson County. She brings conservation and environmental education to them and searches for ways to utilize resources that will help producers understand the environment and protect water quality. Roberta is constantly searching for ways to utilize resources that will help producers in Jackson County understand the environment and improve water quality management in their farm and livestock operations. She has been active in conservation and environmental education efforts, by serving on the board of the Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, supporting local teachers to attend KACEE workshops and conferences, and helping a local college student to organize the first "Ag/Water Day" in Jackson County last spring.

### **Kansas Environmental Leadership Program** (Government)

From a pilot class in 1999, the Kansas Environmental Leadership Program (KELP) has developed into a 10-month-long program focused on enabling citizens to become better versed in environmental knowledge and increasing their leadership skills. KELP attracts participants from a variety of stakeholders in our state's environment: agricultural producers, regulatory agency staff, educators, industry, environmental groups, and extension personnel. These diverse interests work together as a team to develop, design, and implement projects that have positive effects on communities. The greatest reward of the KELP program is the creation of an increasing cadre of informed and experienced people, who live, work, and lead their communities in cooperative

environmental decision making. Including the pilot class, 239 citizens have thus far participated.

### **Rising Star:**

#### **Katie S. Miller**

Over and over, Katie Miller is described as a "go-getter." As project coordinator of the Twin Lakes Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS), she works to inform, educate, and promote water quality in the Neosho watershed. Her job includes putting on the successful Twin Lakes Water Festival, which educates students to explore our natural resources through a multi-sensory, hands-on learning approach. The festival has educated approximately 2,700 students in the past 3 years. Katie also provides technical assistance to landowners and operators working to install best management practices in the watershed to protect or improve water quality, and establishes partnerships to achieve the goals of the Twin Lakes Water Quality Project.

## **2010**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Brad Loveless, Westar Energy**

As Manager of Westar Energy's Biology and Conservation Programs, Brad Loveless has provided untold hours of service in support of environmental projects across the state. Through the work of the Westar Green Team, numerous schools and communities have experienced new outdoor classrooms, wildlife habitat areas, river access points, and wind turbine sites. Brad also serves on KACEE's Board of Directors and has served as its President.

### **KACEE Award:**

#### **Matt Krehbiel, Junction City High School (PreK-16 Education)**

At Junction City High School, science and biology teacher Matt Krehbiel has a philosophy of education rooted in teaching students how to think. He is dedicated to helping students establish a connection to the natural world through involving them in maintaining the high school prairie and native plant demonstration area. He has also compiled a textbook of local ecological content and field research protocols.

#### **George Potts, Friends University and OWLS Coordinator (PreK-16 Education)**

Since the 1970s, George Potts has been active in environmental education and KACEE, serving on its board and as President. From higher education at Friends University to K-12 science teaching in the Wichita School District, George has been an inspiration to many students who have gone on to natural resource careers. He has also served as OWLS Coordinator for Kansas Wildlife & Parks and helped develop more than 200 OWLS sites across Kansas.

#### **E.A.R.T.H. (Earth Awareness Researchers for Tomorrow's Habitat) (Community/Non-Profit)**

E.A.R.T.H. was formed in 1998 to work with middle school curriculum directors to provide these students with innovative, experiential learning opportunities that highlight natural resources and encourage them to become wise stewards of their environment. The program began in Wichita and now encompasses 19 counties in Kansas. Each year, the E.A.R.T.H. steering committee, workshop presenters, and volunteers allocate more than 10,700 hours to the program.

#### **Friends of the Kaw, Inc. (Community/Non-Profit)**

Friends of the Kaw is a grassroots organization whose mission is to protect and preserve the Kansas River. Its website hosts the Kansas River Atlas, a watershed-based, interactive tool that

delivers information about the river. The website also provides information about cultural and historic sites along the river and lesson plans for teachers. The group hosts Sandbar Schools for 4th graders that emphasize river stewardship and water safety, as well as educational float trips for teachers.

### **Rising Star:**

#### **Delia Lister, Pittsburg State University**

Delia Lister is well-known to schools in the Pittsburg area and four-state region as the director of Pittsburg State University's Nature Reach Program. This outreach program teaches about the natural history of the area, as well as local and global environmental issues. She also cares for raptors at the PSU Natural History Reserve. Delia teaches biology at PSU and serves as President of the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society, and has made numerous presentations at KACEE conferences and workshops.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year:**

#### **Centre Elementary School, Lost Springs USD 397**

Students have led the charge toward going "green" at Centre Elementary. Four Green Teams collect the recyclables each week at the school. The Teams also present skits and assemblies to students about recycling. As a result of their efforts, more households are also recycling. The school has eliminated Styrofoam in the kitchens and planted a school garden. The produce is eaten in the lunchroom. Students tend a worm farm at the school, and have created a short video that was shared with another elementary school to help it begin worm farming.

#### **Clifton-Clyde High School, USD 224**

Environmental education efforts at Clifton-Clyde High School have taken multiple directions: classroom curriculum, environmental projects, and community involvement. The school has erected a wind turbine to power halogen lights for a hydroponic watering system. Solar panels power outdoor lights and a water pump for a native flower garden. Students held a "Wind Energy Day" to educate the community about their projects, and are in the process of constructing a greenhouse and planting a community garden. A composting program is also in the works.

#### **Goddard High School, USD 265**

Renewing students' relationships with Kansas ecosystems and the landscape through restoration, reconnection, and reflection is the theme of Goddard High School's "green" efforts. Students have developed a native prairie demonstration area in a renovated section of the school's OWLS site near their pond. A wind turbine powers a pond aerator, helping to keep the water clean. Environmental education is cross-curricular at the school, with arts projects ongoing throughout the year. The OWLS site supports instructional objectives and is also used by the community.

## **2011**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Schaneé' Anderson, Sedgwick County Zoo**

Through her years as a zoo educator, Schaneé' has worked to incorporate environmental stewardship throughout the programming offered to children and adults. She has been actively involved with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums for many years, serving on the Conservation Education Committee. Schaneé' has also been involved with the Paraguay Conservation Action Partnership, and has served on KACEE's Board of Directors and as board president from 2008-2010.

## **KACEE Awards:**

### **Dr. Cynthia Annett (PreK-16 Education)**

Dr. Cynthia Annett's dedication to her students, her work, and to Friends of the Kaw knows no bounds. She has taught at the University of Kansas, Haskell Indian Nations University, and Kansas State University, and mentored many undergraduate and graduate students. With a Ph.D. in zoology, she has taught numerous courses on environmental issues and environmental justice. Dr. Annett has also served as Science Advisor to Friends of the Kaw, taking the lead in designing its website.

### **21st Century Geosciences Program, Olathe North High School (PreK-16 Education)**

Launched in Fall 2002, this elective program is for students interested in environmental science, marine biology, meteorology, geology, and other related fields. Students complete a target curriculum, participate in field trips and workshops, and educate local elementary students and community members about what they are learning through presentations. Geoscience students also teach the community about stormwater management through rain barrel and rain garden projects.

### **Blue River Watershed Association (BRWA) (Community/Non-Profit)**

BRWA focuses its efforts in three areas: community education, environmental stewardship, and strategic partnerships. The organization educates Kansas City-area residents about watershed concerns such as flooding and water quality, and engages the community in addressing these issues. BRWA also works with school districts, and during the 2009-10 school year approximately 3,000 Kansas students participated in the T.R.U.E. Blue program (Teaching Rivers in an Urban Environment).

### **Heather Loewenstein, StoneLion Puppet Theatre (Community/Non-Profit)**

As Founder and Artistic Director for StoneLion Puppet Theatre, Heather is the guiding force behind the company's amazing performances. She has written, designed, performed, produced, and/or directed more than 75 different productions focused on environmental education. StoneLion uses multiple styles of puppetry to teach environmental concepts such as stormwater management, endangered species, and healthy habitats. Heather also teaches EE classes and creates art and sculptures with environmental themes.

### **Lattner Family Foundation, Inc. (Business/Corporate Sector)**

This Florida-based foundation has generously supported many conservation and environmental education programs in the Wichita area. It has funded Great Plains Nature Center programs such as "Linking Children to Nature," which is geared to getting Kansas kids (especially at-risk youth in urban Wichita) interested in the out-of-doors; and publication of the book "Kansas Critters: Mammals," which was written and illustrated by Kansas kids. The foundation has also funded programs at The WATER Center and Chaplin Nature Center.

## **Rising Star:**

### **Brian Pekarek, Superintendent, Clifton-Clyde USD 224**

Visitors to the Clifton-Clyde School District can't help but notice all of the environmental stewardship projects accomplished during the past two years. If they're lucky, they will learn about these projects through a presentation by students. The driving force behind the "green" changes is district superintendent Brian Pekarek. Through his leadership, teachers, staff, and students have focused on communication with the community, fundraising, and achieving academic excellence through becoming more green! Clifton-Clyde High School was one of the 2010 Kansas Green Schools of the Year.



## **Kansas Green School of the Year:**

### **Hesston Elementary School, USD 460**

Hesston Elementary School has made great strides this year in becoming a "Kansas Green School." Paper recycling takes place in classrooms, with students collecting the recyclables weekly. The "Worm Team" collects leftover food from the cafeteria to feed the worms, and the compost will be used in the school's rain/butterfly garden. Local church groups help prepare and plant the garden. During Red Ribbon Week the school hosted a recycling relay day, teaching students how to recycle at home. Students also created a "recycling rap" in music class.

### **Prairie Moon Waldorf School/Okanis Garden**

Prairie Moon Waldorf School incorporates the environment into everything the school teaches. Through a Green Schools Grant, the school designed a Waldorf-inspired environmental education curriculum and built a system for rainwater harvesting and storage. The system waters the Okanis Garden, an organic market garden that involves students, teachers, and volunteers in fruit, flower, herb, and vegetable production. The school works in cooperation with the adjacent new native plant medicinal garden established by the University of Kansas and the Kansas Biological Survey.

### **Tomahawk Elementary School, Shawnee Mission USD 512**

Tomahawk Elementary has been working toward a significant reduction in waste for several years. Great strides have been made during the past school year, with a 92% decrease in solid waste trash through composting of lunch waste and recycling efforts. In addition, paper usage declined by 14% and electricity usage decreased by 28% since 2008. Students receive an enriched science and energy education through these projects, and also help their school and families reduce energy costs and become smarter consumers. The after-school environmental club (the "HiP" Club) has expanded greatly this school year.

## **President's Award:**

**KACEE Staff - Laura Downey, Melissa Arthur, Ashlyn Kite-Hartwich, Rachel Wahle, Sandy Chandler, Jolene Amtower**

## **2012**

## **John K. Strickler Award:**

### **Dee Turner**

Involved in supporting environmental education (EE) for more than 20 years, Dee Turner has made significant contributions to the field of EE. Dee has provided long term leadership to the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education (KACEE) as both a board member and a past president. Dee was also instrumental in working with conservation districts across the state, encouraging each county's program to include environmental education as a part of the conservation district's work. As a result, conservation districts have become key partners for EE in Kansas.

## **KACEE Awards:**

### **Kansas Water Authority/Kansas Water Office (Government)**

The Kansas Water Authority (KWA) and the Kansas Water Office (KWO) have established a long tradition of supporting water education as a high priority in addressing the water issues that

Kansas faces. Beginning in 1995, the support of the KWA and KWO for Project WET in Kansas has been invaluable in building partnerships with other state, local and federal agencies and non-profit organizations in providing effective environmental education throughout the state. The Project WET program has proved to be successful in training both formal and non-formal educators in the range of water issues and how to involve students and others in learning the various aspects of these complex issues.

**Jared Bixby** (Government)

The current Curator of Education at both the Sunset Zoo and the Flinthills Discovery Center, Jared's interest for environmental education in Kansas started more than 15 years ago as a Docent at Sunset Zoo. His willingness and passion to do anything to improve his knowledge and teach others, quickly put him in a leadership role. From youth mentoring, to innovative zoo environmental education programs to stepping into leadership roles with EE organizations, Jared's commitment to EE is evidenced in every aspect of his life. One of Jared's most recent accomplishments is the creation of a nature-based early childhood program at Sunset Zoo. Jared truly embraces the life-long learning that we need to promote an environmentally literate citizenry.

**Keri Harris** (Agriculture)

As District Manager of Franklin County Conservation District, and a long-term member of KACEE, Keri Harris has made and continues to make significant contributions to Environmental Education in Kansas. Keri is devoted to providing hands-on education and interactive experiences to engage children and adults in understanding and conserving natural resources. From hosting teacher professional development, working directly with schools and school districts and their students, and hosting events, Keri's dedication to environmental education is obvious. Keri is always eager to share ideas and resources and has emerged as a leader in EE in the state, including most recently, providing critical leadership for a state Environmental Literacy Plan.

**Jenny Jasper** (Agriculture)

Jenny Jasper serves as the District Manager for the Miami County Conservation District. Through her short time with the Miami County Conservation District Jenny has demonstrated a strong leadership role in the field of conservation and environmental education. Jenny enjoys working with local teachers and students to bring various hands-on learning lessons to schools throughout Miami County to educate the youth about water quality, water conservation, habitats, soil and other natural resources within our environment. In particular, Jenny saw the critical need to educate youth and adults about the precious resource of soil and the creative concept to develop a portable, enclosed tunnel to replicate the world of soil underground was born.

**Cheri Miller** (Agriculture)

Since 2005, Cheri Miller has served as the Wyandotte County Conservation District Manager. Environmental education is foremost on Cheri's mind. She is always creating new programs, modifying previously used programs and sharing her programs with others in the field. She is dedicated to educating people of all ages – from school age to senior citizens; from teachers and educators to residents. Cheri's programs include techniques for incorporating outdoor experiences into the curriculum using school grounds and field explorations. She initiated a rain barrel workshop which assists residents in conserving the much needed rainwater for their use in care for their yards and gardens. Cheri's knowledge, passion and expertise in environment and conservation education shines through in all she does.

**Heather Teasley** (PreK-16 Education)

Heather has been a Kindergarten teacher in USD 382 for seven years. Heather's classroom is rich with environmental education including recycling, partnerships with the local Farm Bureau to do to visit a local farm and learn about farming, health and environment, trips to the local fish hatchery

and 'tree walks.' It is clear to both students and parents that Heather puts a lot of energy and imagination into her teaching. Heather has also been actively involved in providing leadership for early childhood EE, volunteering her time and expertise to share her passion with other early childhood educators. As her nominator stated, "She promotes care of our earth, while showing an appreciation for nature and the wild."

### **Kansas Wildscape Foundation** (Community/Non-Profit)

Kansas Wildscape has worked to meet the needs of wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation and outdoor education in Kansas for over 20 years. Through programs such as Outdoor Kansas for Kids (OK Kids) Program and the Cabins Project, Kansas Wildscape works to ensure that Kansas children and families have opportunities to learn and explore the outdoors through our state and local parks. Wildscape's new program, the WildLifer Challenge, encourages kids ages 6-16 to get outdoors and explore. Through their programs, Wildscape impacts more than 14,000 Kansas kids on an annual basis.

### **Rising Star:**

#### **Eric Giesing**

Eric was hired at the KWEC in 2010 as Educator Director and was charged with creating educational program for grades 7-12, Eric has met this challenge well, and has provided many new ideas that have helped the KWEC to "think outside the box" in how the center provides education to their patrons. In his first two years, Eric has established an impressive environmental education curriculum at the KWEC. He has created and promoted a list of 18 programs available to schools and he has worked with most of the schools in the region. The programs he offers are tied to the Kansas Science Standards. Perhaps the most impressive part of his program development is his flexibility to provide programs to schools on just about any topic teachers throw his way. Eric has worked hard to help host events at the KWEC on migratory birds, black-footed ferrets and wild turkey hunting, making the KWEC an important player in environmental education in the state.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year:**

#### **Brookwood Elementary School, Shawnee Mission Schools**

Located in the Shawnee Mission School District, Brookwood Elementary is focused on making their school more environmentally friendly and their students more environmentally knowledgeable. Taking on projects to reduce waste in the school through the HiP Team (I can make a Healthy Planet), the school now composts all their kitchen waste—more than 22.5 tons last year alone. Students also recycled more than 40 tons of paper, cans and plastic last year and through both projects, have reduced the amount of waste going from the school into a landfill by 90%. Brookwood is also involved in reducing their energy use and perhaps most importantly, engaging students and parents in creative and hands on environmental education through a variety of classroom and whole school activities. This has inspired students to take on community projects such as working in the gardens (they planted over 650 bulbs!), park stream cleans, making dog toys from reused material and cleaning up litter on the school grounds.

### **President's Award:**

**Awards Committee - Anita Butler, Kristyn Hayden-Ortega, Kim Courtney-Decker, Laura King**

# 2013

## John K. Strickler Award:

### Bill Riley

Bill Riley has dedicated much of his professional and personal life to helping people understand and appreciate the Kansas environment and outdoors. As a volunteer, Bill devoted a good deal of his time working with KACEE. At that time, KACEE was an all volunteer organization and Bill was instrumental in the creation of the Blue Ribbon Task Force, a collaborative group which developed a report outlining the goals, strategies and actions that guided environmental education in Kansas and significantly grew KACEE as an organization. KACEE owes much of its success today to the early work that Bill did in laying a strong foundation for conservation and environmental education in Kansas. Mr. Riley furthered his efforts through his work with the 4-H Foundation in Kansas by establishing and maintaining an environmental education position and building the Flint Hills Environmental Education Building at Rock Springs 4-H Center near Junction City, KS. Over the years, thousands of kids have experienced environmental education at Rock Springs because Bill made it his mission to include EE as a regular part of what the organization offered to campers and classrooms alike. Finally, anyone in Manhattan knows that Bill and his wife Erma have made a business from their passion in getting people outdoors with their store, The Pathfinder. Rex Buchanan, Director of the Kansas Geological Survey, perhaps summed it up best in saying, "Because of his efforts, generations of Kansans from across the state know more about, and appreciate, the place they call home."

## KACEE Awards:

### Elizabeth Ablah (PreK-16 Education)

Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas School of Medicine, Elizabeth's background is in health promotion and chronic disease prevention, but through her work with EPA's Community Action for Renewed Environment (CARE) grant Elizabeth has become a leader in environmental education and community improvement projects throughout Wichita. Elizabeth was the driving force behind the establishment of Wichita Initiative to Renew the Environment (WIRE). WIRE is a community-based group that identifies and "does something" about environmental concerns in the city of Wichita. WIRE's mission is to provide education and project leadership to make Wichita an environmentally healthy place to live, work and play. Elizabeth guides this grassroots initiative that collaborates with citizens, neighborhood groups, community leaders, businesses and government to work on projects including engaging Wichita high school students in improving water quality, conducting waste audits at local businesses and working with schools, students and parents to implement a "No Idylling" campaign that helps improve the quality of the air we breathe, while saving energy. As noted in her nomination, "Elizabeth Ablah is a spark of green for Wichita."

### Steve Woolf (PreK-16 Education)

As superintendent of USD 112, Central Plains, Steve isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. In fact, he encourages the students of his school district to get their hands dirty too! Mr. Woolf's love of the outdoors, coupled with his deep connection to the communities he works within led him, with support from his wife, to identify a pressing community need that he and his students could do something about—making fresh food available. Steve found some space and started preparing the ground to plant. As Steve worked, students and neighbors stopped by to help and together, they planted enough fruits and vegetables to make the produce available to anyone who wanted them. Steve notes that there are many in the community who wouldn't otherwise have access to this fresh and nutritious produce. And what started with one garden has grown to gardens at many of

the schools in his district, where high school students work to construct raised beds and students plant everything from heirloom tomatoes to cabbage. Steve sees this as an opportunity to engage students in hands on service learning and help to feed the community. Steve, with help from his wife, numerous community members and students have experimented with gardening techniques to get the best yield and sometimes those efforts have worked well, other times not as well. As Steve noted, "We want our students to understand that success lies on the other side of failure and if you want to double your chances at success, you have to double your chances at failure. And we're going to fail a lot and in the process, have some really cool things happen."

### **Southwestern College** (PreK-16 Education)

With a student population just under 1500 (including distance and online learners), the faculty and students at Southwestern College make a big impact in their community and beyond. Southwestern College has established themselves as a national leader in sustainability among higher education institutions. Faculty and students have brought to life the phrase within the school's mission "to live by and teach a sustainable way of life." All Southwestern students have the opportunity get a minor in sustainability and environmental studies and students who work as a part of the Southwestern Green Team receive scholarships for school as they learn sustainability principles and put them to practice in service projects at Southwestern and the surrounding community. Projects range from working with the local school district to planting and maintain a community garden which supports the local food bank, coordinating county electronic recycling events, to hosting a serve and learn retreat with 70+ high school students who worked side by side with the college students to learn about water conservation and build rain barrels for a local church camp. The students at Southwestern do more than earn a degree, they make a difference. It is this combination of education and service that has distinguished Southwestern College as leader in environmental and conservation education at the post-secondary level.

### **Elaine Giessel** (Community/Non Profit)

Honoring a marine scientist for their contributions to environmental education in Kansas? Absolutely! Elaine Giessel, now a retired naturalist from Ernie Miller Nature Center, has devoted her life to environmental education. One could find Elaine, dressed as Mother Nature or a zebra mussel at Ernie Miller Nature Center, always with the goal of educating children and their families about the environment. Ms. Giessel was instrumental in engaging hundreds of area youth in summer camp programs with the goal of "getting dirty and exploring" the natural spaces around them. She extended this work to train hundreds of students as Junior Naturalists and coordinated competitions such as Eco-Meet, sponsored statewide by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism to tests students' knowledge and understanding of Kansas eco-systems. From teaching preschoolers, to engaging with adults in the community on sustainability in Johnson County parks, Elaine's long history of educating people about the environment with her unique brand of creativity and passion makes her contributions to the field of conservation and environmental education truly noteworthy.

