

2013 South Carolina Teachers' Tour

On June 18, thirty-five educators from across the state met at Harbison State Forest in Columbia to participate in this year's SC Teachers' Tour. For three days the teachers participated in Project Learning Tree (PLT) activities and listened to guest speakers as they learned about the social, economic, and environmental importance of forestry in our state.

The Teachers' tour began by a welcoming and an overview of forestry in the state from State Forester Gene Kodama and by Cam Crawford, President and CEO of the SC Forestry Association. Over the next three days, discussions and activities were led by other forestry professionals from the SC Forestry Commission and the US Forest Service. Holly Welch presented "Best Management Practices" and Darryl Jones talked about the protection of endangered species. Russell Hubright discussed the forestry profession and current issues in forestry. Mike Shealy spoke about the management of state lands and Laurie Reid taught about insects and disease that affect our forests. Scott Phillips educated the teachers about the various forest certification programs including the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and the American Tree Farm System. Brad Bramlette spoke about wildfire protection, while Sam St. Louis demonstrated the use of equipment used to fight wildfires and prepare lands for prescribed burns. Representing the US Forest Service, Jim Knibbs explained the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and Tammy Mason offered information on how to get more diverse populations involved in providing input into national forest management. *"I loved the passion that was evident in many speakers. They often made Earth/faith/forestry connections!"* said Jeri Stanek, 3rd grade teacher at St. John Neuman Elementary School in Columbia.

Coordinator Matt Schnabel, and SCFC employees Stephanie Kolok and Russell Hubright facilitated many hands-on activities during this 3-day advanced PLT workshop, using PLT curriculum materials to teach the participants about trees as a renewable resource, forest management practices, global connections of SC forests to the forests of the world, and forest sustainability practices. The teachers were quite impressed with the PLT materials and activities. *"I learn and remember best by seeing and touching things,"* said Charlotte Graham, 3rd/4th grade teacher at Laurens Academy. Some of the PLT activities that teachers participated in included: Tree Cookies, Monitoring Forest Health, Every Tree for Itself, Tough Choices, Tree Factory, Adopt-A-Tree, Forest to Faucet, We All Need Trees, and Seeking Sustainability.



(Photo: teachers Melinda Beach, Ina Stevens, and Bridget Zelachowski participating in PLT activity "How Big is Your Tree?")

Thanks go out to the many sponsors of the Teachers' Tour who furnished meals and scholarships. The Association of Consulting Foresters sponsored a BBQ meal the first night and members of the Enoree Chapter of the Society of American Foresters provided the evening meal on Wednesday. Needless to say, the teachers packed on a few pounds during the entire event.

On Monday of the following week, the teachers met in Columbia to begin four days of touring different forests and forest industries in the Midlands region of the state. Stops from tree farms to forest products mills around the Midlands area showed teachers the "forest to the product" chain. Following is a daily journal of the activities and reactions of the educators during the tour.

Monday, June 24

Morning: Joe Young of Low Country Forest Products and Crad Jaynes of the SC Timber Producers Association welcomed the teachers and discussed the role of harvesting in the state. Mr. Young described how the forest industry has been an integral part of his life and his entire family. He also passionately explained the "Log-A-Load" program where loggers can give back to local hospitals to buy much needed equipment to help save young children's lives. The highlight of the morning was when Mr. Young stirred everyone's patriotism by leading the entire group in singing "God Bless America."



Afternoon: We quickly grabbed our box lunches and rode the bus to Congaree National Park. Undeterred by the threat of thunderstorms and the mosquito meter that read "WAR ZONE," we armed ourselves with plenty of Deep Woods Off to protect ourselves from the little bloodsuckers. We learned about the role of our National Parks and other public lands in protecting unique and important forestlands. Even when our National Park Service ranger could no longer

lead our hike because of the threat of storms, our group was determined to carry on. Our fearless leaders Stephanie, Dean, and Matt stepped up to the plate and guided the group to experience the southeastern United States' largest intact expanse of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest.

