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Environmental Educators to Unite

On March 18, Florida's environmental educators are gathering for the 2017 League of Environmental Educators of Florida (LEEF) Spring Mini-Conference in Apollo Beach. One hundred are expected to attend, including Archbold Biological Station's Education Coordinator, Dustin Angell. "These conferences never fail to inspire me and I am able to apply so much of what I learn back at Archbold," says Angell. So, what is an environmental educator and why do they have a league?

If you remember touching a live snake on a field trip to Archbold, or learning animal tracking at summer camp, the person that taught the lesson was an Archbold environmental educator. If you've attended talks at Archbold about Florida's wildlife, waterways, or wilderness, the speaker was an environmental educator. The term is used for educators at diverse organizations teaching about science, nature, and our relationship with it, including: nature centers, state parks, biological field stations, animal rehabilitation centers, outdoor tour companies, K-12 schools, universities, and more.

For more than 25 years, Archbold has been an active member of LEEF, the state affiliate for a much larger organization called the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), whose vision is: "A sustainable future for all where environmental and social responsibility drive individual and institutional choices." Besides conferences, these groups offer professional training, job boards, and grants for their members.

Archbold Biological Station has a record of leadership in environmental education at LEEF. Former Archbold educators, Nancy Deyrup and Rick Lavoy, served with LEEF in earlier years. Dustin Angell now serves as the President Elect of LEEF and participates in conferences with several professional organizations each year, sometimes presenting Archbold's work with the Highlands County community. His past presentations included a talk on the unique partnership between Delray Plants and Archbold, who together, craft a special summer day-camp for the children of Delray's employees. "Things are really exciting at LEEF right now," states Dustin. The organization, founded in 1981, runs on the volunteer work of its members, and is now hiring its first Project Coordinator. "We have some big plans and need a Project Coordinator. For example, we are developing an environmental literacy plan targeted at getting school teachers more science training and increasing the collaboration between school districts and informal education organizations like nature centers and zoos."

Florida's environmental educators are now joining with other southeastern groups. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee banded together to form the Southeastern Environmental Education Alliance (SEEA) in 2013. Angell will be attending the 2017 SEEA conference in Buford, Georgia. "Florida is hosting next year, so I will be taking notes. I'm looking forward to showing off Highlands County's beautiful wild places and demonstrating the high quality of environmental education happening here and elsewhere in our state."

Photo 1: Environmental Educators, like Archbold's Dustin Angell, lead nature and science programs for people of all ages. Photo by: Archbold Biological Station



Photo 2: Archbold's Dustin Angell and over 1,000 other Environmental Educators gathered in Madison, Wisconsin in October for the 2016 North American Association for Environmental Education Annual Conference. Photo by: Archbold Biological Station