### **The Coleman Company** (Business/Corporate Sector)

With a name so strongly associated with camping and the great outdoors, it may come as no surprise that the Coleman Company has been instrumental in environmental education and outdoor education for many years in Kansas. In fact, the Coleman Company has been key partner, providing support, partnership and sponsorship to numerous environmental education and outdoor education programs in Kansas for nearly two decades. For example, the Coleman company was instrumental in providing significant support for both the educational exhibits and educational materials of the Great Plains Nature Center, located in Wichita, KS. They have also provided support for the Federal Junior Duck Stamp program in Kansas and have made regular donations to benefit countless environmental education organizations throughout the years. Because of the generosity and support of the Coleman Company, new generations are developing an appreciation for and experiencing the wonder of nature in Kansas.

## **Rising Star Award:**

### **Chris Depcik**

Upon starting his career at the University of Kansas, Assistant Professor Christopher Depcik wanted to challenge his students with real world design. Christopher began the KU EcoHawks program, which builds upon his enthusiasm for cars and challenges KU students to engineer sustainably. Sustainability in engineering for KU students means applying the five E's to their designs: energy, environment, education, economics and ethics and Professor Depcik uses real world and relevant topics to engage his students. An example of this approach resulted in KU students recycling a 1974 Volkswagen Super Beetle into a model of energy efficiency by converting it to a plug-in series hybrid (PHEV) that runs on 100% biodiesel created from used campus cooking oil. Recent road tests have determined that the Beetle reaches over 100 miles per gallon equivalent. Professor Depcik also believes that engaging students early in engineering is essential. He works with K-12 teachers and students on projects such as the development of lessons to teach K-12 students about biofuels, a summer engineering camp for high school students and a battery-powered car design competitions. In this competition, the winners are judged not just on how fast the car goes, but also on how well the team used recycled materials and built the most sustainable vehicle as judged by the "5 E's." These are just a few examples of Dr. Depcik's impact in environmental education—stay tuned for what's next!

## **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

### **Bluejacket-Flint Elementary**

Located in the Shawnee Mission School District, Bluejacket-Flint (BJF) Elementary School takes being a green school seriously. First, staff at BJF engaged in professional development to learn the best practices for engaging students and community. Armed with tools and great examples, the staff began to find ways to engage students in making improvements to their school that resulted in savings in energy and water, waste reduction and composting, using green technology, installing a rain garden to improve water quality and outdoor service learning projects within the community. Thanks to the partnerships and project-based learning, BJF teacher Lucas Shivers notes that students learned on a highly technical level about the current use of green technologies while exposing them to new career opportunities. Not only did students have relevant hands-on learning that kept them interested and motivated, the lessons paid off in test scores that jumped more than 10% based on classroom science assessments after 'green' lessons throughout the year with the averages going from 75% to 88%. Not only was there a pay-off in the classroom, "these ongoing environmental efforts resulting from our collective learning and projects with students translated into real results and economical savings where BJF saw a 29% savings from the baseline year. Thanks to the efforts of students and their work to educate the entire school community, BJF saw the largest increase in reduced energy cost in the whole district," notes Shivers.

### **St John Catholic School**

Being a green school has become part of the fabric of St. John Catholic School. Says parent Rachel Myslivy, "We encourage students, families and parishioners to sign the St. Francis Pledge to Care for Creation and connect the Catholic faith with conservation efforts." It started with food waste in the cafeteria—there was a lot of it! As staff began collecting the waste for composting, they noticed they were throwing away a lot of food and began to look for solutions. What resulted was a new way of serving food which encouraged students to make good healthy choices and which eliminated a ton of waste—literally! Actually, it was closer to 3.5 tons over a school year. As principal Pat Newton said, "the nutritional education and the ability to choose resulted in healthier lunches, far less waste, and a financial savings for the school lunch program." From this project,

the school began looking for other ways to make improvements while creating great educational opportunities for students. This approach has resulted in a role for every grade at St. John—from kindergartners creating signs for recycling to middle school students conducting water investigations. These students explore overall water use and ways to reduce, such as the recent installation of aerators on the school's faucets. Between the K-8 students, they have recycling, composting, energy, water, air quality and outdoor learning spaces covered. Environmental education is not only a part of what takes place during the school day, but the school works to engage parents and parishioners alike with activities like St. John's annual Family Fun Night which was themed "Good, Green Fun" and included crafts from reused and recycled materials and a free book exchange as well as a Scavenger Hunt with environmental facts covering Waste, Water, Energy, Habitat and Air Quality. The school has set their next goal to be recognized as a U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School, a national recognition for schools.

### **President's Award:**

**Carl Cohen, Boys & Girls Clubs of Hutchinson**

## **2014**

### **John K Strickler Award**

#### **Paula Henderson, Starside Elementary**

Fifteen years ago, the Starside Student Council, under the direction of Mrs. Paula Henderson, held a paper drive. That was the beginning of big changes for the school. Since then, Paula has provided strong leadership in educating and raising awareness of environmental issues with the students and staff of Starside Elementary, inspiring them to do more. Paula believes that there is always another mission and there is no point of arrival and this is reflected in Starside's ongoing work to make their school and their community a better place to learn, work, live and play. Under Paula's leadership, Starside has been recognized for their great work and visited by many other school groups from the area, as well as groups from Japan and Dubai. The Kansas City Star and surrounding area newspapers have featured the great things the staff, students and parents are accomplishing in numerous articles. The national educational magazine Scholastic News featured Starside's efforts on their cover, with the title being "Having a Ball GOING GREEN." Paula is proud, that through her leadership and the hard work of staff and students at Starside, the school now has a wind turbine, solar array, school garden, certified Monarch Waystation, school pond powered by solar energy, and a new natural/native play area. Paula's theme song has always been "One Small Voice" which talks about one small voice joining another small voice and together changing the world. One does not have to look hard to see how Mrs. Henderson has brought those small voices together to have big impacts. Paula's school was the first place in the city of De Soto to have a recycling container and now the whole city has opted to recycle. Many stories have been told by parents about their child's willingness to recycle and teach their parents how to recycle and why it is so important. Starside's small voices have certainly been heard in this community. Paula sponsors a group that meets after school on Fridays and several years ago the students came to her and wanted their group name changed from Community Service to Earth Keepers. They said "after all that is what we are doing". Spearheaded by this group, for 12 straight years, Starside has been named by the Presidential Points of Light Foundation as a School of Service. This group works in the school garden, recycles, studies the hawks that live by the school and anything else that helps our surrounding environment. Students at Starside volunteer their time on evenings and weekends to pick up trash, recycle, and work in animal shelters while many times educating the adults around them. Starside's last Career Day was all Green Careers with people coming from University of Kansas, the City of De Soto, County Extension, Sprint,

Hallmark, Nature Centers, etc. showing students that green careers are a growing opportunity and will continue to be. Paula Henderson has and continues to inspire staff, students, parents and community members and exemplifies the John K. Strickler Award for life time achievement in environmental education.

### **KACEE Awards:**

#### **Delia Lister, Nature Reach** (Community/Non-Profit)

Nature Reach is an environmental education outreach program based in the Department of Biology at Pittsburg State University. The southeast Kansas non-profit program is unusual in that it is hosted and partially supported by Pittsburg State University. A program of in existence for 20 years, the current Director, Delia Lister, has helped to significantly grow the program's reach and engage strong partners to ensure the long-term sustainability of the program. Nature Reach was designed to supplement public classroom curricula with resources that are difficult for teachers to maintain in their classrooms. Live animals, preserved skins, replicas, and especially interpretive expertise is the focus of the Nature Reach program. Delia maintains a variety of spiders, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles (several of which are snakes), birds, and mammals. One of the most popular programs uses educational birds of prey, including a variety of hawks and owls. All of the hands-on programs are designed to be taken to individual classrooms, so Delia presents programs to several classrooms during the visit to a school. In this way students are encouraged to touch and experience and ask questions. Many of those elementary students are now adult and still remember their Nature Reach visits. The critical work that Delia is doing to educate in the community makes Nature Reach a program Pittsburg State University is proud to support. KACEE is proud to recognize Delia Lister as one who exemplifies excellence in environmental education in the state.

#### **Marlene Bosworth, Former Delaware River Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy Coordinator** (Agriculture)

Marlene Bosworth is a long time advocate of environmental and conservation education. A former environmental science instructor, Marlene most recently served as the Delaware River Watershed Protection and Restoration Strategy (WRAPS) water quality coordinator and utilized her education background as an underpinning to her work. Recognizing the importance of education about watersheds, Marlene provided the leadership in contacting the Horton School District superintendent with hosting two different two-day classes for teachers to learn more about conservation and agriculture and ways to then incorporate lesson plans into their daily teaching of students. Throughout her time with the program, Marlene has worked hard to educate and include many individuals, organizations and agencies about the critical importance of their local watershed and her many efforts over the years to educate and be inclusive in the delivery of her program has resulted in the Delaware River WRAPS being one of the top WRAPS programs in the state. KACEE is pleased to recognize Marlene Bosworth and her efforts to make environmental education an important part of her community.

#### **Barbara Hardy** (PreK-16 Educator)

Barbara has been a sixth grade teacher at Lincoln-Central Elementary School in Cherryvale, KS, for 23 years and every day, her enthusiasm for science and environmental education is evident to her students. Barbara encourages her students to think about the resources they are using everyday—including how things are made, where they come from, and the importance of conservation. One of the highlights for her students each year is her two-day "spring campout" which takes place at Bill Hill Lake just outside of Cherryvale. She has been organizing this event for her students for 22 years. During this event the students have the opportunity to connect with nature and truly see and feel what they have been learning about throughout the semester. The students get to participate in hands on activities such as fishing, canoeing, owl prowls, fossil digs, fly tying, and much more. Ms. Hardy has encouraged teachers in her school district to get outside



and participate and learn right alongside the kids. Barbara's principal, Steve Pefley says "She has an incredible ability to get kids to think, and her questioning techniques are superb. She is just a natural at taking her class to the next level. Barbara doesn't stand in front of a classroom and ask her kids to pull out the textbook and start reading. She says things like "Hey, look at this..." or "I promised I would teach you this today, so let's get started." She is simply wonderful." KACEE is pleased to honor Barbara for being an outstanding example of how environmental education can be a powerful part of our students' education.

**Dr. Deborah Williams, Johnson County Community College** (PreK-16 Educator)

Dr. Williams' passion and dedication to teaching about the environment is evident in all she does at Johnson County Community College. From the courses she teaches, to the student committees she supports and even to the work she does with her local community and beyond. Deborah supports students in their learning and leadership, serving as a faculty advisor to the Student Environmental Alliance and the Student Sustainability Committee on campus and teaching numerous courses including Biology, Ecology and Bioethics, to name just a few. Her passion for teaching and learning about the environment is evident to her students. When asked to describe her teaching, one JCCC student said, "Wonderful class! Professor is passionate about teaching and the subject. Highlight of the semester was a field trip to the prairie. I learned as much in this class about Kansas as I have learned living in the state for almost 50 years. I highly recommend this class." Dr. Williams is a shining example of outstanding environmental education at the post-secondary level and KACEE is honored to recognize her for her service, leadership and exemplary environmental education.

**Dennis Dinwiddie, Topeka Zoological Park** (Government)

Dennis Dinwiddie has served as both director of conservation and director of education at the Topeka Zoo for the last three years. In the short three years of his tenure at the Topeka Zoo, Dennis has transformed both the education and the conservation programs. Dennis' accomplishments include the creation of a living classroom that is used for education at the zoo, design and implementation of an interactive insect zoo complete with hands on activities to teach the importance of insects in our lives and a free to the public Conservation Education lecture series. These are just a few of the many accomplishments Dennis has made to enhance, improve and expand the important environmental education that the Topeka Zoo provides in the community. Dennis is a shining example of how community partners play a vital role in educating our students and our community. KACEE is pleased to honor Dennis for his many contributions to environmental education. He is indeed a very special environmental educator who has impacted the field in a direct and very real way.

**Rising Star Award:**

**Pam Martin, Kansas Wetland Education Center**

It is hard to label Pam as an "up-and-coming" Environmental Educator as she has already done so much in the field; she seems much more like a seasoned veteran. In her 5 years of environmental education, Pam Martin has established an incredible program at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center (KWECC) that rivals any EE program in the region. Pam has worked at the KWECC as an Educator for KS Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism since the Center opened in 2009. For the first year and a half, Pam was the only Educator on staff and was responsible for establishing the core foundations of the KWECC's educational programs. Pam's passion and commitment to education is evidenced in sheer volume of programs she does for the KWECC--in 2013 Pam conducted 264 environmental education programs. Pam provides education programming to area elementary students as well as family programs, programs through the Great Bend Recreation Commission, Scouts programs, and festivals. One of the most impressive accomplishments that Pam has achieved is the relationship she has established with the USD 428-Great Bend school district. As a result of her efforts in working with the District Administrators and the various

Science Committees, Pam has been able to schedule programs with every Grade K-6 classroom in the district throughout the school year. Pam's work is helping to inspire and educate our next generation about the important role of wetlands in our state and KACEE is extremely proud to honor Pam with the Rising Star Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **Eisenhower High School, Goddard, KS**

Eisenhower High School (EHS) takes going green seriously. A newly constructed school, the district made sure Eisenhower was equipped with the latest technology to be energy and water efficient. But going green at EHS goes well beyond the school building. Led by teacher Denise Scribner, Ecology and biology classes regularly participate in eco-field labs and classroom work which emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills central to "good science." Examples of this approach are easy to find at EHS. For instance, Ecology students manage the recycling project--annually the school has redeems over 700 pounds of aluminum cans, 500 pounds of plastic bottles and 1,500 pounds of cardboard/paper. Having students administer the district recycling project engages them in ongoing investigations of waste stream and waste reduction in the district. This provides a great real world opportunity for EHS students to study decomposition rates and leachate pollution potentials to groundwater helping them to truly understand the lifecycle of items used every day. Further, Biology and Ecology classes complete the Kansas Green Schools Water, Waste and Recycling, and Energy Audit Investigations annually. In addition, EHS has established a native prairie space of 4,000 square feet to help offset the carbon footprint of the school. This legacy for learning site has a recently developed nature trail that uses repurposed plastics for the sign posts and QR codes to inform the students and the public about various environmental facts and concerns rather than printing out paper trail map brochures. EHS is also working to connect students to the environment research outside of their school grounds. The ecology classes are collecting climate data as citizen scientists to provide important data regarding the growth of the trees planted on the campus to the Smithsonian. EHS also brings in consultants from local community, county and state who work in environmentally related careers, such as raptor rehabilitation, hazardous waste, energy conservation, land management and conservation efforts to enhance environmental curricula and connect students to career opportunities for the future. EHS exemplifies the real world, relevant, meaningful and engaging environmental education of a Kansas Green School of the Year and KACEE is proud to honor EHS for their outstanding work.

#### **Chase County Elementary School, Strong City, KS**

When new principal David Warner took over as the leader of Chase Elementary School in Strong City, the school was facing a ten year trend of declining enrollment and it was clear there needed to be some changes to reverse this trend. So Principal Warner began working with staff to re- envision their school to meet the state standards for learning in a new and different way. The school began designing and constructing an outdoor learning center which is built upon the area's strong farming and ranching traditions. For instance, a chicken coop was constructed and students are engaged in caring for the chickens, collecting eggs, preparing the eggs for sale, and working with a budget to make sure they have the necessary food and equipment to raise the chickens and integrating these lessons into their reading, writing, math, science and social studies. A greenhouse was also constructed to provide a great hands on opportunity for students to plant, grow and harvest produce, while learning biology and ecology concepts in engaging and relevant ways. This produce also helps to promote healthy eating habits and connect students to farming and agriculture. Students practice good land stewardship by recycling, composting and using rain barrels to capture rainwater for gardens and livestock. This project-based learning approach is not only connecting students to the land, but connecting students to their learning in

ways that traditional approaches might not. While the program at Chase County Elementary is relatively new, students, teachers, parents and community members are getting engaged and projects continue to expand at the school. The school now has sheep, cattle and raised beds for gardening. And perhaps most telling, for the first time in ten years, enrollment at the school has increased. KACEE is pleased to honor Chase County Elementary as a 2014 Kansas Green School of the Year for their efforts to get kids outside learning about their environment.

**President's Award:**

**Peg Livingood, University of Kansas**

## **2015**

**John K Strickler Award:**

**Kate Delehunt**

KACEE is pleased to announce this year's recipient of our lifetime achievement award for excellence in environmental education, Kate Delehunt. Ms. Delehunt has over 26 years of classroom experience in public and private schools in the KC metro area, working in a variety of settings with a variety of audiences, but always with environmental education as focal point for her work. Kate has worked with K- 12 and post-secondary students in both traditional classroom and summer programs with a special passion for teaching students about water. In fact, many of her former students still refer to Kate as the "Water Lady." Her passion for teaching young people about the importance of and their connection to water is a life-long endeavor for Kate - she has spent the last ten years of her life doing nothing but that, in fact. In 2005, Kate began working with the Blue River Watershed Association as their Education Director. Ms Delehunt has engaged thousands of Kansas City area students in hands-on exploration of their watershed by getting them into the river, collecting and analyzing water samples and developing a deeper connection to and understanding of our water resources. In 2014, Kate joined the staff at Friends of the Kaw, which focuses water education and outreach for the Kansas River. Kate is currently working with local schools engaging them in exploring ways they can prevent pollutants from running off their school grounds, understanding how water moves in their watershed, calculating stream flow and velocity and testing water for water quality characteristics. Her accomplishments over the course of her nearly 30 years are extensive and impressive. So much so that Kate was recognized by the Prairie Fire Museum (Overland Park, KS) in 2014 as a "Local Water Hero." Kate embodies the life-long dedication and commitment to high quality environmental education that the Strickler Award recognizes. KACEE is pleased to honor Kate Delehunt as our 2015 Strickler Awardee for life-time excellence in conservation and environmental education.

**KACEE Awards:**

**Gary Kannenberg (Business/Corporate Sector)**

Gary Kannenberg has enthusiastically become involved in environmental education as an individual, parent, educator and a professional over the last several years. His efforts include doing outreach to schools, working with teachers, volunteering at events, promoting opportunities and supporting Kansas Green Schools with technical advice and resources. As a member of the US Green Building Council, Central Plains Chapter, Gary has worked with groups in the Kansas City area to help make schools more resource efficient and healthier places to work and learn. For example, Gary frequently meets with school administrators and board members to promote Green and Healthy schools, has worked with local community partners on a grant to get kids engaged in understanding their role in preserving water resources, established an award at the Greater Kansas City Science and Engineering Fair for projects that promote sustainability and worked with

Kansas City Community Gardens to get raised-bed gardens installed at local schools. Through the Kansas Green Schools program, Gary even helped his daughter's school get a grant to begin a lunchroom composting project that reduces trash going into the landfill, a project which he has now helped to get started in other schools in the district. Gary makes himself available to visit classrooms in the Kansas City area and teaches at Johnson County Community College as well. Teaching, learning and action are hallmarks of Mr. Kannenberg's work in environmental education and KACEE is pleased to recognize Gary for his outstanding efforts.

**Rachel Myslivy** (Community/Non-Profit)

KACEE is pleased to recognize Ms. Rachel Myslivy for her outstanding environmental education work through both her professional and volunteer efforts. As a program director for the Climate and Energy Project (CEP), Rachel jumped in within her first month on the job to set in motion an innovative educational process, engaging local farmers and ranchers in understanding their water and energy usage and identifying what it meant to be innovative in saving water and energy on Kansas farms and ranches. From there, she worked with ranchers and farmers to identify those who were innovating and has developed a series of case studies that other farmers and ranchers can explore to learn about ways to improve their practices, financial resources for assisting them and opportunities to do site visits to learn more. In addition to the work Rachel has done with CEP, she is very active at her daughter's school in Lawrence, St. John Elementary. Pat Newton, principal at St. John's has this to say about Rachel: "For the past six years, Rachel has raised our awareness of the environment and environmental education. Our school now actively works to make an environmental difference. A few of the changes that she promoted are: composting in the school cafeteria, elimination of the use of Styrofoam cups and plates, minimum use of paper plates and cups, rain barrels to water our gardens, bird feeders, flower beds to attract butterflies, energy audits to gather information about efficient lighting, window replacement to minimize drafts, electric meters for students to take home, school-wide recycling, establishment of middle school green school elective, and the formation of parent green school committee. Rachel is a "doer" and a motivator. Her passion has motivated parents and teachers to participate in wonderful opportunities to integrate environmental education in our school and make an environmental difference." Both in her work and her community engagement, environmental education is an integral part of Rachel's life and KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Myslivy for her outstanding contributions to environmental education Kansas.

**Angela Beavers** (Government)

Angela is the District Manager of the Geary County Conservation District, the co-owner of a farming and ranching operation in southern Geary County, the wife of an Environmental Services Technician on Ft. Riley, and the mother of three young men who have learned that environmental stewardship completely intertwines with the agricultural life that their family has loved for generations. In addition to the work that Ms. Beavers does with local landowners to educate and provide resources for improved watershed health, Angela is the first to volunteer to go out to classrooms, local water festivals or competitions like Envirothon, sharing her passion for learning and teaching about the environment. Her passion and dedication means Angela often gives up her evenings and weekends for environmental education activities and she inspires that same ethic in others. Katie Miller, who nominated Beavers noted, "During her oversight of the streambank stabilization projects along the Smokey Hill River, Angela led volunteers

of baseball teams, after prom committees, 4-Hers, Envirothon teams, local high schoolers and contractors to plant over 19,000 trees along the streambank restoration site – over 500 treeplanting hours were provided to these projects from high school students alone. And not because these kids were paid, not because they were all dying to give up their Saturdays – but because Angela is the type of person that inspires you through her passion and her beautiful, fun personality to do more, to be more, and to give back. And because her un-matched work ethic to be knee-deep in the mud with a shovel right next to you!” KACEE is pleased and honored to celebrate Angela and her work with the children and adults in her county and beyond to understand and take care of our natural resources.