(Photo: teachers ringing the second largest loblolly pine in Congaree National Park)

Evening: Sweaty and tired, we headed back to the hotel to clean up and then enjoy a meal from Hudson's BBQ. Each evening, many teachers enjoyed socializing at the outdoor patio, swimming in the pool, and the other fine amenities at the Hampton Inn.

Tuesday, June 25

Morning: Bright and early at 7:45 (No lollygagging!), the bus departed the hotel for the Weston Lake Recreational Area at Fort Jackson. Here, forester Ian Smith showed us how the Army manages their forests while also utilizing it for training its soldiers. Then biologist, Stanley Rikard, talked about the

dating service he provides for the red-cockaded woodpeckers (an endangered species that prefers longleaf pine savanna ecosystems) on base and how the Army is helping in the recovery of this species.

(Photo: Jonathan Dorn taking a look at a red-cockaded woodpecker nesting cavity)

We then headed up to Camden for a tour of the Canfor Southern Pine Sawmill. Davis McGowen welcomed us and we broke into groups to tour the mill. Thankfully, we all returned safely with all of our fingers and toes accounted for, had a quick lunch (provided by Canfor), and then boarded the bus for our next destination.



Afternoon: As we arrived to Billy Cate's property, we were treated to a bucolic landscape of forest and farmland and an ominous and threatening sky. With hopes that the storms would miss us, we boarded flat-bed wagons with hay bales for seats to view various tracts of forest with different management prescriptions. Mr. Cate talked about the American Tree Farm Program, conservation easements, and how his family has managed the land. Unfortunately, our optimism was not enough to keep away a deluge of rain, and we all got soaked after a storm blew in while out on the tour. Lots of laughs and positive attitude kept spirits high as we finished our wonderful (but shortened) visit with Mr. Cate.

Back on the bus again, we headed down to Eastover to the International Paper (IP) paper mill. Everybody thought we would smell the mill before we saw it, but surprisingly, there was little odor at all. The immense size of the mill impressed us all. We were welcomed by Mike Walker, and here we saw the local to global connections that the forest industry has in the world. They discussed skills and knowledge they needed to teach in order to make productive employees in today's technological forest products manufacturing plants. *"I didn't realize the amount of technology that is associated with forestry, especially in the mill,"* said Jonathan Dorn, 10th-grade teacher at Eastside High School in Greer.

Evening: To end our day, we headed over to the Millaree Hunt Club and were guests of Marion Burnside. The heavy rains made the road impassible for our charter bus to make it all the way to the clubhouse. The cavalry came to the rescue in the form of a train of 4X4 pick-up trucks to shuttle the entire group the remaining mile to the clubhouse through muddy terrain. The Central Carolina Chapter of the SAF(Society of American Forsesters) provided a delicious and filling meal (most of us had never seen grilled chicken breasts so large!). We enjoyed the beauty of the bottomland forest while talking to many professionals in the forest industry.

Wednesday, June 26

Morning: We started the day once again being herded onto the bus by Teachers' Tour assistant coordinator Dean Carson with his cattle prod. We then went down to a logging site, owned by a private land owner, being logged by Michael Doolittle and Charles K. Doolittle Inc. For many teachers, this was the most anticipated and impressive stop of the tour. It was amazing to see the machines in action and to meet some real loggers on the job. This is always one of the highlights of the tour.



(Photo: A logger explains the operation of a feller-buncher to teacher Keith McCaskill.)

We then drove over to Molly's Rock Recreation Area in Sumter National Forest where we met with Mike Harmon, Archeologist with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). He explained how the USFS manages their lands in South Carolina and the history of the Enoree District of Sumter National Forest. Mr. Harmon explained the connections between protecting the environmental integrity,

economics, and the social benefits of forest stewardship of our nation's forests.

Afternoon: We headed down the road to the Norboard Mill in Joanna and enjoyed a delicious lunch provided by Norboard. Here, Chris Gordy and other Norboard employees led us on a tour where they made various oriented strand board (OSB) sheathing products. Again, the sheer size and intricacy of the factory made a lasting impression on the teachers. At every mill on the tour, we were all impressed that nothing on the tree was ever wasted, from bark and shavings, to trimmings in the processing of a tree.

