

I am Brenda Metcalf, of Lancaster, Ohio. I was born and raised in Ohio. I am the youngest of seven children who was blessed to grow up on a farm to a family that had respect for the natural world. I was taught the importance of hunting and fishing as fundamental skills, as well as respecting our natural world. Because of this incredible foundation my parents gave to me I have been in the environmental and outdoor education world for over thirty years. I am currently the Executive Director of the Environmental Education Council of Ohio also know as EECO.

EECO has been at the heart of environmental and outdoor education in Ohio for over 55 years. We connect environmental professionals, teachers, non-formal educators, and higher education institutions around environmental and outdoor programs. EECO provides professional development throughout Ohio year-round through our statewide annual conference, regional conferences, and local workshops. We also provide formal classroom and outdoor classroom presentations and special events all over Ohio. Through our programming annual we reach over 15,000 educators across Ohio. EECO facilitates environmental learning that leads to stewardship in students of all ages. Our longstanding partnership with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources- Ohio Division of Wildlife has been extremely beneficial and adds value to our programming.

The Project WILD Curricula and WILD School Sites programs play a vital role in the education of students in Ohio. Many students are not connected to natural spaces or wildlife issues. Families simply do not have the resources nor the time to educate their children on natural resources, hunting or fishing opportunities in Ohio. Without the Project WILD curricula and WILD School Sites programs in our schools, students would go without outdoor or environmental education. Once educators are introduced to Project WILD they are thrilled to share the activities with their students. Educators already have so much on their plates. By providing a curriculum that has lessons already aligned with the Academic Content Standards, and that is fun is a win-win for these educators. Educators also understand the educational and health benefits of getting their students outside. The Project WILD curricula and the WILD School Sites programs fill that niche. Expanding and offering Project WILD and WILD School Sites to underserved areas of Ohio is an incredible opportunity for major impact on the overall education of students statewide. The prospect of ensuring students are able to get outside and connect with nature will also affect their overall educational performance. Students who are able to get outside to learn are more likely to comprehend the material and engage more fully in the subject matter. The added extra bonus of the Project WILD curricula is that it is interdisciplinary. It is a curriculum that can be embraced by teams of teachers in Math, Language Arts, Science, Reading, and Visual Arts. Educators enjoy teaching the lessons and students have fun learning. Again, it is a win-win scenario for Ohio.

Project WILD and WILD School Sites are most definitely a feather in the cap of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Ohio Division of Wildlife. We are lucky in Ohio to have such an incredible program and opportunity to engage students and adults in the outdoors.