**Sylvia Davis** (Government)

Sylvia’s primary duties at the Office of Utilities and Infrastructure, Water Pollution Control for the City of Topeka Public Works include long-term planning, conducting storm water plan reviews, and assisting in national permitting work for storm water. Sylvia often partners with other local agencies, like the Shawnee County Conservation District, to host workshops for local businesses and citizens, such as a recent sediment and erosion control workshop to train contractors, developers, and engineers in practices that promote cleaner water. Environmental education is a part of what Ms. Davis does on a day to day basis for her work. Yet Sylvia does so much more. For several years, Sylvia has taken on the task of ensuring the participation of the City of Topeka in the annual Topeka Water Festival, a day-long event for area fourth graders that attracts over 1000 students each year. She begins by meeting with city officials so they are aware of the event and understand the role of educating youth about their local water resources in the long-term health of the city. She also recruits her colleagues in the Office of Utilities and Infrastructure to come and present hands-on activities for children during the festival and makes sure they get training to be well-prepared to teach children. She also presents activities and makes time to observe her co-workers to provide support and assistance so that each activity is the best learning experience it can be for the fourth graders. Judy Boltman, Topeka Water Festival organizer, had this to say of Sylvia, “Sylvia’s goal is a quality program and she promotes high standards to help achieve it. There is no doubt that with the Topeka Water Festival alone, Sylvia Davis makes a significant contribution to environmental education in Kansas.” KACEE wishes to extend our congratulations to Ms. Davis for her excellence in conservation and environmental education and our gratitude for this important role she plays.

**Stephanie Stark** (PreK-16 Education)

It doesn’t take long to recognize that Ms. Stark’s high school science classroom isn’t typical —but then, neither is Stephanie. Stephanie recognizes the connections between the environment that students learn within and the high quality of learning that transpires. It is why Stephanie stepped up to be the driving force behind Erie High School becoming the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) certified high school and the first LEED Gold K-12 educational building in the state of Kansas. But Stephanie’s leadership doesn’t end there. Ms. Stark leads an environmental science course at the high school and weaves environmental education into biology and chemistry classrooms, turning the school and the grounds into the students’ learning laboratory. Stephanie has engaged students and teachers in installing community gardens where students explore growing food and sharing with the community, restoring prairie on school grounds and developing a walking path that will allow students to use a pond on school property as another learning opportunity. Steve Woolf, Superintendent of Erie Schools noted, “Stephanie’s students can be found outside working in the environment, in the real world and we know that helps to boost learning. Her goal is to provide an outdoor learning environment for our students and a place for the community to walk through to enjoy the natural environment.” And more recently, Stephanie has become a leader for other teachers, sharing her projects and teaching, what she has learned and the resources she has found with other teachers in her district and

from around the state. KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Stephanie Stark for her leadership and dedication to high quality, non-biased environmental education.

### **Rising Star Award:**

#### **Jennifer Rader**

When Jennifer Rader became the Director of the Southeast Kansas Nature Center in 2013, she was just five years out of college. But what one quickly recognizes about Jennifer is that her preparation to do her job has been years in the making. As a young person, her parents instilled in her a love of nature and the outdoors and that love led Jennifer to volunteer and participate at outdoor and nature events such as Eco-Meets and Wilson State Park's OK Kids Events as a high school and college student. Upon graduating from Fort Hays State University in 2008, Ms. Rader began working with environmental education organizations and took leadership in developing innovative and engaging environmental education programming, including a program through Kansas Wildscape which encourages kids to earn "badges" and win prizes for doing outdoor activities through a program called "Wildlifers." Today, she uses that passion and creativity to develop outdoor programs for people of all ages. Jenn hosts preschoolers for story time, class visits from local schools, community groups and more, reaching literally thousands each year with her environmental education. Linda Phipps, the founder of the nature center notes about Jennifer, "I have seen seasoned nature lovers listen to every word she has to share. Every time I am around Jenn, I learn something new. She has a genuine love for and curiosity about nature and conservation and she shares that with everyone she meets." KACEE is proud to recognize Jennifer with the Rising Star Award for excellence in environmental education and look forward to her leadership for many years to come.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **Rose Hill High School**

The Rocket Green Club was chartered and sponsored by Roger Grier, a science teacher at Rose Hill High School, in 2009. Over the last 6 years, their impact has sky-rocketed and KACEE is pleased and proud to honor them as the Kansas Green School of the Year for 2015. Environmental education is integrated into the curriculum for middle and high school students and students at the high school have even taken leadership for educating local community members, parents and elementary students through special events and activities. For example, the club sponsors the annual "No Waste Christmas Crafts Festival" where elementary students with help from high school students, make gifts by reusing and recycling materials into items like ornaments or bird feeders. The Rocket Green Club is also active in learning by doing and that is exemplified in their recycling efforts. Together, they have implemented strategies at the high school which have resulted in a diversion of 87% of the school's waste from the landfill. That means that just 13 out of 100 pounds of school waste goes to the landfill, the remaining 87 pounds is recycled, composted or re-used. A big boost to their efforts came in 2013, when the club launched the "No Trash Can Left Behind" project, placing more than 80 recycling bins at locations throughout the district and educating students and staff through lunch hour educational campaigns. According to teacher Roger Grier, "Starting from a point of basically having no recycling, we are now collecting over 13,000 pounds of recycled material annually. We have diverted over 50,000 pounds of school district solid waste from the landfill stream to the recycling stream over the past 6 years." The club also has raised more than \$10,000 and uses some of that funding to support field trips that bring students' environmental education to life. These include field trips to see the full waste stream, from landfills and recycling centers to companies that use these resources. Students also use a nine acre pond located on the campus to do water studies. Rose Hill High School students are leaders in their school and their community and KACEE is pleased to honor the school with this recognition.

**President's Award:  
Sedgwick County Zoo Staff**

**2016**

**John K Strickler Award:**

**Joyce Wolf**

KACEE is pleased to announce this year's recipient of our lifetime achievement award for excellence in environmental education, Joyce Wolf. Joyce has been involved in environmental education for more than 30 years and is a familiar, respected and trusted among those who work in the field of environmental education. With early beginnings in leading educational efforts on the Clean Air Act, to her leadership for the Jayhawk Audubon Society, the consistent pattern in Joyce's career and volunteer work is a dedication to the important role that good environmental education plays in understanding and caring for the places we live. For instance, in her volunteer work with Jayhawk Audubon, Joyce and her husband Ron frequently lead a project called the Wetlands Learners Program, (now the Learning About Nature Project.) which was eventually replaced with the Learning About Nature Project. Both projects involved taking students to sites where they could have hands-on experience in nature and develop an awareness, appreciation and understanding of complex environmental issues. This hands on, up close and interactive form of environmental education epitomizes excellence. From 1995 –2001, Joyce served as the Executive Director for the Kaw Valley Heritage Alliance (KVHA). The mission of the KVHA was to form a broad coalition of organizations cooperating to promote greater awareness, appreciation and stewardship of the cultural and natural resources of the Kansas River (Kaw) Valley. Joyce successfully wrote a significant grant from the EPA, which permitted the KVHA to hire two coordinators to plan and carry out the "Rollin' Down the River" festival in 1997. This successful grant also led to the first Kaw Valley Eagles Day event, a highly successful event that showcases many organizations and approaches to environmental education. 2016 is the 20th Kaw Valley Eagle Days Celebration and it seems fitting that Joyce be honored for her leadership this year. Her involvement in environmental education in Kansas is extensive and long term. These are a few of the many examples of ways which Joyce Wolf embodies the essence of the Strickler Award, lifelong dedication and commitment to high quality environmental education. (These are but a few of so many examples that Joyce Wolf embodies the life-long dedication and commitment to high quality environmental education that the Strickler Award recognizes.) KACEE is pleased to honor Joyce Wolf as our 2016 Strickler Award recipient for life-time excellence in conservation and environmental education.

**KACEE Awards:**

**Kim Bellemere (Community/Non-Profit)**

Kim Bellemere has a contagious passion for conservation and community. Her leadership in several non- profit organizations, including the Grassland Heritage Foundation, the Kansas Women's Environmental Network and the Kaw Valley Native Plant Coalition demonstrate her passion for both environmental education and gathering people together to make a difference. Ms Bellemere exemplifies the importance of civic engagement in environmental education. Over the

last several years, Kim has worked extensively in environmental education with youth and parents in northeast Kansas. She was a member of the Lawrence Sustainability Network Leadership Council from 2009-2011 and a co-founder and coordinator of the Raintree Montessori School Monarch Waystation Program from 2009 to 2013. The projects she founded at schools in Kansas continue to thrive and encourage our students to appreciate native plants and animals, every day. At her current position with the Grassland Heritage Foundation (GHF), Kim serves as the Membership and Education Coordinator and is responsible for organizing and planning their educational activities, reaching thousands each year. Kim works within and between communities to identify volunteers, target projects appropriate for GHF, and educate the public on the importance of conservation work. Most recently, Kim was instrumental in founding the Kansas Women's Environmental Network, a network of more than 200 women from around the state who share ideas, information, job opportunities, host a book club and more, ultimately encouraging the kind of collaboration and cooperation among and between organizations that makes a difference. KACEE is pleased to honor Kim Bellemere for her leadership in environmental education.

**Stephanie Carlson** (Community/Non-Profit)

KACEE is pleased to recognize Ms. Stephanie Carlson for her outstanding environmental education work through both her professional and volunteer efforts. Upon returning to Kansas in 1998, Stephanie began volunteering with the Dillon Nature Center. With a degree in Forestry, running educational programs as a volunteer might seem a bit daunting, but as her colleague, Mary Clark, Director of the Dillon Nature Center noted, "Stephanie was one of those dream volunteers who was never satisfied with 'just the basics.' Before each nature hike she would read and reread the training material and then research more information on her own. She was always willing to dive in and try anything we put before her." It is no wonder that when funding at the Dillon Nature Center became available in 2009, Stephanie was hired as a half-time employee and has since moved to a full-time employee in 2012. Most recently, Ms. Carlson has been responsible for aligning programs with the Next Generation Science Standards, implementing STEM programming in schools, and training volunteers to lead programs. In the 2015-2016 school year, Stephanie presented STEM programs to more than 700 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students on Green Energy, Invasive Species, and Energy Transfer. Each year she meets with curriculum directors from our contract schools to make sure we are providing the services that meet their needs at each grade level. Besides providing programs for more than 20,000 school age children, Stephanie leads public programs for preschoolers, adults and families, and prepares lesson plans for our summer camp staff. In honor of the enormous contributions Stephanie has made in the Hutchinson community, KACEE is pleased to honor her with this award for excellence in environmental education.

**Kerri Ebert** (Agriculture)

For the past fourteen years, Kerri Ebert has shown exceptional leadership and dedication to educating Kansans about sustainable agriculture and farm safety through her work as Project Coordinator of the Kansas AgrAbility Project, Extension Farm Safety Program, and Kansas Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Alternative Crops (KCSAAC). In this capacity, she provides consultation and review of proposals for Sustainable Agriculture, Research, and Education (SARE) for the North Central Region. She has written several grants and publications to further the cause of sustainable agriculture in Kansas. In addition to the formal nature of her work, Kerri is an incredibly intuitive leader and supportive colleague. She has a keen understanding of the complexities involved in the Kansas agriculture and natural resources scene, along with a dedication to helping others make the connections required to make environmental education a reality across the state. During her time with Kansas AgrAbility and SARE, Kerri has secured almost three million dollars of funding for professional development for natural resources,



agricultural professionals, and extension specialists and programs that provide education for youth and adults on farm safety and health. From local farm tours to regional and national conferences, Kerri actively and thoroughly educates herself on the importance of sustainable agriculture and farm safety. The most important piece of Kerri's work is she makes sure that the knowledge is disseminated across the state. Her collaborative spirit, determination, and genuine good will towards others make her a true leader in the Kansas environmental world. Rachel Myslivy, who nominated Ms. Ebert for this award summed up Kerri's contributions to environmental education in the following, "A true collaborator, Kerri constantly strives to find what works and make it happen. Her fingerprints can be seen in many outstanding sustainable agriculture projects through the KSAAC logo. She leverages her position to secure funding that expands educational opportunities through various organizations with diverse perspectives across the state." KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Ebert with this award.

### **Erinn Stiles** (Community/Non-Profit)

KACEE is excited to honor Erinn Stiles for her excellence in environmental education. Ms. Stiles began her pathway toward environmental education while attending Kansas State and as a docent and part-time seasonal educator for the Sunset Zoo in Manhattan, KS. Upon graduation, Erinn moved to the Wichita area and took a position with the Tanganyika Wildlife Park as a volunteer coordinator. Though Erinn greatly enjoyed the challenge of starting a volunteer program, she also wanted to add an environmental education component to her position. In 2009, Erinn began to develop education programs for Tanganyika and in early 2010, she took the official title of Education Coordinator. In a short period of time, Erinn was able to develop assembly shows, classroom programs, overnight programs, and scout workshops, all with an environmental-education focus. Now, Erinn facilitates over 200 education programs and shows per year. Her environmental-education based programs and tours impacted over 30,000 students and adults in 2015. As if developing and delivering school, scout, and community programs wasn't enough, in 2014, Erinn developed a Safari Summer Camp for Tanganyika. Recognizing the need for students to experience, explore, and engage with the natural world during the summer, Erinn developed a series of week-long camp curricula for elementary-aged students. Over 80 individual campers attended the six weeks of programming offered in 2015, a huge success for a first-year camp. Though she has only been working full-time in the field of environmental education for 6.5 years, Erinn Stiles has already made a tremendous impact on both Tanganyika and the Wichita Metro Area. Her dedication to conservation-based environmental education has grown by leaps and bounds since her start in college, and it is only poised to grow exponentially in the future. KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Stiles with this award.

### **Daryl Finch** (PreK-16 Education)

It doesn't take long to recognize that Mr. Finch's high school science classroom isn't typical—but then, neither is Daryl. As a biology teacher at Council Grove High School, Mr. Finch has extended his classroom well beyond the four walls of his classroom. Teaching in the heart of the Flint Hills, Daryl has spent significant time studying the native grasses of his area by creating learning opportunities with the Konza Biological Field Station (managed by KSU). He has even worked to create his own native grass studies using White Memorial Camp - located near the local federal reservoir. Recently, when Council Grove approved a bond to build additions on to Council Grove High School, Daryl created a plan to develop planting areas of native vegetation in the newly created landscaped areas. Using this area as a classroom, Daryl and his students implemented the plan. This is a hallmark of Mr. Finch's approach to education—his students are leaders. Daryl and his students have started a school garden as well. During the fall and spring our students study vegetation, watering, composting, and conservation of resources in the real-life classroom of a garden. Not only do the students learn, but Council Grove's food service program utilizes some of the school-grown garden produce. Currently, Daryl and his students have taken a deeper

focus on their study of water. Daryl and his students are organizing a "Water Event", to be held in March, at their facility and open to the public, again with students leading the charge. Most recently Daryl has expanded his expertise beyond Council Grove to serving and learning with "Solutioneers." A program funded through the Pisces Foundation, "Solutioneers" are dared to think big and bold to develop more opportunities for students to learn about conservation and environmental education in Kansas. Daryl is co-leading an effort to create a statewide group for students in their schools called WILD. WILD's mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students and the land in which they live by developing their potential for leadership, personal growth, and connection to their environment. Daryl is helping to lead toward a vision of developing students whose lives are impacted by WILD and environmental education. Students achieve academic and personal growth, participate in outdoor activities and provide leadership to build healthy local communities, a strong land ethic, and a sustainable world. KACEE is pleased to honor Mr. Daryl Finch for his outstanding leadership and dedication to high quality, non-biased environmental education.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **Complete High School Maize**

Complete High School Maize (CHSM) is an alternative school located in Maize, KS. CHSM is an experiential, project-based, service learning school that serves between 60-70 students at a time. Eight people make up the entire staff including the principal, science teacher, teacher/assistant principal, english teacher, social studies teacher, business teacher, secretary, and paraprofessional. And while CHSM is small, their accomplishments are mighty. A high school where students lead the way, CHSM began their green school efforts in 2008 when students noticed how much trash the school created. They investigated, researched school recycling programs across the country and developed their own plan to begin recycling at the high school. As the CHSM principal, Kristy Custer noted, "The students soon found that once they began recycling, it was difficult NOT to recycle, and they found themselves going out of their way to prevent throwing things in the trash. For instance, they would carry a separate bag for cans when participating in the Adopt-a-Highway program." The recycling project has been so successful that CHSM is now coordinating recycling at four elementary schools, the Educational Support Center, as well as the Copy Center. Community members are also invited to drop off recycling in the school's recycle bins. CHSM students pride themselves on customer service and even arrange pick-up for one elderly resident who is homebound. In 2011-12, CHSM recycled 13.30 tons of paper, which ranked 3rd among schools in the surrounding communities; in 2013-2014, CHSM recycled almost 15 tons of paper, which ranked 2nd. Beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, the project became large enough that each of the elementary schools had their own recycle bins placed at the individual schools. CHSM students still assist elementary students or do the pick-up at these buildings. This has led to students exploring ways to compost and experiment with composting larvae and needing a great place to use compost, branching into gardening. Instead of conducting a conventional fundraiser this Spring, students will be starting vegetable and flower seeds to sell. Students will conduct soil testing and research which plants can be transplanted well and when to start the seeds indoors. Plans are in place for the students to sell plants for donations at CHSM and at a local farmer's market. A Kansas Green School since 2012, Complete High School Maize has progressed from implementing an environmental education program into its school, to teaching and assisting other schools how to implement an environmental education program in their schools. The students and staff are leading the way for environmental education in their community and KACEE is proud to honor Complete High School Maize as a Kansas Green School of Excellence.

### **President's Award:**

## **Ann Root**

# **2017**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Pat Silovsky, Milford Nature Center, Junction City, KS**

KACEE is pleased to present the 2017 John K. Strickler Award to Pat Silovsky, Director of the Milford Nature Center in Junction City, KS. Pat has had a nearly 30 year career and impact in the field of conservation and environmental education. She began working at the Milford Nature Center in December 1988, as the first and only Director. She was a staff of one with literally a blank slate and transformed the Milford Nature Center into a space that welcomes visitors from throughout the country with hands on exhibits, live animal exhibits of Kansas wildlife, informative exhibits and a nature playground. What visitors see now, nearly 30 years later, is the direct result of her creativity, dedication, hard work, and ability to encourage and lead staff.

Pat also develops and leads learning experiences for audiences from Kindergarten to seniors as well as special events Eagle Days, Fishing Clinics for kids, Mother's Day plant sale, and even a Monster Myths program at Halloween. Pat has also had a key role in the Kansas ECO-Meet, which is a wildlife/ecology competition that began in 1991 and is sponsored by Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. This program gives middle and high school students the opportunity to show off their wildlife knowledge by competing in written exams, an interpretive skit, and plant scavenger hunt. What started out as a program offered to students in the Milford Lake area has grown to a statewide competition with ten regional meets, touching 500+ students in Kansas each year.

Pat has been a leader not only at Milford Nature Center, but also throughout the state and nationally. Pat has been active in several leadership positions within the National Association for Interpretation and has helped to host conferences in Kansas for regional members. Pat's leadership is especially evident in her mentorship of others, in the field of wildlife rehabilitation programs, in surveying populations of federally endangered black footed ferrets in Western Kansas and most importantly, mentoring young professionals in her field. Lisa Cole, a former naturalist at the Milford Nature Center describes Pat's influence in this way, "Pat taught by example and it is due to her guidance that I embarked on a career that provides so much of the meaning in my life." Lisa is just one of many who went on to work in the conservation and environmental education field who Pat helped get started. For Pat's many contributions to the field of environmental education and her long time commitment and dedication, KACEE is pleased to honor her with the 2017 John K. Strickler Award.

## **KACEE Awards:**

### **Noah Busch** (PreK-16 Education)

KACEE is pleased to honor Mr. Noah Busch with an award for excellence in environmental education. Mr. Busch has been teaching high school for only 10 years, but he's already made an indelible impression on students and his fellow teachers alike. Noah believes that the best way to learn biology is by collecting data in schoolyards, fields, streams, the Konza Prairie and other local natural sites. Noah's students have tagged monarch butterflies and studied their migration habits and patterns. His students have waded in streams to collect data on water quality and survey macroinvertebrates. Noah's students go on nature walks and hone their observational skills, identifying birds, trees and other wildlife along the way. In short, his students use the world around them as their learning laboratory and that is the kind of learning that sticks with students.

Noah's current passion is to bring the prairie to his students. With budget challenges in schools, Noah realized that in order to make sure that his students have opportunities to study the prairie ecosystem, it would be beneficial to have a prairie patch on the school grounds. This will help facilitate learning about pollinators, biodiversity, native species and more. And Noah's passion for environmental education is one he shares with others. Noah has engaged students from his own class and the district in EcoMeet and Envirothon, two statewide competitions on the environment, and he's working with other teachers across the district to bring more environmental education into classrooms through Green Gatherings. Green Gatherings bring teachers from different grade levels and schools together to talk about teaching, collaboration and community resources for everything from recycling and composting to gardening and more. Noah was also a lead team member on a program to assess student's environmental literacy. For his work in and out of his classroom, with students and other educators, KACEE is honored to recognize Mr. Noah Busch, Biology Teacher at Manhattan High School.