We then boarded the bus one last time and started back to the hotel. While driving through Newberry, we picked up an abandoned forester on the side of the road! (no worries...his wife had dropped him off) Our guest was Mark Kiser, a consulting forester, who gave us another perspective on forest management for private landowners. We stopped at a couple of tracts that Mr. Kiser manages and he showed us how he helps landowners sustainably manage forests for profit while also protecting soil, air, and water quality. Candi Samples, K-5 teacher at Riverview Elementary said, *"Everyone I met was dedicated to the profession and his/her particular role in the overall scheme of preserving sustainability for future generations of living things."*

Evening: Dusty and dirty, we returned to the hotel for a quick (Dean made sure of that) clean-up before going back to Harbison State Forest for the sponsors reception and dinner. It was a wonderful evening where teachers had a chance to talk to the sponsors who helped make the Teachers' Tour possible.



After some teacher awards, many handshakes, hugs, toasts, and kind words at the dinner, we all headed back to the hotel and continued the fun and deepening of new friendships. Kathy Peckham, teacher at Covenant Classical Christian School in Columbia said, *"The appreciation of the forests and the love that foresters have for our wonderful country has touched my heart. This course has given me an eye-opener and inspired me to think differently*

about the forest and its resources."

(Photo: Melanie Birchmore & Martha Brooks receiving the "Cambium" award from Matt Schnabel)

Thursday, June 27

Morning: We lazily started our last morning together at 8 a.m. with a few more sessions of forestry education and final procedures before returning home. Dean Carson spoke about engineered wood products and gave away door prizes (various hand-crafted wooden items for the home) to each teacher. Crad Jaynes spoke about his experiences in the logging industry and leading the SC Timber Producers Association. We were informed how to “like” the South Carolina Teachers’ Tour on Facebook, see pictures, and make contact with past and present Teachers’ Tour participants. Finally, we shared testimonials about our experiences on the Teachers’ Tour and how attitudes were changed over the past two weeks. We shared final hugs and goodbyes and promised to stay in touch.

The SC Teachers’ Tour has had over 560 educators participate in the event since it began in 1997. Over the past 17 years, countless students and other educators have been influenced by the knowledge and experience the teachers gain during this event. Many have gone on to become more involved in Project Learning Tree as facilitators to train other teachers. Some have even won state and national awards because of the inspiration they received during this event and actions they were motivated to do as a result of the Teachers’ Tour. But don’t take just our word for it, listen to the comments of Judy Bagley, a high school teacher from Greer Middle College Charter High School in Greer who was on this year’s tour:

“One of the ways God speaks to me is through nature. ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of his hands.’ In the past, as I would pass a clear-cut area, my thoughts were always that they ruined God’s creation! Now I truly believe the people of this industry are the greatest and most humble servants of God’s creation!”



**2013 Teachers’ Tour participants along with instructors
Stephanie Kolok, Dean Carson, and Matt Schnabel**

More SC Teachers' Tour Testimonials

"Experiences are priceless. Opportunities for me to gain the knowledge about forestry are rare. The ability to share in my school, community, and family will help change the way forestry is seen in our country." – Wendy Wilson, Willow Tree Community School, Gaffney

"I was amazed at the technology that was not only used at the factories but by the logger." – Alan McLaurin, Dillon High, Dillon

"Best workshop I've attended in 40 years of teaching!" – Carolyn Williams, St. John Neumann Catholic Elementary, Columbia

"I will no longer cringe as much when a logging truck pulls out of the forest with a full load of logs. I will think about the 90,000 jobs provided by the forest industry and all the wonderful people involved in sustaining South Carolina's forests." – Kathy Hutchens, Pelion High, Pelion

"There was a wealth of information that I will now take back to my classroom and when people truly don't understand, explain to them the truth about forestry." – Bridget Zelachowski, St. John Neumann Catholic Elementary, Columbia

"I really enjoyed learning about something for which I had misconceptions. I will implement the Project Learning Tree activities into my lessons this year." – Latrice Carraway, Brockington Elementary, Timmonsville

