

## PROJECT WILD IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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First let me say a bit about who I am and what I'm doing here. I'm responsible for the Information and Education programs of the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Division. I have worked for Division in varying capacities for nearly 2 decades which at times feels far too long. What keeps me going is my belief in the educational process and what it can do for wildlife conservation. I'm going to talk to you about a specific education program - Project Wild, which has been developed to be integrated with our formal school systems.

I expect that many of you have heard of Project Wild. In the States and Provinces where it is already operating, some of you may be quite familiar with it. But I'm betting that for most of you, your exposure to Project Wild has been slight. I'm also betting that as scientists working on wildlife, you might worry about the future of wildlife.

Before I discuss Project Wild itself, I want to say why I think we should focus on young people and school system. In order for people to live in harmony with this world, they must have a good information base about what makes it tick. They also need the know-how to use that information. But more important still, they must adopt proper attitudes and values. Attitudes and values take shape in young minds so that by high school graduation it is very difficult to reshape them. Therefore we must concentrate on the education of young people. To reach large numbers of young people in a consistent and influential manner, we must use the formal school system for environmental education programs.

There are other important reasons for integrating environmental education with the school system. Wildlife agencies rarely have enough staff with the suitable skills to tackle

the task on a continuing basis. The wildlifer visiting a classroom helps public relations but he or she rarely has a sustained impact.

Teachers can have sustained impact. They are professional educators accustomed to helping young people learn. For the most part, they have the know-how and opportunities for sustained contact with young people with whom they can build knowledge and attitudes in a building block fashion.

However infusing environmental education into the school system is much harder than you might think. About 1984 I decided to focus a major part of our educational effort on integrating our wildlife education with the formal school curriculum.

In reviewing what was going on in other places and in talking with people in the formal education system, I learned a lot about why it is difficult to make environmental education work. Every other special interest group with a message to promote is vying for some time in the school day. Each group sees the school system as the best way to reach children. But the school day is already full. Teachers already feel under pressure to deliver the core curriculum. There is very little room for something new. Much of the material that is developed for school use is not appropriate for one reason or another. This is especially true for the lower grades. Many teachers lack the training and confidence to deal with wildlife-related information. They often see this as "science" and outside the limits of their comfort zone which is usually more closely associated with subjects like language arts, mathematics and social studies.

I also learned that successful programs had certain commonalities:

1. They have avoided packaging environmental education strictly as science. In-

- stead they have been interdisciplinary crossing over traditional subject areas.
2. They have avoided a stand-alone approach where a separate time slot had to be found in the program of studies at the expense of some other established subject. Rather they have blended with existing subject areas.
  3. They have included teacher training to increase confidence and commitment instead of hoping that teachers would acquaint themselves with the material on their own.
  4. They have paid close attention to the learning patterns of all age groups of students.
  5. They have been activity based capitalizing on the fact that everyone learns best by doing.

After learning about the barriers to integrating programs with the school system, and about how to get over them or around them, I discovered Project Wild just as it was rising above the horizon around 1985. It had all the characteristics of other successful programs and it was fully developed and field tested in schools. It only required the development of an implementation plan appropriate for the school system of the Province or State. That seems straight-forward but it is not.

Project Wild arose from an alliance of environmental educators and wildlife agency staff in western U.S. It was written generically to be readily adopted by any geographic area. In Canada the Canadian Wildlife Federation is the primary sponsor who have made it available to the Provinces. It is the option of the wildlife agency in each Province to opt in or opt out.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, we have been much slower to get Project Wild going than many other jurisdictions. This is largely because we went through a rigorous process of proving its merits to the educational officials of this Province. They are very reticent to hop quickly onto the band wagon of the latest special interest group -

and rightly so. If they were to do this, education programs would be flip-flopping all over the place. Our education officials would not, and should not, accept on faith that a program, developed and tested elsewhere, would be automatically suitable here. Since education in Canada is strictly within Provincial jurisdiction, the sanction of our Dept. of Education for Project Wild was critical. We established a committee comprised of members selected from within the educational system. This was done to increase the sense of ownership of Project Wild by our formal educators rather than having it seen as promotional material from outsiders. The Committee's job was to evaluate suitability of Project Wild and to recommend a provincial implementation plan. The evaluation included a one year pilot program to see if material springing from the western U.S. could work in an Inuit community like Nain, Labrador or in other Newfoundland communities with their own sets of demographic characteristics.

It worked well. Teachers were extremely pleased. Some even raved. And our educational authorities listened. Project Wild was approved for use in our school system last October.

We are now developing a guide to show teachers how Project Wild fits with the existing curriculum in practically every major subject area such as Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. In the fall, we will begin the process of teacher training. This will include the development of a core of teachers who will in turn train other teachers in their own local areas. Besides accelerating the rate at which Project Wild will spread throughout the Province, a major benefit of this practice will be that Project Wild will gain credibility as one group of teachers sees it through the eyes of other teachers who use it and understand it.

Where will Wildlife staff fit in? They will attend Project Wild workshops along with teachers. In this way they will be able to serve as resource people during the workshop

and be exposed to the teacher's perspective of Project Wild. This is preferable to giving workshops exclusively for Wildlife staff because the teachers will meet their local wildlife representatives and vice versa. Later, when a teacher is conducting a Project Wild activity in the classroom, the wildlife staff person may be called upon to assist. When he or she visits the classroom, there will be a pre-existing level of understanding because of the exposure to Project Wild that took place at the workshop.

I have a great deal of hope for Project Wild and what it can do for environmental conservation and the fostering of an environmental ethic. Public concern about the environment is increasing but the question is - will this concern be sustained or will it wane again like it did after it peaked in the 60's? We should probably act as though the interest will drop off again but hope that it doesn't. We should see the present public apprehension as an opportunity to entrench programs like Project Wild in our societal development.