### **Melissa Peak, Lincoln Elementary** (PreK-16 Education)

Learning to be good stewards of our resources begins at an early age at Lincoln Elementary. Preschool teacher Melissa Peak knows that even very young children can and will make a difference. Melissa's students both learn about and make a difference each and every day. For 6 years at Lincoln Elementary, the preschool students recycle all sorts of items through a program called TerraCycle, turning those recyclables into money that helps fund school projects like the Walking Viking Program and creating a more beautiful space to learn and play by planting a variety of plants around the school. Melissa's students can literally see the differences they're making for their school each and every day. Melissa's impact doesn't stop at the doors of her preschool classroom, she leads the entire school in making a difference as well. Melissa coordinates a recycling contest twice a year to engage 300+ students at Lincoln Elementary and then personally makes sure that every recycled item, every can, and every plastic bottle is collected, counted and kept track of for the 14 classrooms that recycles during the contests. Melissa even hauls the many bags of recycling to the local center.

Melissa's impact on the Lincoln Elementary students extends beyond the school walls. Using funding from the school's recycling program, Melissa purchased milkweed and other great pollinator plants and created a butterfly garden to especially attract monarch butterflies—which students at Lincoln learn the monarch caterpillars only eat from milkweed plants. Teachers at Lincoln Elementary use the butterfly garden to

observe different species, life cycles, and more. This outdoor classroom was so successful, additional plants have been planted around the school and she enlisted her own children to help get the work done. Mrs. Peak's first class of preschool students are now school leaders at another grade level building for making their school, their community and their environment better. For her dedication, creativity and passion for environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor Mrs. Melissa Peak as a 2017 Outstanding Environmental Educator.

**Rochelle Butler, Madison Elementary** (PreK-16 Education)

Mrs. Rochelle Butler has been the 3rd grade teacher at Madison Elementary School in Madison, Kansas, for 11 years and was engaging her students in being responsible stewards of our resources long before there was such a thing as a "green school." Rochelle began with teaching her students about recycling. She did so recognizing that today's responsible students mean tomorrow's responsible citizens. What is perhaps most inspiring about Rochelle is that she continuously strives to build on her student's understanding and responsibility for the world around them. Last year, Mrs. Butler co-authored a grant that built a recycling shed for the Madison school district, and subsequently designed and coordinated a district-wide recycling program that recycles classroom waste, as well as materials from the cafeteria. Due to her efforts, thousands of industrial sized cans and cardboard containers from the cafeteria that would otherwise be destined for a landfill are instead recycled. In Mrs. Butler's grant, she also allocated funds for vermiculture composting systems that she, as well as other classrooms, utilize in their curriculum. This compost material is later used in the Madison Outdoor Learning Center vegetable gardens. Rochelle's wholehearted approach to reducing, reusing, and recycling, and the ways she integrates student learning has a powerful impact.

For Mrs. Butler, being a responsible student extends outside the school walls and into the community. For instance, Mrs. Butler's classroom participates in a city-wide cleanup day each spring. Her students regularly engage in community service and learning through projects such as collecting trash from the Madison city lake, cleaning debris from parks and yards of the homebound and weeding the flowerbeds of the city library. As parent volunteer Anna Curry noted, "She truly has a servant's heart and works willingly and diligently to see a job is properly carried through." For Rochelle's ongoing work to engage her students to make her school, her community and the world a better place, KACEE is pleased to honor Mrs. Butler with this award for excellence in environmental education.

**Nicole Wade, Sunset Zoo** (Community/Non-Profit)

Nicole Wade is an incredible asset to the Manhattan community and has made a big impact on environmental education in just a short period of time. Nicole joined Sunset Zoo as a Program Assistant in October of 2013 and less than a year later, was promoted to the Education Specialist position. One of Nicole's first contributions to the environmental education programs of Sunset Zoo was to shift their summer camp programs from games and activities to robust week-long investigations of animals and the environment. Nicole finds ways for hands on learning to take place in creative ways that have benefits to both student learning and the zoo. For instance, Ms. Wade worked with zoo keepers to provide crawfish to local schools to raise and observe in the classroom and then returned to the zoo to be used as enrichment for otters. This classroom connection to the zoo has increased interest and participation in summer programs at the zoo.

Recognizing the opportunity to expand learning opportunities through volunteers, Nicole has also been instrumental in strengthening the training and outreach opportunities for volunteers, using zoo ambassador animals at events and in classrooms. Nicole is also active in engaging students and the broader Manhattan community in vital citizen science efforts to provide training to Manhattan students and residents in assisting scientists with toad and frog tracking, a part of a larger effort across the US. Ms. Wade has also been integral in Sunset Zoo's Behind the Science initiative to train scientists on public engagement strategies and create opportunities for public audiences to engage directly with scientists. Several of these events have been held in Manhattan and effort are underway to expand these opportunities to other cities in

Kansas. In the words of Jared Bixby, Curator of Education at the Sunset Zoo, "Nicole Wade has created a big impact at Sunset Zoo through environmental education and the use of associated best practices. Her reach spans generations from preschool groups to senior centers, and her focus continues to be hands-on interaction with animals and the outdoors." KACEE is pleased to honor Nicole Wade for excellence in environmental education.

### **Angela Anderson, Twin Lakes WRAPS (Government)**

Angela Anderson began her career in environmental education as the Special Activities and Outreach Coordinator at the David Traylor Zoo of Emporia in 2002. One might have expected that when Angela took a position coordinating the Twin Lakes Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) group in 2011 that she might not continue to work in environmental education. But that couldn't be any further from the truth. One of the first things Angela did when starting as the Twin Lakes WRAPS Coordinator was to resurrect the Twin Lakes Water Festival that Katie Miller started. In 2016, three hundred thirty two fourth graders were able to experience "hands on" water quality education with numerous presenters sharing their knowledge of conservation for our natural resources. This involved three counties, nine schools, fifteen presenters and lots of volunteers. Angela also presents at numerous activities sharing her expertise and passion for conservation of our natural resources. She presents at Dickinson County's Water Festivals and assists youth activities at both zoos in Manhattan and Emporia.

Angela not only continues her role in environmental education, she is a leader in her region, chairing the Neosho Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) that stemmed from the Governor's Water Vision in 2013. With her unique background of living and working in the Neosho Region, and interacting with, and educating local residents, Angela's perspective was key in creating regional plans that benefitted everyone. In addition, for the last seven years Angela has been the chairperson for the Debbe' Schopper Information and Education (I & E) Committee. This is where agencies all come together to brainstorm shared ideas on upcoming workshops and educational activities for both youth and adults. Angela has also been a big inspiration by being the Wildlife presenter at Council Grove's Regional Envirothons. The Kansas Envirothon is an outdoor, environmental high school competition where high school students learn and are tested on soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics, range, a current issue and an oral presentation. Her knowledge and expertise on wildlife excels with her presenting awesome exhibits of wildlife and lessons handed down from her father, Roger Wells, a certified wildlife biologist. She even hosts individuals to come to a Flint Hills lek to view and photograph prairie chickens in action when they are booming. Angela is also president of the Kansas Wildlife Federation, a school board member and collaborator with Council Grove High School, where she works with last year's awardee, high school teacher Daryl Finch to engage students in community based environmental education. For her leadership and ongoing commitment to environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor Angela Anderson for her excellence in conservation and environmental education.

### **Rising Star:**

#### **Courtney Masterson, Kaw Valley Native Plant Coalition**

KACEE is pleased to recognize Ms. Courtney Masterson with this year's Rising Star Award. Courtney was nominated by three different people for this award and her list of accomplishments in the few short years she's been working professionally are already too numerous to mention. Courtney's passion for environmental education and native plants began early. While attending Johnson County Community College, Courtney served on the first Student Sustainability Committee and utilized her passion for native plants and green solutions to help with a key stormwater project. Courtney went on to the University of Missouri – Kansas City, earning a degree in Biological Sciences, and later studied at the University of Kansas, where she earned her Master's degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. It was at KU that her passion for native plants truly blossomed and that is evident in her numerous volunteer efforts including co-founding and leading The Kaw Valley Native Plant Coalition, serving on the planning committee for the Kaw

Valley Seed Fair, serving as a field guide and student mentor for the Blue Valley and Lawrence Public School Districts for student research to name just a few. The thread that runs through all of Ms. Masterson's volunteer and leadership efforts is a passion for teaching people, whether they be students, other volunteers, colleagues, or community members, about native plants and ecosystems.

Ms. Masterson is now working at the Kansas Biological Survey where she assists with research on native plant/soil fungi relationships. She also teaches Environmental Science at Johnson County Community College and Field Botany at KU. Courtney, however, continues to be an active volunteer and leader for native plants and education in the Lawrence area. What is perhaps most impressive about Courtney is what her colleague Kim Bellemere noted might sometimes go unnoticed, "the small, informal things she does like mentoring fellow volunteers at the community orchard while they're weeding or mulching; spending her evenings filling envelopes for a local seed swap; or taking an afternoon to create a garden for the city with leftover and donated plants. Even just simple conversations with Courtney are opportunities to learn and share her enthusiasm for our native habitat and the environment." From the big things, to the little things, in just a few short years, Courtney's contributions to environmental education in have made a difference in so many people's lives. KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Masterson and we know she's just getting started.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **The Independent School, Wichita, KS**

The first recipient of the 2017 Kansas Green School of the Year is awarded to the Environmental Action Club at The Independent School. In 2012, the Independent School Environmental Action Club was established and in just five years, the club has grown and tackles everything from campus-wide green project activities, to student led research projects, to tailoring leadership roles to future career goals and talents, to providing environmental education projects for students in grades K-12. The Environmental Action Club has been responsible for engaging K-12 students in going green, implementing an all school campus recycling program, eliminating Styrofoam from the cafeteria and encouraging participation in "Lights Out" campaigns. Student learning and research happens through a registered Monarch Waystation and service learning through annually starting seeds and planting milkweed and other bee and butterfly friendly, attractive plants around campus. The Independent School Environmental Action Club is constantly seeking new ways to engage students in conservation and greening their schools through environmental education and service learning. They are currently developing plans to build bat and bird houses, researching water bottle filling stations to decrease plastic bottle waste, and working on developing a personal food computer; a project where students create a small computer controlled and monitored environment for growing food, a project of the Open Agriculture Initiative. Students also continue to have service days where they maintain the campus nature site, a place where students can learn, study, research and just appreciate nature while at school. Classes pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade use the area for nature walks, creative writing projects, photography, filming, science experiments and more. The Independent School Environmental Action Team also built a boardwalk trail so that that everyone would have safe access to the natural habitat and can observe some of the many species that use the space for habitat.

The Environmental Action Club also prepares, facilitates and guides elementary age students in a Winter Fun Day, one the club's main fundraisers. The Environmental Action Club students teach others how to be a better environmental stewards through guided educational nature tours, making crafts from recycled materials for environmental educational activities. What is perhaps most unique about this club is the way students are engaged in leadership roles that fit their career interests and passions. For example, one club member who is interested in becoming an elementary education teacher serves as the Educational Coordinator and plans the Winter Fun Day and Earth Day activities. The Project Manager is the student who has interest in construction

and access to equipment. He has completed building and construction projects for function and beauty around campus. The work of the Environmental Action Club has had a huge impact on the school and even the community. This is what one student had to say about Independent School, "People seem inquisitive about not only the things we do on a micro level, but things that are happening on a macro level. There are students questioning how our school can help around our city to better our environment..." KACEE is pleased and proud to honor the Independent School as our 2017 Kansas Green School of the Year.

### **Earhart Environmental Magnet School, Wichita, KS**

KACEE is pleased and proud to award Earhart Environmental Magnet School with the Kansas Green School of the Year Award. This award is long overdue. Earhart has integrated environmental education into its core curriculum since its inception in the late 1970s. Throughout its existence, the staff at Earhart have modified and adapted their curriculum to meet local, state, and national science standards, but using the environment as a context for learning has remained a constant. Teachers and students put the curriculum into action through their Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site (OWLS) and outdoor education activities which include a camping program. The staff, students and parents at Earhart recognize that getting students outside to learn supports academic achievement, health and helps develop critical thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills.

The staff, students and parents at Earhart recognize the value of their OWLS as an outdoor learning laboratory for students and have invested significant time and resources to maintain and enhance the outdoor learning space and improve habitat. Projects have included restoration of Earhart's pond and prairie habitats, adding additional native flowers to support a Monarch Waystation, planting native trees around the perimeter of the building to save on energy costs and provide habitat, and building a raised food garden. Each project has been supported by local community advocates along with the Earhart school community. For instance, Westar's Green Team worked along with students and teachers to complete pond and prairie restoration as well as tree planting. The American Heart Association and Via Christi sponsored their AHA Teaching Garden, which is the first one in Kansas. This project has allowed students to follow the seasons of the garden from planning and planting to harvest and eating! Students are continuously involved in the maintenance of these habitats where they also spend time collecting data, making observations and using the outdoor space as a learning laboratory. Being involved in citizen science programs like Journey North's Monarch Watch and Project Bud Burst shows students the importance of collecting data and that what happens in their small part of the Earth matters. KACEE is pleased to recognize Earhart Environmental Magnet School with the 2017 Kansas Green School of the Year award for their many years of engaging students in high quality environmental education and hands-on learning and commitment to green their school and schoolyard.

### **President's Award:**

**Jeff Severin, University of Kansas, Center for Sustainability**

## **2018**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Mike Rader**

KACEE is pleased to present the 2018 John K. Strickler Award for lifetime achievement in conservation and environmental education to Mike Rader, Wildlife Education Supervisor for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism in Pratt, KS. Mike has demonstrated a career long commitment to environmental education, from his earlier years as a conservation worker at



Wilson State Park to the work he does today, educating people of all ages about wildlife and the environment. His long term engagement and contributions have had impacts throughout the state and he's become a strong leader in the field.

As a conservation worker at Wilson Park for 18 years, Mike provided educational programs to visitors from all over our state and beyond about the unique wildlife in the park and shared his love and wonder for this special place in Kansas with thousands of visitors each year. In 2007, Mike was promoted to Wildlife Education Supervisor and was able to take his passion for teaching about the environment to a statewide level. He is currently responsible for overseeing the staff and programming at Milford Nature Center, the Prairie Center in Olathe, Pratt Education Center & Museum, Southeast Kansas Nature Center in Galena and the Kansas Wetlands Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms. These facilities provide outreach and education for tens of thousands of people each year. Mike also oversees the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites or OWLS, where he helps promote, establish, and fund outdoor classrooms in schools. These outdoor classrooms are found in 167 schools across the state, providing an onsite hands- on outdoor learning lab for thousands of students across the state.

Underlying Mike's work is a connection to youth. In addition to the environmental education through nature centers and creation of outdoor wildlife learning labs on schools across the state, Mike also spearheads a statewide scholarship competition for high school students called ECO-Meet. Mike tirelessly fund raises and recruits schools and students to participate in this program which challenges and inspires interest, appreciation and understanding of the natural sciences and the Kansas environment. Hundreds of high school students from around the state participate each year and many of these students go on to pursue careers in the natural sciences as a result of their experience with this program. Mike's work has truly created a legacy for wildlife and wildlife education in the state.

Mike is especially passionate about birding and can often be found leading groups for bird watching events, coordinating bird counts and tracking bird migrations. He is one of our state's most knowledgeable birders and shares his knowledge and expertise with others through a number of events. Finally, Mike is a leader and a tireless advocate for environmental education in our state and serves in a leadership position as an ex-officio board member for KACEE. He constantly works to support KACEE's work and has been instrumental in advancing wildlife education in our state throughout his career. For Mike's many contributions to the field of environmental education and his long time commitment and dedication, KACEE is pleased to honor him with the 2018 John K. Strickler Award.

## **KACEE Awards:**

### **Flint Hills Map and Education Program** (Community/Non-Profit)

Many may not realize that Kansas is home to a national treasure. That many Kansans aren't aware sparked a project that educates students and adults so that we might preserve this Kansas treasure. KACEE is pleased to recognize the Flint Hills Map and Education Program for their outstanding contributions to the field of conservation and environmental education. In 2012, a team was formed by project founder, Director Emily Hunter Connell including local ranchers, area teachers and staff from the Flint Hills Discovery Center as well as numerous advisors met to begin working on efforts to develop a sense of pride, awareness, commitment and knowledge about one of the world's most rare and endangered eco-systems, the tallgrass prairie. The tallgrass prairie, which once spanned an estimated 167 million acres across central North America, represents a unique ecosystem known for prairie grasses that can grow as high as 9 feet. As western states were settled and land was converted to farm ground, a large majority of this ecosystem was lost. By today's estimates, less than 4% of the tallgrass prairie remains, with 2/3 of that remainder found in the flint hills of Kansas. Together, the team began designing a comprehensive education effort which highlights this unique and valuable remaining tallgrass prairie to area students. Together they designed a comprehensive map exhibit, accompanying lessons for students and teacher professional development to support learning about the Flint

Hills in classrooms across the region. Leadership for this project was provided by Annie Wilson, a local rancher, teacher and song writer.

To date, the map and exhibit have been provided free of charge to 173 K-12 schools, 10 colleges, and 9 public locations in 24 Flint Hills counties. The exhibits provide students with a map pin pointing to their school's location within the broader tallgrass prairie, information about the plant species native to the area as well as some key facts about the tallgrass prairie. Lesson plans expand learning to include prairie related reading, writing, math, social studies, science and art. The impact of these educational efforts reaches over 114,000 students and faculty annually. The ability to share these invaluable resources with students and schools was made possible through generous private contributions from business and industry, area ranches and committed individuals. For their outstanding efforts in educating students about the prairie, KACEE is honored to award the Flint Hills Map and Education Program with a 2018 Community and Non-Profit Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education award.

### **Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society** (Community/Non-Profit)

Sperry-Galligar Audubon was formed in 1999 for the purpose of conservation education in Pittsburg, KS and the surrounding areas. The organization was named for married professors in the Pittsburg State University Biology Department, Dr. Gladys Galligar and Dr. Ted Sperry. Dr. Sperry was a student of Aldo Leopold, author *The Sand County Almanac* and considered by many to be the father of wildlife biology. It was under Leopold's direction that Dr. Sperry created the Curtis Prairie in Wisconsin, now the world's oldest ecologically restored prairie. In Kansas, Ted and Gladys' commitment to conservation and education was apparent through their work at the University and at their home in Pittsburg. As an Audubon Chapter, members of Sperry-Galligar fundraise for conservation projects in the area as well as volunteering for a variety of conservation and education efforts in the community. Examples of these volunteer efforts include: monitoring bluebird boxes, counting chimney swifts, building benches for local trails, and helping on work days for the Pittsburg State University's Nature Reach program.

While one might think that a local Audubon Chapter would be focused solely on birds, one of the most valuable services the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society provides to the community is offering free monthly programs, including programs on birds, but also covering a multitude of topics from salamanders to solar panels and bees to bears. This effort fills a vital community need for environmental education. In addition to their own education efforts, Sperry-Galligar also supports other local conservation and environmental education efforts, including volunteering and providing funding to programs that serve area youth, such as donating supplies to local day camps and providing scholarships to high school students who participate in Kansas Eco-Meet, a statewide competition testing knowledge and understanding of wildlife issues and conservation. For their outstanding efforts and leadership in both supporting and providing environmental education for more than 20 years in the Pittsburg area, KACEE is pleased to recognize the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society for their excellence.

### **Judy Boltman** (Government)

If one didn't pay close attention, you might overlook the powerful and profound impact that Judy Boltman has had on conservation and environmental education. Judy currently serves as the District Manager of the Shawnee County Conservation District and also serves as the lead organizer for the Topeka Water Festival, an annual educational event for 4th graders in the Topeka area. In the words of her colleague from the City of Topeka Public Works, Office of Utilities and Public Transportation, Sylvia Davis, "Judy is truly one of environmental education's unsung heroes."

In her role as the Conservation District Manager, Judy serves the people of Shawnee County with voluntary programs of education, planning, and application of conservation practices to sustain the long term quality of our natural resources. One of her strengths lies in her ability to engage a long list of partners she has worked with over many years to help bring education and resources together to assist farmers and ranchers, contractors, developers, homeowners and

members of the public at large. In addition to her work with local land owners and developers, Judy stepped up in 1999 to host an event for Topeka 4th graders designed to be a day of hands on learning that increases awareness and appreciation of local water resources and issues surrounding the community, as well encouraging students to be good stewards for our water resources. What started out as a small event for just 300 students has blossomed into an annual event requiring more than 100 volunteers to present 36 activities to almost 1,200 area fourth graders each year. Coordinating this event is no small task--Judy begins planning for the event immediately following the last year's festival and according to event partner Sylvia Davis, "Judy is the cog that keeps the entire wheel turning. She schedules every individual volunteer, works with a running list of schools that want to participate and their respective schedules, lines out logistics in terms of bus schedules, food arrangements, and finances and works with the fabulous staff at KACEE to ensure that everyone's needs are met." What is perhaps most remarkable is that Judy manages all this with a smile and always credits everyone else with the event's success. For her quiet and unassuming leadership, KACEE is pleased and proud to award Judy Boltman with the 2018 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award.