"I had a great appreciation for the professionalism and hospitality of the people in this industry. These people had careers not jobs." – Karen Squiggins, Clover High, Clover

"I thought earlier that when a forest was clear cut, that the land was ruined. However, after this class, I realize that if the land is replanted, it will produce a mature forest in 30 years." – Shirley Sexton, Carolina Springs Middle, Lexington

"I now understand that forestry is not depleting the world of trees, but rather sustaining a renewable resource very responsibly." – Sharon Burnett, Laurens Academy, Laurens

"Clear cuts are ok and controlled/prescribed burning is a positive action and can prevent forest fires." – Pam Harrington, Gold Hill Middle, Fort Mill

"The most valuable experience for me was seeing the clear cut, equipment, and workers from the Doolittle logging site. It made the biggest impact on me because I had preconceived notions about clear cutting." – Martha Brooks, Pickens Middle, Pickens

"I enjoyed the Project Learning Tree activities because they can be directly used in the classroom." – Lekeshi Wormley, Rock Hill High, Rock Hill

"I never thought loggers were bad, but I now understand how good the industry truly is and its importance." – Tonya Carbaugh, Laurens Academy, Laurens

"I enjoyed everything! I can't pick one part because I learned something new all the time." – Renee Brooks, Diamond Hill Elementary, Abbeville

"I learned that there are a wide range of career opportunities within the forest industry." – Melanie Birchmore, Laurens District 55 High, Laurens

"Forestry is a great business with great people who have the environment's best interest in mind." – Amanda Ferguson, Westwood Elementary, Abbeville

"I have gone from a tree lover to an educated tree lover...BIG DIFFERENCE." – Carol Hudson, St. John Neumann Catholic Elementary, Columbia

"I had no idea of the extent of work that goes into cutting the timber and maintaining our forests. The foresters' dedication and passion were very touching." – Debbie Carnell, Carolina Springs Middle, Lexington

"The newest perception would have to be the idea that the industry is self-sustaining and renewable." – William Leaphart, Fairfield Central High, Winnsboro

"My favorite part of the program was being a part of the "forestry family," if only for a few days." – Bill Teal, D.R. Hill Middle, Greer

"The Teachers' Tour opened a whole new world of "multi" dimensions. Seeing all the forest products gave me a greater appreciation for all the timber industry members." – Ina Stevens, Sangaree Middle, Berkeley County

"Sustaining forest lands is very important for local communities, the state, and our nation." – Ronnie Ford, Timberland High, Berkeley County

"I most enjoyed being with other teachers who are willing to learn new things. We were treated with such respect and appreciation." – Melinda Beach, St. John Neumann Catholic Elementary, Columbia

"I enjoyed meeting all the professionals from many areas in the forest industry. I think putting a face, personality, perception of high integrity with titles deepens my appreciation for what they do and why they do it." – Donna Turner, Clover High, Clover

“I found new ways to expose my students to ways they can learn to appreciate our forests and all the uses that I typically would have taken for granted.” – Tina Wallace, MLD Higher Learning Academy, Sumter

“I enjoyed the actual site visits because they showed the step by step processes that went into producing each product.” – Debra Mouzon, Lake City Elementary, Lake City

“I enjoyed the opportunity to learn and see first-hand how wood is manufactured and how forests are regrown.” – Allison Benner, UHC Upstate Homeschool Group, Greer

“There is nothing like ‘hands on.’ Seeing is believing!” – Keith McCaskill, Greer Middle College Charter High, Greer

“I learned that maintaining a forest is a lot of work and is the responsibility of us all, not just the SC Forestry Commission.” – Julie Moore, Greer Middle College Charter High, Greer

“This course has not only given me knowledge but has also opened my heart in so many ways.” - Kelly Adams Phillips, Cox Industries, Orangeburg

“I didn’t know that every bit of the tree was utilized in some way.” – Jeri Stanek, St. John Neumann Catholic Elementary, Columbia

“I think a committed, informed member of the forest industry is our most valuable resource. He/She makes all the difference in the world.” – Charlotte Graham, Laurens Academy, Laurens