### **Melanie Falcon** (PreK-16 Education)

KACEE is pleased and proud to recognize teacher Melanie Falcon for her excellence in conservation and environmental education in the classroom. Melanie began her teaching career at Wilson High School in Wilson, KS in 2007 and jumped right in with teaching environmental education and leading the school's efforts to create enthusiasm and engagement with students in their environmental learning. Melanie provided critical leadership for the school in working with students to prepare for and compete in a statewide competition called ECO-Meet. This competition brings students from around the state together to test their knowledge and understanding of Kansas plants and animals. Students who do well at their region advance to a state competition and Melanie's students always do well. She has had ECO-Meet teams that finished in the top three positions every year she's worked with them including sweeping the top three team positions in 2014 and 2015, with one of her teams winning the entire competition 9 of the 10 years that they've competed. She's coached her ECO-Meet teams to top honors in a field of more than 25 of the best teams from across the state, with her team winning 1st place in 2016. As ECO-Meet Coordinator, Mike Rader stated, "This is attributed to having really strong students in the competition, but also due in large part to the time and effort she took to help her students prepare. As a coordinator for the event, it was fun for me to see her excitement and emotion as she broke down when we announced the winner. It was the culmination of a long, hard-fought season of regional events and against much larger schools, and her tenacity and competitive spirit was rewarded."

Melanie's passion for learning and teaching about the environment is not only evident in her classroom, but in the many hours she spends outside of the classroom learning and teaching. Melanie advances her own knowledge of Kansas plants and animals through active participation in herpetology field trips, looking for, learning about and sharing her knowledge of amphibians and reptiles in our state. She has volunteered during the summer for the Sternberg Museum of Natural History in Hays to educate visitors from far and wide during her time off from the classroom. Countless students and visitors have benefitted from Melanie's passion for teaching and learning and her love of the out-of-doors. She routinely participates in a program sponsored by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism called Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) which provides women with skills, knowledge and experiences to become more active in outdoor recreation opportunities in our state. Melanie is always ready to try new things and share her love of nature and the outdoors with others. Melanie has recently taken on a new teaching position as a middle school science teacher in Lindsborg where she is already continuing in the tradition of her work at Wilson High with a whole new group of students. While it was challenging to leave the school she loved, Melanie can be proud that some of her former Wilson students have now taken over leading the ECO-Meet program, which is a testament to her leadership and inspiration. KACEE is pleased to honor Melanie for her work both in and out of the classroom in

inspiring learning about world around us.

### **Park Management and Conservation Program, Kansas State University (PreK-16 Education)**

It's no coincidence that many of our state leaders in conservation and environmental education have one thing in common—they all graduated from the Park Management and Conservation (PMC) Program at Kansas State University. The PMC Program in the College of Agriculture, Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources prepares students for careers in a wide variety of natural resource management agencies and organizations. This program prepares students for jobs including: park managers and rangers, conservation officers, planners, nature center directors and naturalists and other positions responsible for environmental education efforts. The PMC program has played a significant role in contributing to environmental education, specifically in Kansas, for over a half century. From the beginning, faculty with the PMC program recognized the importance of including environmental education as a part of the preparation of their students, providing the training for thousands of students over the years to include environmental education as a critical component of the work they do. For this long standing effort, KACEE is pleased to honor the PMC Program at Kansas State University with an award for excellence in conservation and environmental education.

Throughout the long history of the PMC Program, several key faculty have made significant contributions toward the enduring impact this program has had in our state and beyond. Early influencers and former faculty included John Strickler, then state forester, Ed Udd, Tom Warner, Keith Lynch and Mark Morgan. Dr. Ted Cable and Dr. Sid Stevenson built on their efforts, both for the last 30 years. Together, the two have developed a program accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions (COAPRT) which graduates hundreds of students each year. Courses like Introduction to Natural Resource Management, developed by and for many years taught by Ted Cable, offered as a general education course, attracts both major and non-major students to study the natural resources of Kansas and connections to natural resource issues in other parts of the world, embodying the phrase, "Think Globally, Act Locally." This course often sparks the interest of students who hadn't previously considered a degree in Park Management and Conservation. Dr. Sid Stevenson has worked to include courses that connect students to experiences in conservation and environmental education, often through partnerships with agencies and organizations across the state, including KACEE. By providing students with opportunities to teach environmental education at local events, learn boat safety and education while on an actual boat he acquired, and experience outdoor education at sites like Rock Springs 4-H camp, it is no wonder that the students who graduate from the PMC program rise to become leaders in their professions. As the program grows, new faculty, Jeff Skibins and Ryan Sharp have continued this strong leadership for preparing our next generation of environmental educators and leaders.

### **Connie Elpers Rising Star Award:**

#### **Amber Myers**

It isn't often that someone is called "one of the hardest working and most dedicated stewards of our environment that I've ever met," let alone someone who has only been working in the field for five years. Yet that's just how Stephen Bridenstine, the Curator of Education at the Flint Hills Discovery Center described 2018 Rising Star award recipient, Amber Myers. Stephen goes on to say, "Her love of the natural world marks everything she does and has impacted not only the staff and guests here at the Flint Hills Discovery Center (FHDC) but everyone she meets in her life." KACEE is pleased to recognize Amber's achievements as a rising star in conservation and environmental education.

Amber's passion and dedication to sharing the environment with others drives both her personal and professional life. She recently returned to Kansas State University as an older non-traditional student to

obtain her dual degree in Park Management and Conservation and Natural Resources and Environmental Science, all while juggling the responsibility of caring for two school-age children. She became a volunteer and part time educator at the Flint Hills Discovery Center (FHDC) and as noted by her supervisor, Mr. Bridenstine, "During this time, she has transformed this department, this institution, and herself." After just a year on the job, Amber became the sole full-time educator in charge of leading all the educational programming at the FHDC, a very demanding job. However, seeing the lack of animal and nature focused programming, Amber found opportunities. She created a Family Outdoor Adventure Night program to get families more comfortable in the outdoors and a "walk and talk" series to get people into the field with local experts, both programs designed to share her love of nature and the outdoors with others.

That might be enough for most people, but Amber still saw more opportunities for connecting children and adults with nature. Amber also began to find ways to get kids engaged with hands-on experiences with wildlife, like digging for insects in the soil, searching for crawfish in the Kansas River and learning about administrators of the critical role that live animal programming can play in both the FHDC mission and bottom line. This culminated in Amber's singlehanded development of a Flint Hills Native Animal Education Program and "Meet the Neighbors" Exhibit. Stephen Bridenstine sums it up, saying, "In the end, her maturity and professionalism proved the key to developing this program. Now, the Flint Hills Discovery Center offers guests live interactive experiences with our Flint Hills animal neighbors, something never before considered here." For her amazing contributions in her first years in the field of environmental education, KACEE is pleased to recognize Amber Myers as the 2018 Connie Elpers Rising Star.

## **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

### **Chisholm Middle School**

In schools all across Kansas, students and teachers are working together to create greener and healthier schools. Each year, KACEE recognizes those schools that stand out as leaders in this effort and we are pleased to recognize Chisholm Middle School in Newton, KS as our 2018 Kansas Green School of the year. Students at Chisholm Middle school studied the important role of pollinators like butterflies and bees to the community's agricultural economy and wanted to make a difference. Led by teacher Chelle Coffee, students inventoried the diversity of species found on the school ground using activities from a program called Project Learning Tree. They discovered that there was not much diversity at all of species on the school site or area surrounding the school and teacher Chelle Coffee provided students with information on prairie pockets, or small plantings of native grasses and forbs. This led to the school applying for and receiving a grant from the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism for an Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site or OWLS. These sites are designed to serve the dual purpose of providing habitat and a hands-on learning site for students. Part of this process involved research for the students. "Each of the students designed a native Kansas garden and researched what native plants they would like to see in it to sustain pollinators needed for our area. A few also added that we would need rock areas for small rodents and snakes in the prairie ecosystem," said teacher Chelle Coffee.

The research and design conducted by the students was presented and students pulled their ideas together to come up with their final prairie garden design which incorporated the best of each student's ideas. What makes this project especially impressive is the partnerships built in the community to see the garden come to fruition. In collaboration, the teacher and students approached their PTO to donate money for the development of the prairie. Local seed company, Sharp Brothers Seeds, donated three different sets of seeds for each area the students wanted; a tall prairie, a medium prairie and a short pollinator prairie. A local business owner, Gerald Unruh of Bentley Sand was hired to deliver rock for the garden, but when he found it was for the school, he generously donated the rock and delivery to the school. Mulch was donated and delivered by the city of Newton. And finally, the district manager for the Harvey County Conservation District, Dana Stahl provided her expertise in helping students with when and where to do the seed

plantings as well as teaching the students about the water in the creek next to the school and how this native prairie helps with water quality.

The garden is already being utilized by other classes at Chisholm Middle School and students continue to make plans to improve the outdoor learning site including plans for benches so that students and community members can comfortably enjoy viewing of the new wildlife that now visit and live at the site. They also plan to install bird feeders and more plants, as well as converting more of the school grounds to prairie and food gardens. The garden is a great place for learning for many of the classrooms and as noted by teacher Chelle Coffee, "Since the garden consists of Kansas native plants it does not need water to thrive. The students and school along with community members and parents have created a sustainable, healthy, outdoor relaxing area for people to visit and for students to use as an outdoor learning space." KACEE is pleased to honor Chisholm Middle School as our 2018 Kansas Green School of the Year.

### **President's Award:**

**Paul Miller**

**2019**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

**Laura Calwell**

KACEE is pleased to present the 2019 John K. Strickler Award to Laura Calwell, Education Director for Friends of the Kaw and Friends of Kaw Point Park in Mission, KS. If one spends even a small amount of time with Laura, it is immediately obvious Laura is passionate about the Kansas River. The Kansas River, or it is affectionately called, the Kaw, is considered one of the longest prairie rivers in the world, spanning more than 170 miles that run from Junction City to Kansas City. Along the way, the river supports communities with drinking water, farmers with irrigation and thousands of people with a great place to paddle each year. Laura recognized early on the value of this important Kansas river and was one of the founding board members of Friends of the Kaw, a grass-roots, non-profit, conservation organization whose mission is to protect and preserve the Kansas River. She has served in leadership positions on the board for many years. In 2003, Laura added to her work to protect and preserve this invaluable resource by becoming the Kansas River Keeper, part of an international river protection network and charged with being the eyes, ears, and voice for the Kansas River.

It became clear to Laura that in order to protect and preserve the Kaw, people needed to understand and appreciate the river. As Kansas Riverkeeper, Ms. Calwell organized, managed, and facilitated over 20 Education Float Trips on the Kansas River each year. A major focus of the float trips was to educate participants about the environmental and natural importance of the river that is also a primary drinking water source for northeast Kansas. To make sure that our next generation was prepared to value and protect the Kansas River as well, Laura also began implementing river education programs aimed at K-12 students. In 2013, as the Kansas Riverkeeper, Ms. Calwell was instrumental in developing the Kids About Water (KAW) Program, an issues and actions approach to stormwater education. She added to this effort with the Friends of the Kaw's Paddle Experiences, a program designed to introduce underserved children to stormwater pollution concerns, macroinvertebrates, and safe recreation at an area lake. And to expand the reach even further, Calwell began the Community Issues Taught by Youth (CITY) Project, an intern program for high school students from Kansas City who learn to become trainers for volunteers to do water quality testing and organize community-based river clean-up projects.

All told, Laura has spent nearly 30 years educating thousands of adults and students about

the 'Mighty Kaw' and its importance to our communities. Laura's efforts using hands-on experiences with the river coupled with engaging learning about the health of the river have helped so many understand and appreciate this incredible resource and the Kaw is grateful. For Laura's many contributions to the field of environmental education and her long time commitment and dedication, KACEE is pleased to honor her with the 2019 John K. Strickler Award.

### **KACEE Awards:**

#### **Jill Haukos** (Community/Non-Profit)

KACEE is pleased to honor Jill Haukos with an award for excellence in environmental education for her important work in educating thousands of children and adults about tallgrass prairie at the Konza Biological Research Station. In 2012, Kansas environmental education gained an outstanding leader when Jill was named as director of the Konza Environmental Education (KEEP) program at the Konza. Jill has maintained and expanded the exemplary programs that were established before she came to Konza, including the docent program and the K-12 field trip program at Konza. Beyond the great care she has given to programs she inherited, Jill has innovated and guided KEEP to offer even greater environmental education opportunities for all ages of Kansans and made KEEP an exemplar environmental education program in the nation.

Jill has actively worked to strengthen the connection between the long term research scientists from the Konza Biological Research Station with educational opportunities for adults and school groups that visit the prairie. As part of these efforts, Jill authored a book, *Autumn Calf*, an engaging story about a bison calf that weaves into the story an appreciation for prairie ecology and provide related activities to help children access Konza data about bison growth to sharpen their math skills and science understanding. Jill provides this book to every fourth grade class who visits the Konza as well as to any library, school or teacher who requests it, free of charge. In addition, Jill brought the Kansas Master Naturalist program to the Konza and offers trainings to those who want to develop their skills to be effective volunteers and docents for the Konza and other natural spaces in Kansas. Ms. Haukos also provides a summer workshop to teachers to build their skills in teaching about the prairie in their classrooms and then provides these teachers with a bus stipend to get their classrooms out on the Konza. Jill values the transformative experience field work can have on students, especially field experiences in special places like Konza Prairie and each year facilitates Konza field trip experiences for thousands of K-12 students. Jill has also been instrumental in making sure that the public continues to have access and opportunities to experience the Konza. Jill has been key to helping public and school visitors be respectful of research while keeping the nature trail open to the public and various Konza research areas open to docent-led field trips for K-12 education. As noted by Carol Williamson, "Jill is an inquiry teacher - a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage. Rather than students listening to a Konza field trip leader who spouts what they know about the prairie, Jill creates for docent-led field trips rich experiences and interesting questions upon which students can build their understanding of the prairie ecosystem, with the field trip leader facilitating learning." For her work in engaging thousands in experiencing and learning about prairie, KACEE is honored to recognize Ms. Jill Haukos for her excellence in conservation and environmental education.

#### **Sandra Sanders** (Community/Non-Profit)

Sandra Sanders is a life-long educator, a career teacher who was named Lawrence teacher of the year in recognition of her talents and contributions to the education of Lawrence elementary students who she taught for more than three decades. But that is not where Sandra's educational service ends. In 2006, as school funding for field trips was being cut from budgets, Jayhawk Audubon received funding to support field trips to natural areas for students. Sandra, with her wealth of connections and experience with Lawrence schools stepped up to coordinate these field experiences as the volunteer Wetland Learners Project Coordinator, now called the Learning About Nature Program. But Sandra did far more than coordinate dates and volunteers,

she built a highly successful, collaborative and impactful nature education program that went above and beyond all expectations. From start to finish, Sandra connects all the dots so that students get the most out of the field trip. Ms. Sanders consults teachers to determine the most valuable curriculum for the field experiences, works with teachers to make sure learning is extended back into the classroom, she meets with students before the field trip to prepare them and she is there for the field trip as well to make sure that all the volunteer educators make the most of the experience for the students. As colleague Susan Iverson noted, "Bear in mind that an astonishing number of the students have never gone for a walk in the woods or been to the wetlands and don't think they want anything to do with it! Sandy is able to spark their interest."

Sandra also coordinates all the volunteers who do hands on activities with the students during the field trip on a wide variety of topics including: aquatic macroinvertebrates, wetland plants, insects and birds, while weaving in environmental science, history, art and writing. In the spirit of innovation and collaboration, Sandra has developed a unique collaboration with University of Kansas and provides training and support for KU students to teach the different learning stations. "This training of future educators in environmental education is a wonderful byproduct of the project that no one but Sandy envisioned at the beginning" states colleague Susan Iverson. Sandra also works with the KU students to follow up visits to the local classrooms and continue the learning beyond the field trip. Sandra also expanded these after field trip visits to include some career education, having KU students share what they were studying, what career opportunities they will have and perhaps most importantly, in Sandra's own words, to share with the students that "science is about a way of thinking and anyone can develop their ability to look at the world from a science-based perspective. It's not a mysterious approach to life available to only a few people." With more than 9000 students who have participated in the Learning About Nature Program, along with the many KU students she has engaged and the multiple partner organizations, it is clear that Ms. Sanders has had a huge impact on environmental education in Kansas and KACEE is pleased to honor Sandra with the 2019 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education for a community non-profit organization.

### **Vanessa Avara (Government)**

KACEE is pleased to recognize Vanessa Avara for her excellence in conservation and environmental education. Vanessa has been sharing her passion for wildlife for more than 20 years, the last 11 years at the Milford Nature Center as their Assistant Director. Milford Nature Center not only is the home of educational exhibits and nature trails, the nature center also does a tremendous amount of education programming for schools and the community. The educational programs offered include topics on different species of wildlife as well as the water, food, shelter and space that make up habitat for different living creatures. As noted by Pat Silovsky, Director of the Milford Nature Center, since 2008, "4,000 programs to over 118,000 people have been given by the staff of Milford Nature Center and Vanessa has been there for nearly every one of them." What is key is that the learning opportunities are all hands on and when there are opportunities to create more hands on learning spaces, Vanessa takes advantage of them. For instance, Vanessa has been instrumental in creating pollinator experiences for visitors. This includes installing and maintaining a beehive, raising butterflies for the butterfly exhibit and creating pollinator gardens designed to attract and support bees and butterflies, as well as a monarch waystation to provide critical places for monarch butterflies to stop and feed as they make their migration each year to Mexico.

But Vanessa does far more than provide educational programming for students and visitors to Milford Nature Center, she has provided important leadership for our state birds of prey. Ms. Avara was the first woman falconer in the state of Kansas and has provided countless hours of consultation and education to birders and falconers. Vanessa is the co-author of the Great Plains Nature Center first pocket guide on Raptors an enormously successful pocket guide that has been reprinted several times. Additionally, nature centers throughout the region see Vanessa as an invaluable resource for animal care and rehabilitation, consulting with her about sick animals and how to properly care for animals nature centers use as "ambassador" animals



that visitors and classrooms have the opportunity to see up close during learning. As Pat Silovsky notes, "If a good example is twice the value of good advice, then those who come under the tutelage of Vanessa are in good hands and well on their way to becoming better animal caretakers." Vanessa also lends her expertise with community members who have found an injured or stray animal and has gone as far as agreeing to let the community member know what happens with the animal they've found, even though there are often not enough hours in the day for the education and care that Vanessa provides. At the heart of her interactions, Vanessa educates about wildlife—their importance, their care and their protection. For Vanessa's ongoing work to teach others to be as passionate about wildlife as she is, KACEE is pleased to honor Ms. Avara with this award for excellence in environmental education.

### **Courtney Smith** (PreK-16 Education)

Creativity is an important part of art, but Marlatt Elementary Art Teacher, Courtney Smith, takes creativity to a whole new level. Both in and out of her classroom, Courtney works to connect students with art and the world around them. From her art class where students construct their art pieces using recycled items, to the work Courtney does with the Marlatt Green Team, she shares her enthusiasm and excitement in all she does. As a teacher leader for the Marlatt Green Team, a team of more than 50 students, Courtney finds the time and materials needed for students to lead the way in making their school greener and healthier. Working before and after school with students, Courtney has helped coach the Marlatt Green Team in investigating waste in the school and finding ways to reduce the amount of trash going from Marlatt to the landfill by recycling and composting. Courtney is working with students now to explore energy use at Marlatt and find ways to reduce energy consumption at the school. She's even got a garden going with the students where they grow, harvest and eat the food they grow. And throughout, the students are as excited and energetic as she is - Courtney's creativity and passion are contagious! As Kansas Green Schools Coordinator Rachel Wahle stated, "Whatever Courtney is doing, whether you're a teacher or a student, you don't want to not be there!"

Courtney is not only a leader at Marlatt Elementary, but also within the district. As noted by Lucas Shivers who serves as the district Director of Elementary Education, "She has presented at several district-level professional development sessions to collaborate with and coach others on green and STREAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) projects." Courtney is always excited to bring new people onto the district's Green Champions team and from the start has been instrumental in growing the involvement with other teachers in the district. Along with a team of teacher leaders, the Manhattan/Ogden school district applied for and was awarded the US Department of Education's Green Ribbon School District recognition, a highly prestigious recognition given out to only three other districts in the nation this year, with Manhattan/Ogden being the first Green Ribbon District in the state. But Courtney knows there's more her school and the district can do and she's on track with the Marlatt Green Team to get Kansas Green School Silver Globe recognition this year. For her contagious energy and enthusiasm in leading students and teachers, KACEE is proud to recognize Ms. Courtney Smith for our outstanding contributions to the field of environmental education in Kansas.

### **Kellie Woolf** (PreK-16)

Kellie Woolf first got her hands dirty in environmental education over 11 years ago while working behind the scenes to help with a district level grant to create school gardens. Kellie was instrumental in bringing the grant project alive, securing donated land for the gardens, engaging community members and volunteers, getting water donated and spending countless hours in the garden, preparing, planting, weeding, watering and more. Kellie was highly motivated to step up and lead efforts as the garden was to serve as a community resource for whoever needed the food and there was a good deal of need in that community. What started as a small garden project turned into an extensive garden space that continues to be the pride of the school district and community. Kellie recognized the power in connecting education, the outdoors and service and that connection has become the hallmark of her work. When she moved to the Erie District,

she became the Problem-Based Learning Director for Erie High School and continued to weave these connections with her students as they undertook projects including planting a variety of gardens, grafting trees, building green houses, creating aquaculture systems and more. At the heart of Kellie's teaching, she engages students in understanding the world around them and addressing our most challenging problems in a way that lets students know they can make a difference.

When the opportunity to engage students in a new program called Kansas WILD came about, Kellie found a way to expand the opportunities to connect her students with education, the outdoors and service. Kansas WILD, a program created by her husband, then superintendent of Erie Schools, is an innovative approach to engaging kids in the outdoors. Modeled after FFA, the program seeks to provide students with opportunities to learn and experience the outdoors, develop leadership skills and engage in service learning. With Kellie's leadership the Erie High School WILD Chapter was off and running and students had the chance to camp, fish, hike, cook, create and celebrate in nature. Her students led service projects including the installation of school gardens, a school orchard and even an apiary. When the program was in jeopardy, Kellie gathered supporters of the program to join her in helping new leadership understand the academic connections and impact that WILD was having on students. As noted by her husband, Steve Woolf, "Through her brave support of environmental and conservation education, WILD is likely to continue even in the face of adversity." Kellie is truly a champion of environmental education at her school, within her district, in the region and in the state and KACEE is honored to celebrate her excellence in environmental education with this award.

### **Connie Elpers Rising Star Award:**

#### **Mandy Kern**

KACEE is pleased to recognize Ms. Mandy Kern with this year's Rising Star Award. While Mandy has only officially been an environmental educator for about seven months, Mandy's passion for environmental education began almost 13 years ago, while Mandy was an agriculture educator at Hiawatha High School. Mandy began incorporating environmental education lessons into her agriculture courses and both she and her students were hooked. The natural connection was in school gardening and Mandy helped to develop some of the amazing school garden resources and lessons that are available to any Kansas teacher. But when the opportunity to jump into fulltime environmental education presented itself last year, Mandy made the leap, becoming a program specialist at the Kansas Wetland Education Center (KWEC) in Great Bend, KS. KWEC is a one of its kind educational facility, operated collaboratively through Fort Hays State University, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism overlooking the Cheyenne Bottoms, a wetland of international significance for migratory birds. While only being on the job for less than a year, already Mandy has had a huge impact. Mandy is in charge of educational programming and has to date, developed over 20 program offerings ranging from learning about wind technology, wetlands forensics, green schools and anatomy of flight to name a few. Mandy has also taken on developing and delivering programming for informal science opportunities through scouts programs, 4-H and more. In her first four months alone, Mandy delivered more than 150 educational programs.

But Mandy is just getting started. Also in her first few months of working at KWEC, Mandy wrote and received education grants, allowing her to expand her educational opportunities including an innovative opportunity to get college students studying to become teachers trained in environmental education, using a program called Flying WILD. Mandy is also connecting KWEC to community efforts to strengthen STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) by offering drop in STEM Days at KWEC, where she engaged students in hands on STEM activities connected to environmental education and the wetlands. These were so successful that KWEC plans to offer even more drop in STEM Days this coming year.

Curtis Wolf, Director of KWEC, perhaps summed it up the best. He said, "Mandy has indicated a real commitment and passion to environmental education, and she hopes to continue pursuing

this in her career. She is a very dedicated employee and is willing to go the extra mile to provide more opportunities for the public to care about environmental education. She has often joked with me saying her reason for this passion is selfish, in that she hopes to provide opportunities and pass on environmental literacy to her own children. However, Mandy is already proving to be a great asset to advancing environmental education in general in Kansas. She is epitomizing the true definition of a Rising Star!" In recognition of all that Mandy has already done and the promise of so much more, KACEE is pleased to recognize Mandy with this year's Connie Elpers Rising Star award.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **Madison Elementary School**

Big things sometimes come in small packages. Nestled in the heart of the Flint Hills of Kansas, Madison Elementary school serves about 130 students from prekindergarten to sixth grade. While small in number, Madison Elementary is big on impact in engaging students to lead the way for greener and healthier schools. The school formed the Madison Outdoor Learning Center with the goal of engaging students in problem-based, hands-on learning for all students in the district, from PreK-12. The learning center provides opportunities for students to care for chickens, collect the eggs and sell the eggs to providing funding for the project. In addition, the Madison Outdoor Learning Center has raised beds for preschool through sixth grade classrooms. The students plant, tend and harvest the produce from the gardens in collaboration with teachers, administrators and community members, learning invaluable science and math lessons while also focusing on healthy eating. The food harvested from the gardens is donated to the local food bank which also serves as an important lesson in providing service for those in the community in need of fresh produce. But they didn't stop there, the students of Madison began a school wide recycling program and the program is run entirely by students and a local volunteer who makes sure the recycling collected at the schools gets to the local recycling center. Students learn more about the importance of recycling by taking a whole school field trip to the recycling facility to connect the learning for students about the lifecycle of different products.

With the success of these project-based learning activities, the school is expanding even further to include a greenhouse in the Madison Outdoor Learning Center which will allow the school to engage students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) as they extend the growing season for food and doing so in an environment that requires systems controlling the temperature and moisture. The volunteer group of teachers and administrators who have researched programs in other schools, written grants and worked to get the greenhouse installed are hopeful that in addition to the STEM learning opportunities, eating fresh produce from the greenhouse will encourage students to try foods they might not otherwise try and develop a lifelong healthier lifestyle. Also recognizing that community health in the Flint Hills is dependent on the health of the Tallgrass Prairie itself, teachers, administrators and community volunteers are also working on installing a tallgrass prairie patch as an outdoor learning area within the center. With an easily accessible patch of native flora and fauna to explore, teachers will connect students with the place they live and provide a hands-on learning opportunity to learn about this unique ecosystem. In the words of Rochelle Butler, a teacher at Madison, "Our outcome is to instill a sense of understanding of the urgent care needed for protecting the remaining Tall Grass Prairie of the Flint Hills." KACEE is pleased and proud to recognize Madison Elementary with the Kansas Green School of the Year award for their outstanding work engaging students to lead the way for greener and healthier schools.

### **President's Award:**

**Jessica Lawrenz**

## **2020 (Event held on October 1, 2021 virtually)**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

#### **Delia Lister**

KACEE is pleased and proud to announce this year's recipient of the prestigious John K. Strickler award for long-standing achievements in Kansas environmental education. Delia Lister has been a force in environmental education for a number of years now, beginning as an undergraduate at Pittsburg State University when she began working with the Nature Reach Program as a student in 2003. Delia finished her Master's and took over as the Director of Nature Reach in 2006 and has blossomed into a leader in both the classroom and out of the classroom teaching environmental education and her passion and dedication to her work is obvious to all who have the privilege to come in contact with Delia.

Delia serves as faculty in the Biology Department for PSU and teaches two environmental life sciences courses as well as stepping up to develop new courses to help prepare students to become a certified interpreter through the National Association for Interpretation. Through her work, Delia is helping to prepare the next generation of environmental educators. But that is only part of what Delia does. Delia is also the Director for Nature Reach, a program which provides environmental education to literally thousands of PreK-12 grade students on an annual basis. With exciting programs that teach students about wildlife, wild places and how to be better stewards for the places we live, her programs are in high demand. Delia uses animal ambassadors for her programs so that students have an opportunity to see animals up close which they might not otherwise get to see. And Ms. Lister is responsible for managing the care of over 50 species, many of which serve as animal ambassadors.

This would keep anyone very busy, but somehow Delia finds time to do even more, Delia has taken leadership for organizing and planning several study abroad or study away programs for her college students, including studies in Glacier Bay National Park in Alaska, the rainforest in Peru and most recently Paraguay. Delia's enthusiasm for sharing her passion for the outdoors and environmental education is contagious and she has worked with several students so that they too experience nature as few have the opportunity. This passion carries over to her volunteer efforts, serving as a board member for KACEE, helping to organize conferences for the National Interpretation Association, serving as an officer for the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society and as a member of the Pittsburg State Sustainability Committee. Delia has made so many important contributions to environmental education in Kansas, from the organizational level, to the college level and then down to the school-aged level, she makes an impact. For her many years and many and varied contributions to the field of environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor Delia with the 2021 John K. Strickler Award.

### **KACEE Awards:**

#### **Keila Sherman (Government)**

KACEE is pleased to honor Keila Sherman, the Greenwood County Conservation District Manager with the 2021 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education. Keila has only been the District Manager for the last five years, but has already demonstrated her leadership in environmental education. Keila knows the future success of conservation in her Greenwood County relies on the engagement and education of youth. From sharing information with youth at popular events like the Greenwood County Fair and the Cattlemen's Day Young Ranchers program. Keila also visits classrooms in the county to do environmental education programming. Keila will bring out the Soil Tunnel Trailer, the Earth Balloon or the Stream Trailer to local schools so that students have a hands-on learning experience about the connections

between agriculture and the environment. She also provides educational programming for area students through a water festival and Day on the Farm. In addition, Keila helps with training students for the Envirothon and sponsors them to attend the Range Management School. Keila will often locate and organize guest speakers for the units the students are studying. These guest speakers are scientists or specialists in their field. Older students are exposed to careers that involve conservation and sustainable agriculture.

This year Ms. Sherman went above and beyond, working with the sixth-grade science students in Eureka with a week of lessons using an Augmented Reality Sandbox, a 3D interactive tool that helps students visualize topography and watersheds. Ms. Sherman developed lessons with the sandbox that supported the classroom's learning goals and made it relevant by tying in a local landmark, Teter Rock, which is a source of pride for local residents. Students constructed the hill in the sandbox and then used what they had learned to create a model using TinkerCAD, a computer assisted drawing software to print their 3D design and paint the model according to the elevation colors found on the sandbox simulation. As teacher Pam Collinge stated, "This project reinforced the importance of the ecosystem in which the students live and promoted pride in where they are from. I think this is the purpose and power of place-based science lessons." This is just a small sample of the outstanding conservation and environmental education work that Keila provides in her county and KACEE is very proud to present her with this award.

### **Shelby Stevens (Government)**

KACEE is pleased to award our 2021 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Shelby Stevens with the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks (KDWP) in Pratt, KS. Shelby has been involved with environmental education in Kansas for more than 20 years. She serves as the Administrative Specialist for the Wildlife Education Services (WES) in the Education Section of KDWP, as well as administrative support for Boating, National Archery in the Schools and assists with many of the other agency educational efforts. Shelby serves as the backbone of the Wildlife Education Services, providing high-quality, prompt and precise support of all KDWP's educational programs. She is the point person for the Wildlife Education Reference Center, which provides wildlife education supplies, learning kits, books and other items available for teachers and other educators across the state to check out for classroom use. This means that educators have ready access to everything from examples of skulls and pelts of native animals to reference materials like birding guides. In addition, Shelby is an integral part of the Becoming an Outdoors Woman program, leading the behind-the-scenes efforts that make the program successful.

Shelby's work doesn't stop at the KDWP offices in Pratt, she is also responsible for making sure that all the educational materials that schools and families have access to at our state nature centers are high quality and available. Shelby supports the education efforts at the Milford Nature Center, the Southeast Kansas Nature Center, the Pratt Education Center & Museum, the Kansas Wetlands Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms and KDWP's education programs in the Kansas City District office in Johnson County/Northeast Kansas. She has been a major part of the Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS) program for KDWP as well, serving as the initial contact for teachers and other resource folks in getting applications in for consideration of funding. Mike Rader of KDWP had this to say about Shelby, "She is a joy to work with and in the thirteen years I have been her supervisor, I could not have asked for anyone better as an assistant." For all her work in supporting high quality environmental education in Kansas, KACEE is please to present Shelby Stevens with this award.

### **Helen Alexander and Julie Schwarting** (PreK-16 Education)

When Julie Schwarting's students at Lawrence Free State High School (LFSHS) walk into her class, they will often be heard to ask, "Are we going out to the prairie today?" And often, her answer is yes. Julie Schwarting, a biology and environmental science teacher at LFSHS had a wild idea—what if they turned the old football practice field into a prairie? And Julie had just the partnership she needed to make this a reality in Helen Alexander, KU Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Professor. Together, they engaged high school students, KU scientists, and Lawrence community members to create a 1.4-acre research and demonstration prairie restoration. The site serves as a long-term study site for both students at LFSHS and KU to better understand prairie biology. High school students have an opportunity to ask and answer their own questions on the prairie and learn biology concepts in the context of the prairie ecosystem. They also are able to work with university graduate students and faculty on long-term projects, including being part of published research. But it's not just Julie's students at LFSHS who benefit from this prairie—many other teachers from other departments at the school have also taken their students to the prairie site as a way to expose their students to the outdoors, and a calming, relaxing environment. The prairie serves as a rich place for students at Free State to learn and develop problem solving skills, as well as social and emotional skills.

The Free State prairie provides learning opportunities that are as deep as prairie roots. LFSHS students and KU students use the prairie as a live learning laboratory and they also open up the site to the community for diverse events, such as outdoor painting workshops. To better educate the community and students, Schwarting and Alexander collaborated with KU scientists to produce plant identification tags that are both accurate and visually appealing to any prairie guests. Students are tasked with activities that include observations, research, and care of the prairie during their classes. Because the prairie is bounded by a wooded stream, annual burns and hand culling of woody vegetation also occur. The prairie is a true collaboration which serves as a rich learning resource for the school and the community and is supported by KU's Kansas Biological Survey, Lawrence Public Schools, Evergy, the Elizabeth Schultz Environmental Fund, and the Grassland Heritage Foundation. As fellow teacher Sara Abeita can attest, "The prairie on our campus has increased students' love, awareness, and care of native Kansas habitats. By exploring the prairie, designing experiments using the experimental plots, and collaborating with researchers like Dr. Alexander, my students are able to see how the content we learn in Biology class is real and affects their everyday lives. The prairie, along with its design, allows students to ask open-ended questions and design their own experiments." For their leadership, vision and collaboration to provide outstanding environmental education, KACEE is pleased to award Julie Schwarting and Helen Alexander with the 2021 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award.

### **David Bennett** (PreK-16 Education)

There are some teachers who go above and beyond to make learning impactful for students and David Bennett is one of those teachers. A teacher at J. C. Harmon High School in Kansas City, KS, Mr. Bennett teaches science and environmental science. David has developed a productive partnership with Friends of the Kaw, an organization that works to educate about and protect the Kansas River. Through this partnership, David's students have the opportunity to get out into the water and do water testing and water quality field experiences, giving them real world experiences in collecting and analyzing data. More recently, Mr. Bennett has expanded that work to have his students participate in the "Community Issues Taught by Youth (CITY) program which required students to apply for and then train to be interns who teach adults how to do water quality testing. These students also have made several appearances radio programs and have organized, promoted and implemented a community clean up. David's students are learning to lead in their community and care for their environment at the same time.

Seeing the incredible learning potential for his students around water, David applied for and received a substantive grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to construct the J.C.

Harmon Wetland and outdoor education lab. Now Mr. Bennett has easy access to engage his students in learning at the wetland, including hands-on field-testing lessons using both non-chemical and chemical tests and seining and identifying macroinvertebrates. Mr. Bennett, with assistance from students and staff, manages and maintains the wetland in addition to his full-time teaching job at J. C. Harmon High School. While it means more work for him, David knows the learning is richer outdoors and his students benefit by learning real world science and connecting to their environment. For Mr. Bennett's work to inspire the next generation and his outstanding contributions to the field of environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor him with the 2021 Award for PreK-16 Formal Education.

**Amy Hammett** (PreK-16 Education)

It's not uncommon to see Amy Hammett's students from Maize High School presenting their harmful algal bloom predictive data models, successfully predicting blooms in order to prevent harmful toxins from entering the Cheney Reservoir drinking water supply to a roomful of adults. This is because Ms. Hammett's students are the experts. Amy reached out to the City of Wichita in the midst of the Lexus EcoChallenge for help in connecting her students with others interested in water quality. This was when Lisa French, the Cheney Watershed Project Coordinator, was introduced to Ms. Hammett, and Lisa learned more about what Amy was doing with her classroom. This is how Amy described her work, "Since we wanted to use USGS historical data to identify trends and patterns about when algal blooms historically occurred alongside our own current, primary collected data at the reservoir, we reached out to United States Geological Survey (USGS), who were very supportive, helping us to build a thermistor data collection device and teaching us their gold standard data collection techniques. The Kansas Water Office, the City of Wichita, and lake researchers at the University of Kansas (KU) and the University of Missouri's Reservoir Observatory Student Science (ROSS) project were gracious enough to answer all of our deep-level limnology questions along the way. The students and I used an R-programming computer model and Microsoft Excel to successfully make predictions about when HABs occur in Cheney Reservoir. Those trends and patterns we learned at Cheney Reservoir enabled the development of a Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) system to accurately predict HABs up to 36 hours in advance in order to protect drinking water everywhere." And her students used some very sophisticated techniques along the way to lay the groundwork for this new data intelligence.

Not only are Amy and her students doing the research and interpreting the results, they are actively seeking ways to share their work with others. In the process her students are learning some key skills necessary for anyone who wants to make a difference on environmental issues. They work to explain their data so that other students understand the issues. They have become comfortable making presentations and speaking in front of groups. They are learning to be leaders in their school and community. And as a Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Master Science Teacher, Amy shares her passion for real world and relevant environmental and science education to other high school teachers in the states of Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado, as they learn how to use the new science standards, and she launched a formal Data Science Education in K12 initiative as well. Through all of her work, Amy is relentless in her pursuit of resources and results. "We applaud her energy and enthusiasm as a teacher and a mentor for her students. When we visited her classroom to talk about our watershed project, we witnessed the strong bond that she has built with the young adults in her classroom," said Lisa French of Ms. Hammett. It's evident to all who see Amy and her students that she is helping to prepare our young scientists for a lifetime of exploration. KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2021 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education.

## **Connie Elpers Rising Star Award:**

### **Jessica Barnett**

Jessica Barnett, the Agriculture and Community Development Agent with K-State Research and Extension in Olathe knows that agriculture is deeply dependent on the environment and her passion for agriculture and the environment run deep and education is the tool she uses to cultivate these connections. For example, Jessica leads approximately eighty volunteer Extension Master Naturalists in the Kansas/Kansas City metro area. She insures that their trainings and meetings have informative speakers to teach them all facets of preserving our environment. In the last two years this group with Jessica's leadership have presented the Hasta Luego Monarch Butterfly Event at the Pollinator Prairie Garden to roughly 480 citizens. Participants have learned the importance of the Monarch to our eco-system and the health of our planet. And this is just one of many activities that the Master Naturalists take on in the region.

Jessica also works with young people to connect agriculture and environment and excels at it. One program which continues to be very successful under Jessica's leadership is called a "Slice of Ag". Youth gain an appreciation for how farming helps to grow the ingredients for a healthy pizza lunch. Fourth grade students from across the county look forward to attending this event. Students visit eight different activity stations which provide experiential learning opportunities. In the past two years approximately 2040 youth have participated in this 2-day event. Jessica has also led numerous programs for youth and their families. In partnership with the Pollinator Prairie Garden's Pollinator week including a camp to help families learn about the importance of pollinator's role in helping our vegetable and flower gardens grow and produce flowers and food. Four hundred and fifty family members attended this unique camp. Bees, tallgrass prairies, ecosystems, and farm to table are just a few on the topics which Jessica has presented to schools in the area. Helping youth to make the connection with the world around us is definitely a passion for Jessica. These are just a few of the many educational opportunities that Jessica has led and been an integral part of in the last 2 years. Jessica is truly a shining star for leadership, youth and environmental education for K-State Research & Extension and Johnson County. For her work providing outstanding environmental education to thousands in just a few short years, KACEE is proud to present Ms. Jessica Barnett with the Connie Elpers Rising Star Award.

## **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

### **Olathe West High School Green Tech Academy**

Imagine a high school where every student attends classes in a building designed for energy savings, and leadership of sustainable practices is led by students. Imagine a place where students can research, investigate and imagine environmental solutions for their future. Fortunately for students in Olathe, they don't have to imagine, they have the opportunity to attend the Green Tech Academy, a 4-year 21st Century Academy program that students may join, that is charged with researching and directing how the school can save energy and use sustainable practices. The Olathe West Green Tech Academy is registered as a Kansas Green School. Like most Green Schools Olathe West (school mascot: Owls) manages their school's recycling. The Green Tech students have "OWL You Recycling?" t-shirts to promote school-wide participation and manage school recycling as a service project. But way beyond an exemplary recycling program, the Olathe West Green Tech Academy aspires to develop a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, explore, understand the economics of energy and the impacts to the environment, know and debate local, national and global legislation related to these issues and come full circle to design and build alternative energy systems for cars, homes or businesses.

The Green Tech Academy and facilitator, Mr. Cody Janousek, brings the resources to students by engaging an advisory board with over 40 industry, university, community and government partners. These partners work with individual and small groups of students to advise



the students' work, critique their presentations, and provide internship opportunities for students. These students take a deep dive into energy, climate and environmental health which culminates in their senior year with a Capstone Project where they demonstrate their learning through their projects. A major recent project in Green Tech resulted in the Academy and OWHS being awarded a \$5,000 grant by Heartland Utilities for Energy Efficiency through KACEE to establish a network of green feeder schools that will establish green teams pushing forward environmental and energy efficiency initiatives. The high school Green Tech high school students will use the grant and collaborate with their business and industry to work with elementary students in Olathe to improve green practices in each school. "I am thrilled for Mr. Cody Janousek (Green Tech Academy facilitator) and our Green Tech Academy," Olathe West Principal Jay Novacek said. Advisory Team member Carol Williamson summed it up when she said, "This is an exemplary program in a truly Green School with students reaching out to their local and statewide community to collaborate for a better future." KACEE couldn't agree more and we are pleased to present the 2021 Kansas Green School of the Year Award to the Olathe West Green Tech Academy.

### **Pivot Award:**

#### **Mandy Kern**

The Kansas Wetlands Education Center (KWECC) annually hosts thousands to their site, providing school groups and visitors with high quality environmental education. When COVID-19 made those opportunities impossible, KWECC Educator, Mandy Kern, put her creativity and passion to educate to work to learn how to create an incredible virtual field trip for Cheyenne Bottoms. Whereas many educators simply tried to maintain their current work to whatever extent was possible with the restrictions of the pandemic, Mandy challenged herself to learn new skills which resulted in a virtual field trip that ultimately has probably exposed Cheyenne Bottoms to more students than was ever previously possible.

Moreover, what she created has allowed others to use virtual reality videos, interviews, and drone footage to teach as if they were in a natural setting, even when that has not been possible. One teacher we spoke with told us of ways Mandy went above and beyond to make sure her students had the environmental education opportunities they might have otherwise missed out on because of the pandemic. Ultimately, Mandy's work is a great example of how to use challenges to improve our crafts as educators and she serves as a great example for anyone involved in environmental education. For Mandy's creativity and resilience, KACEE is pleased to honor her with the 2021 Pivot Award.

#### **Labette, Crawford, Montgomery, Neosho and Wilson County Farm Bureaus**

These 5 counties have hosted an Earth Day celebration for 25 years. The event has focused on a day long educational effort, aimed at 4th grade students from the 5-county region. Historically the event has hosted nearly a thousand students, along with their teachers, teacher aides and parents/guardians. Unfortunately, in 2019 the event was cancelled due to weather and then 2020 it was cancelled yet again, this time because of COVID-19. Not wanting to cancel the Earth Day event yet again, in February of 2021, leaders from these five counties began plans for a virtual Earth Day education event for 2021.

Together, these five counties started their own YouTube channel and filmed, edited and published 17 short videos explaining all major commodities (soybeans, corn, wheat, etc.), beef, soil conservation, biotechnology among others, all centered around helping students learn more about the ways we can help to protect and conserve the environment. They worked with volunteers from many FFA chapters, farmers, NRCS and others to pull this off and made sure that the nearly 1000 students in these five counties didn't miss out on yet another Earth Day event! For their leadership in making sure their area students continued to have environmental learning opportunities, KACEE is pleased to honor them with the 2021 Pivot Award.

## **Clancey Livingston**

In his nomination, colleague Robert Hamilton had this to say about Clancey, "Whether it's accommodating students or making real time adjustments to lesson plans, his skill in engaging students and integrity to teaching." A high school teacher in the Manhattan-Ogden School District, Clancey successfully transitioned his entire AP Environmental Science class online in the spring of 2020 while maintaining the Environmental club recycling program at Manhattan High School. Clancey went above and beyond for his students by teaching and mentoring colleagues to use online platforms to make learning more engaging for his students and other classes as well. His efforts were affirmed when 93% of his class passed the Advanced Placement Environmental Science test.

When students returned to modified in-person learning Clancey ensured equity for every student in his class. There are many examples of how Clancey adapted, including securing a remote control video robot which allowed quarantined students to "drive" around the socially distanced classroom and collaborate with their assigned groups. Perhaps one of the most important ways Clancey supported his students was his constant care for their emotional wellbeing during the stresses of returning to in-person learning through sponsoring several clubs including the Environmental Club and the Red Cross Club (and the GSA) and a member of the Compassion Committee, which is a faculty committee. His compassionate leadership motivated students to maintain morale. For Clancey's work in addressing both the academic and socio-emotional needs of his students, KACEE is honored to present him with the 2021 Pivot Award.

## **President's Award:**

### **Richard Mabion**

## **2022**

## **John K. Strickler Award:**

### **Dr. Peggy Schultz**

KACEE is pleased and proud to announce this year's recipient of the prestigious John K. Strickler award for long-standing achievements in Kansas environmental education. For the last 20 years, Dr. Schultz has developed innovative, "hands-on" environmental education and outreach programs, focused both on public school children and their teachers.

Dr. Schultz began her work in environmental education in Indiana, where she was the Director of Biology Outreach at Indiana University. When she arrived at the University of Kansas in 2015, she immediately looked for ways to continue bringing ecology lessons to kids. Since 2016, she has been the main scientist leading public school education and outreach projects for a major ecology research grant funded by a National Science Foundation EPSCoR program. As part of this program, she created the KEES (Kansas Ecosystems for Elementary Students) program. After a year of development and testing (2017-2018), Dr. Schultz and her team began in 2018 to bring Kansas-based ecology lessons to 3rd graders in Title 1 schools in Lawrence and Topeka.

In 2018 and 2019, Dr. Schultz and a team of 5-6 instructors taught 3rd grade lessons in person. 2020 and its concomitant restrictions did not deter Dr. Schultz from continuing the program. She recruited the help of her team and began making videos. The video series "Ecosystems of Kansas"/ "Ecosistemas de Kansas" was aimed at giving 3rd graders remote access to the lessons, while exploring the biomes found in Kansas. These videos were posted on the University of Kansas Natural History Museum Facebook page and the Kansas Biological Survey and Center for Ecological Research YouTube channel, and shared directly with teachers through the EPSCoR website.

In 2021, kids were back in school, but in-person lessons were still not permitted. Dr. Schultz and her team were creative and began adapting the in-person lessons to a hybrid model.

Lessons are now packaged so that students each have their own materials and KU instructors zoom in to lead the lesson in tandem with the teacher in the classroom. Dr. Schultz is optimistic that this model can allow her team to access more classrooms and her team is now working on publishing these lesson plans to make them widely available.

In addition to the KEES program, Dr. Schultz has organized and led the Ecosystems of Kansas Summer Institute. This program, also funded by the National Science Foundation, consists of a week-long paid opportunity for high school teachers from all over Kansas to learn ecological concepts and research techniques. The Institutes are wonderful experiences: teachers explore outdoor spaces, learn about Kansas ecosystems, do real-world research, and meet other teachers from across the state.

An illustration of the effectiveness of the Ecosystems of Kansas Summer Institute comes from the success of KACEE Educator Award winning high school teacher Amy Hammet. Ms. Hammet participated in the 2018 Summer Institute, where she worked with KU aquatic ecologist Ted Harris. Dr. Schultz supported investments in materials that Ms. Hammet and her high school students, with guidance of Dr. Harris, used to initiate monitoring the water quality at Cheney Reservoir. Another teacher, Drew Ising at Baldwin High School, built on his experience with the Kansas Summer Institute by securing a \$50,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to establish experiments with his students that tested Atrazine pollution as a contributor to eutrophication of aquatic systems. With each of these success stories, hundreds of high school students were directly engaged in environmental science, thereby magnifying the impact of the Summer Institute.

Dr. Schultz's dedication to environmental education and outreach is fueled by her love of nature, her love of children, and her desire to share knowledge that she knows kids deserve to have access to. For her many years and many and varied contributions to the field of environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor Peggy with the 2022 John K. Strickler Award.

## **KACEE Awards:**

### **Brenda Henry (Community/Non-Profit)**

The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks supports a program called OWLS which stands for Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites. OWLS are designed by local schools to both create wildlife habitat on the school ground and to create an outdoor learning opportunity for the students of that school. And the OWLS site in Atwood, KS is impressive, but what is perhaps more impressive is the OWLS coordinator, Brenda Henry.

Rawlins County Elementary Principal, Lacy Sramek had this to say about Ms. Henry, "I have known Brenda to be involved with the OWLS program since I was in high school in 1997. I had the privilege of being in a journalism class that was asked to create the first OWLS brochure. Brenda was there at the beginning of the project and has continued to have a huge impact with it in our community. Now, as the principal of the Rawlins County Elementary School, I get to watch as Brenda continues to promote the OWLS program."

Brenda actively encourages all grade levels to participate in learning at the OWLS site and provides many opportunities to engage learners in both educational aspects and maintenance of the site. For example, last fall the 6th grade class helped spread mulch and get it ready for winter. Brenda frequently hosts field experiences for students where students learn about what is happening in the pollinator garden, find out how the sustainable self-waterers function, and explore nature on the trail. Brenda has also pulled in different community groups to help with the upkeep and continuous update of the OWLS trail, a resource used not only by students, but by community members.

This past year, Brenda brought together several teachers for professional learning on how to use the OWLS site as a part of their teaching. Brenda truly works to make this Outdoor Wildlife Learning Site a connected and collaborative program for the community.

Brenda has been the backbone of the Atwood OWLS program since 1996, when she was teaching in the district. Brenda actively used the site for teaching her classes then and now

during her retirement she continues to build the program while offering more opportunities to Atwood's youth and community. "Her passion and knowledge in this field make her shine; therefore, I am thrilled that she has been nominated for this award," said principal Lacy Sramek.

For her leadership, vision and collaboration to provide outstanding environmental education, KACEE is pleased to award Brenda Henry with the 2022 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award.

#### **4-H Water Ambassador (Government)**

KACEE is pleased to honor the 4-H Water Ambassador Program, created and led by Holly Dickman, Susan Schlichting, Stacie Minson, and Michelle Beran with the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education.

Holly Dickman with the City of Hays assembled a team of environmental educators--Susan Schlichting with K-State Research and Extension (retired), Stacie Minson with Kansas State University and Michelle Beran with K-State Research and Extension to recruit and train a team of teenagers to serve as water ambassadors in the Ellis and Barton County communities. The 4-H Water Ambassador program is a leadership opportunity for teens 13 and older, focusing on the importance of water quality, water conservation, and water careers.

In 2021, teens applied and interviewed to be a water ambassador. Those selected attended two trainings where they learned about the water cycle, ways to conserve water, how to use drones to view water sources and land use, how everyone can contribute to caring for our shared water resource, potential careers in water, and ways to use social media, videos, and other technology platforms to spread the word about the importance of our water resource. They were also exposed to experts in the water field and immersed in field trip opportunities that included the city of Hays water treatment and waste water treatment facilities, Frontier Park watershed, and Cheyenne Bottoms wetland.

Each water ambassador received a notebook filled with resources, lesson plans, activities, and tips for presenting. With training complete, water ambassadors were asked to present to their 4-H clubs, classrooms, libraries, and in their community. These teens presented at World Water Day at the Sternberg Museum, Let's Walk Water Festival in Hays, Spring Break and Drop-in STEM programs at the Kansas Wetlands Education Center, as well as many individual presentations. For their work to engage students in leading the way with conservation and environmental education, KACEE is pleased to honor the H2O Ambassadors Program!

#### **Dana Schmelzle (Government)**

How do you have a bigger impact with environmental education? You bring lots of students and volunteers together at the same time and Dana Schmelzle makes this happen every year. Dana is the District Manager for the Nemaha County Conservation District located in Seneca, Kansas. She holds conservation educational field days for elementary students in her area. This requires reaching out to schools to invite classrooms, finding volunteers to present environmental education activities, coordinating the event and Dana is even a presenter herself for the ages of kindergarten through eighth grade at the annual Agriculture Festival. In this way, Dana reaches hundreds of students with her work.

But Dana goes beyond the work she does in her community. She held the office vice-chair of the Kansas Association of Conservation District's Education and Youth subcommittee charged with organizing and hosting the Kansas Envirothon. This competition is uniquely run by conservation districts for high school students to train and test themselves on environmental education topics. Dana became the chair of the organization during the COVID pandemic which created new challenges. But she stepped up to successfully organize and host a first of its kind virtual event. It might have been difficult for most to reimagine an event that traditionally takes place outdoors and has teams of high school students competing with learning and tests on soils, forestry, wildlife, aquatics, a current issue and an oral presentation. But Dana was able to make sure students didn't miss out on a year of competition. The change in the competition was not an easy one and Dana took it all in stride and the competition ran smoothly.

While providing educational programs for K-12 students might be enough for some, Dana also organizes conservation workshops throughout the year for adults in her district. One event, the Women in Agriculture "The Heart of the Farm" event is attended by 200 to 300 men and women each year. She continues to handle all these events (and more!) but still manages her District office as well as a family business along with her husband and her three boys. She lives in a small community and small-town businesses are important to her, along with community involvement. Dana's passion for teaching about conservation is one she shares not only with schools, but throughout her community. For Dana's commitment and dedication to conservation, KACEE is pleased to present her with the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education.

### **Jada Tressler (Government)**

KACEE is pleased to award our 2022 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award to Jada Tressler, Education Specialist at Wyandotte County Lake Park in Kansas City, Kansas. From Jessica Lawrenz, former director of F. L. Schlagle Environmental Library, "I have been Jada's manager for the almost four years she has been employed at the Mr. & Mrs. FL Schlagle Library. Jada is very passionate not only about the subjects she teaches, but also about the community that she serves. Jada has developed and implemented so many programs for us over the years, that it's impossible to list them all. For example, just summer camp alone, she has to develop enough activities to entertain campers every day for weeks for five hours a day! Her activities incorporate a lot of time out in nature, because we all know how little these kiddos get to "just be" in the natural world."

One of Jada's specialties is incorporating technology for program delivery or enhancement, which became extremely important when COVID turned the world of education upside down. She developed educational videos for a lot of their most popular school and homeschool programs that were sent to teachers to use in their classrooms and libraries or for parents to use at home. For the public she developed many educational videos relating to nature and animals, including two American Sign Language videos which received some of the most views of any of the library's videos. Jada's technology contributions don't stop at making videos. She creates and contributes weekly content for Schlagle's library blog and social media accounts. One of her most viewed posts to date and actually holds the record for most likes out of ANY library post, was her post about persimmon seeds and winter weather predictability. The post received over 1 million views and shares and was shared all over the world!

Jada helps F. L. Schlagle Library maintain collaborations and partnerships with other similar organizations and facilities in the KC metro area. She contributes and participates with members in the Interpretive Site Coalition. She takes professional development very seriously to keep up on current topics and education. She just recently completed all the "Project" workshops virtually through KACEE. Jada moved to Kansas from Missouri, but she is still involved with the Missouri Environmental Education Association and serves in the group to plan their state conferences.

In her short five years in the field of EE, Jada has made such a huge impact on so many people. Her passion, innovative ideas and dedication to the field are already evident and we look forward to seeing what is next for her. As Jessica Lawrenz noted, "Jada's leadership in the field of EE will inspire and create that spark in others, to gain an appreciation and love for the natural world!" For all the many contributions Jada has already made, KACEE is pleased to present Jada with this award.

### **Alex Bartel (PreK-16 Education)**

KACEE is honored to recognize Holton High School (HHS) teacher, Alex Bartel with the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education. Mr. Rod Wittmer, principal of HHS had this to say, "Alex has taught at Holton High School for the past 15 and I have had the privilege of working with him for the last 12 years. It has been a privilege because

Alex is the type of educator that is continuously looking for ways to move forward with what he teaches, how he teaches, and how he interacts with students."

Alex is invested in the Holton community through his teaching in both the Science and Agriculture departments at HHS as well as his coaching of both high school football and middle school basketball. He co-advises the HHS FFA Chapter and has worked with groups that have excelled at the district, state, and national levels. Through FFA, Alex has worked closely with HHS FFA Alumni and local conservation boards to help best prepare his students for competitions, travels, and local projects.

Alex sponsors the HHS Envirothon Team that has represented the State of Kansas in the North American Envirothon two times during his tenure. Envirothon engages teams from local high schools in environmental and natural resource conservation problem-solving, teambuilding and leadership experience and competition. Successful teams from each state go on to compete with teams from across the country. Alex's principal, Mr. Wittmer, notes that he has directly witnessed Alex's heart and passion for his work as his own son participated on Alex's last North American team.

At HHS, Alex also has his classes lead the HHS school wide recycling program through the dispersal of blue tubs into each classroom and office. Then once per week, his classes will collect the tubs, sort the recyclables, weigh the materials, and place the materials into a county provided recycling center trailer. More recently, Alex also created a cross curricular opportunity for two of his classes to build and install bluebird houses in one of Holton's city parks creating another opportunity for the city and school district to create meaningful connections for youth.

These are but a few examples of the many ways Alex works to provide high quality and impactful environmental education with his students. KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to HHS teacher, Alex Bartel.

### **Jeff Calhoun** (PreK-16 Education)

Others notice right away that Dodge City High School teacher, Jeff Calhoun has a passion for connecting his students with the world around them. And those who have the good fortune to work with Jeff describe him as a bright, highly-motivated and passionate individual that puts his heart and soul into whatever he sets his mind to. Jeff is extremely motivated to find the best ways to prepare his students for classes, competition and life after high school. His passion for education and the out-of-doors is obvious both in school and out, as he is an active participant in the Kansas Ornithological Society and the Kansas Herpetological Society.

Jeff expects and demands a lot from his students yet remains professional and committed to letting them shine in their own way. Jeff has equally high standards for himself and puts in a tremendous amount of extra time with students, taking them on field experiences, providing practice and preparation time outside of school walls and hours – giving well above and beyond what most would do.

Because of Jeff's commitment, he has accomplished extraordinary things with and for his students. Dodge City High School predominately serves a Hispanic population, a population which is often ignored or left behind in outdoor focused efforts. But Jeff goes the extra mile with his students, organizing interesting and educational field experiences for them to attend, including trips with local experts to explore caves, paleontology, ornithology, herpetology and many other subjects. The passion with which he does these things is obvious and greatly appreciated by his students.

From his colleague, Mike Rader, "Jeff maintains a determination, work ethic and passion for what he does that I don't see often in many educators. He is not afraid to stand up for himself, his students and what he feels is the right way to do things. In a time when teachers are struggling to deal with so many issues beyond their control, he continues to provide what he feels is best for his students, despite what limiting factors may be in play. Jeff is an integral and important member of the

community he is in, and any district, school, administration and especially the student population, is fortunate to have him as part of their staff.” For his dedication and passion in teaching our youth about the outdoors, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Jeff Calhoun.

**Dr. Matthew Clay** (PreK-16 Education)

In just a few years of working as an assistant professor in the teacher education program at Fort Hays State University, Dr. Clay has made the department something to be proud of. Both elementary and secondary pre-service teachers leave the program well versed with the knowledge to help their future students become critical thinkers and problem solvers who connect with environmental education. Dr. Clay expands his student’s experiences by bringing in a wide variety of guest speakers, experts, and organizations; providing the students with resources and connections to use in their future classrooms. He has introduced the students to KACEE, Kansas Green Schools, and EE curriculum like Project WILD and Learning Tree. His students are tasked with creating place-based unit projects and encouraged to work outdoor education into their lesson plans. These lessons help students form connections to their local environment and community.

As a former secondary science educator, Dr. Clay is knowledgeable about the demands and rigors of a classroom and prepares his preservice teachers for success. He has an interest to connecting youth with the outdoors and while teaching high school in Ness City, created opportunities for outdoor student travel. Dr. Clay worked to connect these outdoor experiences for students with core academic subjects, ultimately helping his high school students not only succeed, but excel. Dr. Clay’s high school teaching experiences have made his work with students at Fort Hays State University who are studying to become teachers meaningful, relevant and impactful.

But Dr. Clay’s work expands beyond his classroom. In 2020, he created a project that used a large survey to identify barriers preK-12 teachers perceived in implementing environmental education in their classrooms. Results of the survey were compiled into a filterable public data set open for Environmental Education organizations to use to create targeted resources to increase the number of teachers integrating environmental topics, ultimately increasing the integration of environmental education in classrooms.

In addition, Dr. Clay works tirelessly to submit meaningful environmental education grant projects that will support educators, especially those in rural areas. A proposal for such a project will look at community engagement for drought resilience. This project will equip and empower teachers and students in rural southwest Kansas to engage their communities to better monitor and respond to drought by providing geographically and culturally relevant resources, supplies, professional development, and networking. He was also recently successful on securing a Teacher Education Competitive Grant from Kansas Board of Regents to increase the number of licensed teachers in hard to fill disciplines and underserved geographic areas of the state. He seeks out these opportunities to help make stronger science educators in our state. For his many and varied contributions to environmental education, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Dr. Matthew Clay.

**Gary Keehn** (PreK-16 Education)

Jackson Heights High School teacher Gary Keehn is no stranger to the world of environmental education. In fact, he’s been involved for several decades. He began his career right out of college, working for a YMCA Outdoor Education Camp where he managed two nature centers, writing, and teaching outdoor education curriculum. For the past 30 years, he has been a dedicated public-school teacher who has brought his passion for environmental education to his classroom. Gary goes above and beyond for his students by teaching them through hands-on learning so they acquire real-life experience in stream and aquatic studies, water chemistry and biotic studies of water quality to manage the streams and ponds on the school property at Jackson Heights.

In his Wildlife Management class, Gary has the students practicing wildlife management skills on the 40 acres of wildlife area that the district acquired over the years. His students conduct studies similar to those conducted by wildlife biologists and then charges his students with making informed decisions about how the wildlife on the property should be managed, giving them real world experiences. Gary also has his students help teach ecology units covering animals, aquatics, and leadership. Again, this gives his students real world experiences which help to not only create a generation with the knowledge and skills to be good stewards in their communities, but also sparks interest in careers in the field.

Beyond his contributions at school, Gary has also taken his passion for environmental education to the community. Extending many of his teaching practices and programs to others, Gary has experience in every facet of environmental education. He's led guided float trips down rivers in 3 states where he undoubtedly spent some time educating participants on the ecology of the area, provided programming to scout troops and as a certified hunter education instructor, helping the public become educated on safe, ethical, and responsible hunting practices. Two years ago, Gary was a Teacher-Ranger - Teacher for the Tallgrass Prairie National Park. He had done a summer of stream studies on four prairie streams and worked with groups that came to the Tallgrass Prairie to do stream studies. He wrote a curriculum for the National Park System to use in stream studies to finalize his work with the National Park System.

He's a teacher of teachers and through that he has impacted the lives of thousands of students. For over 10 years, he was the lead teacher for the Illinois Rivers Program. There, he helped develop curriculum and was an author on several books to help teachers in Biology, Chemistry, Earth Science, Geography, Math, and Language to help students learn about rivers and streams around the world.

Lyndzee Rhine from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks had this to say, "Gary's positive and happy attitude have been nothing short of a bright light during darker times. He has always cultivated a friendly, welcoming, and safe environment for all his students and strangers alike. He is constantly bringing out the best in people and encouraging them to put their best selves forward. Never would he allow a student to feel marginalized or less cared about than another student. He has established a solid foundation from which students can go forth and build upon." For Gary's exhaustive work in environmental education, in and out of his classroom, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2022 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Mr. Gary Keehn.

### **Connie Elpers Rising Star Award:**

#### **Emily Davis**

For those fortunate to meet Emily Davis, it is immediately obvious that she is special. Her drive, passion, empathy, and knowledge are nothing short of inspiring. And 2020 proved that Emily is also unstoppable and she was not going to let the pandemic stop her from ensuring environmental education continued to be accessible and engaging in the virtual world. Emily jumped in and put her passion to work, developing an environmental education program which addressed the clean-up and restoration of the East Fork Chisholm Creek. The program was developed with the Wichita Public Schools district and community in mind. With a goal of educating and restoring an urban wildlife creek and its watershed with aid from the community, Emily has set out to create stewards of our water and natural environment. Her application for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation 2020 Five Star and Urban Waters Grant, a grant of \$50,000, was awarded in its entirety. Enhancing the community park, engaging the public in hands-on, outdoor conservation experiences, and improving citizen understanding of how damaging trash and litter is in urban waterways are the key takeaways from the program she has developed. While most of the work done at the Great Plains Nature Center, in Wichita, KS, is geared toward K-5th grade, this program specifically targets high schoolers, an often-underserved group. To date, the project successfully removed over 2,000 lbs. of trash and debris from the watershed and removed invasive species from five acres of public land. The never-ending stream



of trash/debris that flows into the watershed, continued encroachment of invasive species, and popularity of the program have all but ensured the continuation of this project, well after the grant period ends.

As Director of Educational Programs at the Great Plains Nature Center (GPNC) in Wichita, Emily leads the way in refreshing and creating new programs and ensuring these environmental education programs are of the highest quality. She played, and continues to play, a large role in how the nature center, which serves over 200,000 people each year, executes their virtual programs. She shares these ideas openly with area teachers, volunteers, and others in the environmental education community. She has organized Teacher Days, where teachers visit the nature center to get hands-on training for activities and lessons they can do with their students with or without the aid of GPNC staff. This created a cadre of teachers ready to take their students out to do hands on activities like water testing, catching and identifying macroinvertebrates, tips for leading hikes with their students, and using the free GPNC Discovery Box resources to enhance the environmental education of their students.

And beyond being a creative and inspired environmental educator, Emily makes it her business to share her love for nature, especially helping others to understand and appreciate snakes and other less-loved animals. Emily doesn't shy away from the dirty work because she understands the importance of it. Taking care of ambassador animals is time consuming and tough work but necessary for the success of these programs. You can see her understanding of this in the way she treats the animals, directly and indirectly. Enrichment, food preparation and the training of staff and volunteers to also treat the animals with such high regard has changed the quality of life their animals have, making them wildlife education favorites.

It is hard to imagine that one person could do so much in such a short period of time. KACEE is honored to present Mrs. Emily Davis with the Connie Elpers Rising Star Award and we look forward to the many and important contributions that she will make to environmental education in the state.

### **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

#### **Lyons Middle School, Lyons, Kansas**

Imagine, if you would, a small group of energetic students desperately trying to find a way to make a difference in their school with little to no success. Imagine also, a teacher, COVID-exhausted and pivoting, trying even more desperately to find something to get her students excited again about learning, learning which is fulfilling and meaningful. Something, in fact, that would be lasting, that future students could continue to engage with, that could shift and change in coming years and that would provide a way for students to make a real difference. When Lyons Middle School teacher Leonore Enfield found the Kansas Green Schools program and the Virtual Academy, she knew she may have just found the key to these challenges.

Leonore and her students formed a Green Team at Lyons Middle School, a team Leonore describes as, "very motivated and energetic" and already they've made a huge difference. As teacher leader Leonore describes, "we began by taking our small group of energetic change-makers and assigning them as the Green Team Leaders. They then spent several weeks recruiting Green Team members from the student body, staff, parents and community members. We currently have four Green Team Leaders, fifteen Green Team student members, eight Green Team faculty and staff members, and nine Green Team parent and community members. These various Green Team members have all helped us to be able to successfully complete the Waste Investigation at our school."

During the Waste Investigation, the Green Team was able to research the different types of waste produced by schools in general, follow the designated Green Schools' investigation to determine what types of waste Lyons Middle School produced, sort the waste into categories and weigh the waste in each category to look for trends and potential ways to minimize their waste. Together, the Lyons Middle School Green Team was able to carry out a school wide waste

evaluation. The Green Team also looked at classroom waste and the 7th grade Science classes volunteered to be the ones to sort and catalog the classroom waste data. With waste data from the school and the individual classrooms, the Green Team was able to determine that a high enough percentage of the waste created was compostable that a solution needed to be found. They also discovered that an existing group of students were willing to continue to collect recyclable waste, but that unfortunately, a lot of waste that could be recycled wasn't making it into the recycle bins and a good amount of recyclable waste wound up in the trash.

The Green Team began to think of creative solutions to the challenges they found. For instance, to curb the misplacement of recyclable waste, the Green Team is implementing a classroom competition that will reward the classroom with the least amount of trash. Lyons Middle School custodial staff has agreed to be the judges of this competition since they are the ones that collect the trash each day. Another solution proposed by the Green Team to lower the school's waste footprint is the creation and use of a compost bin. Green Team plans include placing a compost bin adjacent to the cafeteria and using the compost created in a school garden this coming year. WILD, Lyons Middle School's outdoors club, which was started two years ago, is developing a plan to put a raised bed "Kitchen" Garden in the raised curb area of the parking lot. This location is close to the kitchen and make use of a presently unused weedy space. Additional plans include collaborating with the kitchen staff to find out what herbs, Spring/Fall lettuces, and other produce they would be able to use before the WILD club finalizes what will be planted. The WILD club has also committed to making a schedule for who will tend it the garden, when and how often as well as planning for getting the supplies to build and maintain the garden space.

Leonore Enfield notes the impact this has had on her students and the school, "This year, the Green Team has been such a uniting factor in the ever-changing landscape of our school. Our students have something consistent to look forward to, something tangible to hold on to, and something to constantly dream about. This semester we are doing the Water Investigation. We are actually more excited to do this investigation because we just experienced a water crisis in our town in November. Eleven main pipes burst and broke water lines throughout the town. Instead of being an overnight fix, the city was without water for at least three days, and in some areas more. This experience has really made the Green Team think about the importance of water and water quality issues. They are eager to discover why our water tastes worse now than it did before the water crisis happened. We are all excited to be moving forward and to also be submitting for recognition as a Kansas Green School of Excellence at the end of the Spring Semester." For their work to lead the way for greener and healthier schools, KACEE is pleased to present the 2022 Kansas Green School of the Year Award to Lyons Middle School.

### **President's Award:**

**Gina Penzig and Jeff Severin**

## **2023**

### **John K. Strickler Award:**

**Mike Hayden, Former Governor of Kansas**

KACEE is pleased and proud to announce this year's recipient of the prestigious John K. Strickler award for long-standing achievements in Kansas environmental education. As noted by Rex Buchanan who submitted the nomination, "Mike has often said that he went into politics, instead of biology, because he does more for wildlife and the environment through the public policy route."

While he was Speaker of the House, former Governor Hayden led the charge to pass a House Resolution which created KACEE, then named the Kansas Advisory Council for Environmental Education. When he became Governor, Mike appointed John Strickler as an assistant to lead the state's natural resource issues, placing John in a position to elevate KACEE and environmental education's profile throughout state government.

If you've followed Governor Hayden's long career, you already know the long and tireless work that he's done on behalf of Kansas and our environment, especially water. He has made the environment and environmental literacy a priority throughout his distinguished career. When he was Secretary of Wildlife and Parks, he fought for additional state park land and particularly on behalf of water issues. He brought together the governor's subcommittee on natural resource issues, focusing attention on the environment in Kansas. Former Governor Kathleen Sebelius was interviewed as part of a documentary series on climate change. She lauded Mike's tireless efforts to keep water in the forefront of public policy conversations in the state.

From nominator Rex Buchanan, "Mike is the rare example of a politician who knows what he's talking about and isn't afraid to speak his mind. That's rare, maybe even singular, in the environmental world." For former Governor Hayden's many contributions to the field of environmental education and his long-time commitment and dedication, KACEE is pleased to honor him with the 2023 John K. Strickler Award.

#### **KACEE Awards:**

##### **Ben Postlethwait (Business/Corporate Sector)**

KACEE is honored to recognize Sr. Manager, Conservation & Sustainability Programs at Evergy, Ben Postlethwait with the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education. Since 2011, Ben Postlethwait has led the Evergy Green Team as volunteers to complete 50 to 70 environmental projects each year. The Green Team works with conservation groups, agencies and schools to enhance and foster an understanding of the Kansas and Missouri environment as well as improving natural habitats and helping provide access to important environmental areas. From educational events to enhancing trails or river access to developing green space, Ben and the Evergy Green Team have provided education and created spaces and access to spaces for outdoor learning and exploration for people of all ages.

One of the projects that the Green Team built was the Kansas Children's Discovery Center's Epic Sandbox and has since returned to complete several projects that help make up the center's Certified Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom. Executive Director, Dene Mosier said, "Ben has been a critical part of creating magical experiences for children at the Kansas Children's Discovery Center for years. From our pond to the prairie to creating a pirate ship, Ben has been the key to finding the equipment and expertise this museum needs to spark imagination and start children on a lifetime of outdoor adventures. Ben and the Evergy Green Team have the knowledge this museum needs to bring whimsical, imaginary play experiences to life for families."

John Fierro, Mattie Rhodes Center, said, "Ben always exhibits a high-spirited nature, with a passion for the environment and community betterment. He maintains a positive atmosphere that is infectious." KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Ben Postlethwait.

##### **Kara King (Community/Non-Profit)**

KACEE is pleased to honor Kara King, Interpretive Manager at Sedgwick County Zoo, the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education. Kara oversaw the elementary education programs for over 15 years. During this time, she provided programming and educational events for literally thousands of people. Kara has a passion for getting kids outdoors and recognizing the importance of learning outdoors, she takes her students outdoors every chance she can. When Sedgwick County Zoo was looking for a different way to interact with

school groups Kara helped created Investigation Stations. These 20-minute programs are fast paced, hands on adventures that students participate in the Zoo setting, instead of coming to a classroom. Kara uses her passion and creativity to design learning experiences for students and families that range from a program that helps students learn about the many and important ways that Native Americans relied upon bison to activities which teach students about bird migration and the challenges that pets often create for these birds.

In 2021, Kara was promoted to Interpretive Manager and oversees more than 40 staff and the programs they deliver throughout the zoo. She works hand in hand with this team of educators to take advantage of the learning opportunities throughout the zoo, highlighting the conservation challenges and needs of many of the zoo's species while ensuring that learners leave knowing what they can do to help. Despite the busy schedule that Kara keeps, she also incorporates environmental education training for teachers and other educators like herself, knowing that this work requires the help of everyone.

As her supervisor Schanee' Anderson noted, "Her passion for nature is contagious. She freely shares her knowledge and love for Kansas with others. She feels the cultivation of the next generation of conservationists is part of her duty as an environmental educator." Kara has sparked that care and passion for countless young people and is a vital part of inspiring future generations and KACEE is pleased to honor Kara King!

### **Patty Rice (Community/Non-Profit)**

KACEE is pleased to award our 2023 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award to Patty Rice, Early Childhood Specialist at Sedgwick County Zoo. Patty joined Sedgwick County Zoo as the early childhood education specialist in 2014. This is a big job because she manages all the Zoo's early childhood programs and serves as director of Animal Tales Preschool at Sedgwick County Zoo. And above and beyond her teaching, Patty is an amazing advocate for early childhood and outdoor education. This is evident in all Ms. Rice does.

Fostering a love of nature and connections to the world around them is Patty's specialty. She works to support parents and caregivers in developing the interest and confidence to explore nature with their kids as well as providing preschool experiences for young learners to develop their self-confidence, concern for others, cooperation and a spirit of sharing though engaging in a nature play space and learning activities. One of the favorites of families and young learners was Mud Day, where preschoolers learned how to paint with mud, make mud pies, and practice measurements by creating thick and thin mud to use for a variety of activities. Patty nurtures young learners and families to explore and care for the world around them.

Schanee Anderson, her supervisor, had this to say about Patty, "She has a kind, comforting style which makes staff, families, and children feel nurtured and loved. We regularly have past students stop by the Zoo just to say hi to "Ms. Patty." For all the many contributions she has already made, KACEE is pleased to present Patty Rice with this award.

### **Bluebird Taylor-McKown (Community/Non-Profit)**

Bluebird Taylor-McKown has been involved in the Lawrence, Kansas environmental education community since May 2020. When applying for her position as the Education and Outreach Coordinator at Baker University Wetlands Discovery Center, Bluebird described herself as a "hard working, reliable, detailed-oriented Naturalist". While Bluebird has only been with the Wetlands for a year, she has already demonstrated that this description is true. "However, she left out some important details. She failed to mention the enthusiasm with which she approaches her job as well as her love for learning new things," said Irene Unger, Director of the Baker University Wetlands Discovery Center. Unger notes that Bluebird has designed and created nearly all the educational programs and summer camp programs for the Baker University Wetlands programming singlehandedly.

Bluebird creates unique programming for Nature Tots aimed at children 0-5 years old and

created two new programs, Nature Scouts for young naturalists ages 6-12 and Wetland Stewards which target adults but can include all ages depending on the workday. Bluebird has been instrumental in designing and delivering educational programs at the Baker University Wetlands for students of all ages and abilities. With topics ranging from wetland ecology to Indigenous people, Bluebird creatively designs learning experiences that engage and captivate audiences, ultimately connecting them more deeply with the Wetlands and the place they live. Bluebird works to make sure her programs are accessible to all students of all grade levels and pays special attention to those who have special needs. And while she does a great deal of this work on her own, Bluebird is quick to engage local partners to expand these learning opportunities for all.

Bluebird is a valuable member of the Baker University Wetlands' team. She has contributed much in the short time she's been with them and KACEE is pleased to award Bluebird Taylor-McKowan with the 2023 Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education Award.

### **Jessica Ruiz (Government)**

Innovation is just a part of what makes Jessica Ruiz an outstanding environmental educator. As a relatively new Outreach and Education Coordinator at the Bureau of Waste with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Jessica sought new opportunities to support students and educators in helping to "Keep It Clean Kansas" or KICK. She implemented a challenge to students across the state to explore waste, recycling and composting in their schools and then use their creativity to tell folks about what they're doing to reduce waste at their schools. She collaborates actively with others to support teachers with professional learning and materials to better engage their students. In Jessica's own words, "My hope for the program is that it opens the doors for students and educators to bring new ideas, solutions, and opportunities to environmental education. That there are no limitations or barriers for students and educators that want to learn how to do good."

In addition, Jessica has become a regular presenter at the Topeka Water Festival, has become engaged with the Friends of the Kaw, hosts the Bureau of Waste Management booth at KDHE Haunted Labs Events, serves as the "Keep it Clean Kansas" social media manager, and has coordinated other events to promote Environmental Education & Outreach. Additionally, Jessica is also the lead Grants Coordinator for the agency and works diligently with applicants to ensure they submit the appropriate information, so they may leverage the best possible considerations to improve their respective programs. With such an impressive set of accomplishments in such a short time, there is little doubt Jessica will have a large impact on waste and recycling education. For her many and varied contributions to environmental education, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Jessica Ruiz.

### **Aaron Batterbee (PreK-16 Education)**

A high school science teacher, Aaron Batterbee models the best of hands-on and real-world problem-solving strategies with his students. From projects where his students partner with local water quality organizations to do stream testing to a partnership with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and Evergy to clean up and restore a wetland near the school, which he uses regularly with students to test water quality, inventory the habitat, bird watch and grow water willow to improve the habitat and water quality. He sponsors the school's Ecology Club and engages students in supporting recycling and brings in partners whenever possible to both support student learning and give students real world experiences in conservation.

Once the pandemic hit and school life changed, Gardner Edgerton High School paused going on field trips. Aaron worked with the school district, Johnson and Miami County Soil Conservation Districts, the local K-State Extension Office, Johnson County Stormwater Management team and the City of Gardner to secure funding to build a 1,000 Square Foot

pollinator garden on campus. This collaboration was featured in the Fall 2021 JoCo on the Go magazine and podcast. His students worked with the grounds department and the district Automotive and Technology Center to clear the area, plant the vegetation, and build a fence around the area. Recently, he worked with the local fire department and the high school fire science students to do a prescribed burn on the garden area. This should help with weed control and open more space for native plants to grow.

From his colleague, Kerry Stoneking, "Aaron has been working with Evergy and the State of Kansas Wildlife and Parks on a wetlands area about a mile south of the school. He has had students working on cleaning up the area, maintaining bridges and benches, and monitoring tree swallow populations. He also regularly leads groups of students and adults on bird watching excursions in the wetland area. As you can see, Aaron has created a network of contacts around the area and finds ways to get his students involved in truly making a difference in environmental education." For his dedication and passion in teaching our youth about the outdoors, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Aaron Batterbee.

### **Tim Elsen (PreK-16 Education)**

As an educator, you want to know that you make a difference in students' lives and Tim Elsen is a teacher who has done so repeatedly. Tim connects students to science in ways that engage and support learning and often takes that learning off campus through events like Science Olympiad and opportunities for his students to teach environmental education activities to younger students at events like Party for the Planet at the Sedgwick County Zoo. Tim's students are encouraged and supported in their learning and often, Mr. Elsen is the first teacher these students have had that let them know they're capable of excelling and succeeding in science. But above all, Tim encourages his students to be kind and helpful, especially to those from other teams at competitions--he truly creates a supportive learning community for all his students and often goes above and beyond to do so.

Tim is also a leader in the Kansas Association of Teachers of Science, holding the office of President in 2018. He has been instrumental at setting up regional mini-conferences at no cost to teachers every November. Networking, hands on science, and lots of fun have been hallmarks of these mini-workshops. Schanee Anderson from Sedgwick County Zoo had this to say, "I am so blessed and honored to know him and even more that my children have gotten the opportunity to learn from him. He shows all children that they can do great things. Not just in science but in life. He truly cares about each of his students and really wants them to all LOVE science."

One of his previous students said, "Mr. Elsen has been there and supported me throughout all 3 years of middle school. There have been multiple times where I wanted to completely give up all things relating to science or just academics in general, but he has been there to remind me how important and needed I am. He has helped me grow both academically and as a person in a general. He is, to me, the best science teacher or coach somebody could ask for." For Tim's inspired work in science and environmental education, in and out of his classroom, KACEE is pleased and proud to present the 2023 Award for Excellence in Conservation and Environmental Education to Mr. Tim Elsen.

### **Connie Elpers Rising Star Award:**

#### **Elsi Miller**

While Elsi Miller's fulltime job is managing land for The Nature Conservancy in the Great Bend Sand Prairie, environmental education is important to her. Sharing her passion and expertise at numerous Kansas Wetlands Education Center events and coming up with creative ways to teach children and families about migratory birds, Kansas critters, and wetlands are just a couple

examples of her education outreach. It's estimated that in her career so far, Elsi has reached a few thousand people with her education efforts. Elsi finds ways to weave conservation work with education every chance she has. For example, Ms. Miller took the opportunity to bring students from Fort Hays State University out to Cheyenne Bottoms and assist them with their radio telemetry projects. If you're not able to join her in person, Elsi has found a way for you to experience the Great Bend Sand Prairie remotely, as she shares many of the interesting things she does in the Sand Prairie through YouTube videos, accessible to all. Mandy Kern, Kansas Wetlands Education Center added "Simply put, many of the events and programs offered through the Kansas Wetlands Education Center this past year would not have been as successful without the assistance of Elsi Miller. Her contributions to the environmental education community will only increase as she continues the conservation work she has started at the Sandhills Ranch and Cheyenne Bottoms."

Ms. Miller has also brought many innovative conservation strategies to her work, including installing range cameras at water tanks for the cattle who graze the land and help to create better habitat for the migratory birds who travel through the area each year. This innovation saves hours of travel, allowing Elsi and her colleagues to work more efficiently. The range cameras are just one of many projects that Elsi has put into place. These are practices that she shares with other conservation managers and are yet another way that Elsi's passion for education shines through.

It is hard to imagine that one person could do so much in such a short period of time. KACEE is honored to present Ms. Elsi Miller with the Connie Elpers Rising Star Award and we look forward to the many and important contributions that she will make to environmental education in the state.

## **Kansas Green School of the Year Award:**

### **Wichita Collegiate School**

It is amazing what a group of 8-10 year olds can do with the support of a creative and dedicated teacher. The Wichita Collegiate Global Guardians are 3rd and 4th grade students who have volunteered their time and talents to help make their school greener and healthier for all. These students meet one day each week over their lunch period/recess period and work through the Kansas Green Schools investigations. The students have led the way in creating leadership positions, investigating water, waste, healthy school environment and the school's outdoor space since they began. For each of these investigations they've led, they also develop plans to conserve more and use less resources. Led by teacher Jena Simms, these students then present their findings and ideas for solutions to their fellow students, school administrators and community members.

These students started with investigating water and according to Simms, took this very seriously, noting that still to this day, they take bi-monthly water walks and check the water sources on the campus. They have made several recommendations to the head of school for water conservation improvements. These students continued to meet after the water investigation was complete and each day strive to take actions which impact the Earth in positive and meaningful ways. This group affectionately named themselves the OG's because they were the original green team on the campus.

Jena Simms notes the impact this has had on her students and the school, "Kansas Green Schools have impacted the way these students learn and interact with their natural surroundings. It has sparked an interest in the lower school students and thus impacted all the families at home. One of the things I am most proud of is how these students take what they have learned completing the investigations and take it and apply it in their home lives. They are making a difference at school AND at home." For their work to lead the way for greener and healthier schools, KACEE is pleased to present the 2023 Kansas Green School of the Year Award to Wichita Collegiate School.

**President's Award:**

**Janet Waugh, Former Kansas State Board of Education**