

Youth Environmental Symposium, 2010 Final Report

As we move into an era of unprecedented environmental challenges and pressures, how can an ethic of environmental sustainability be meaningfully integrated across jobs and sectors? This was the question we asked Lake County high school students and teachers to consider at our 2010 **Youth Environmental Symposium (YES) *Working for a Greener Planet.***

Part of the larger *Business of Being Green* program thrust in 2010, the symposium included twenty-two professionals from a range of job sectors from an urban planner, to a green chef, to a wildlife biologist, to a green entrepreneur among others to describe their job, their path, and how their work contributes to creating a more sustainable environment. Sixty students and teachers from nine Lake County high schools and organizations attended the symposium held at Ryerson Woods on October 13. Now in its 15th year, YES is co-presented by Friends of Ryerson Woods and the Lake County Forest Preserve District. The beautiful 552-acre Ryerson site serves as a living classroom for the symposium.



One of FRW's signature programs, YES seeks to connect regional high school students to the natural world so that they may become vested stakeholders and stewards of the environment. The principal goals of the symposium include the following:

- Increase participant knowledge, awareness, and critical thinking about the environment
- Encourage students to model individual decisions that are more ecologically sustainable
- Engage students in hands-on skill building and stewardship activities
- Provide students with access to leaders and decision makers in the environmental sector
- Amplify college opportunities in the conservation field.

In an effort to expand our outreach efforts towards youth of color in order to realize a more diversified

environmental workforce in the future, we invite every school in the region—public, private and parochial—to bring a group of students and a teacher to the Symposium. All schools are eligible for substitute teacher pay and transportation reimbursement. We waive all fees for YES participants.



Additionally, we have launched a successful outreach effort to engage underserved youth from schools like St. Martin de Porres High School in Waukegan. St. Martin de Porres primarily serves Waukegan and North Chicago and is part of a national association of high schools that provide quality college preparatory education to urban students with otherwise limited education. This year, St. Martin de Porres brought sixteen students and two teachers.

Kicking off the day was legendary *National Geographic* photographer, **Joel Sartore** as the keynote speaker. Beginning his address with a provocative video about a snake wrangling festival, Sartore spoke with students about the complex interplay between people and nature, between the needs for economic viability and habitat and natural resources protection. Sharing a veritable feast of mesmerizing images, Sartore shared with students his efforts to us his photojournalism to both articulate the extent of global environmental degradation and to advance land conservation and biodiversity. One participant commented, *"Sartore gave an international perspective on conservation and showed how you can still promote the environment while working "in the system."* A teacher remarked, *"Sartore set the tone for this (day of) highly productive and focused speakers."*



Following the keynote address, students and teachers picked four of twenty-one career workshops to attend to learn more about green careers that might interest them. The jobs and careers represented at the symposium included: furniture designer, wildlife rehabilitation, environmental advocacy, village sustainability manager, habitat restoration, landscape architect, urban planning, customs-law enforcement, environmental health, green architect, environmental law, environmental high school teacher, green chef, urban anthropologist, land acquisition, green entrepreneur, environmental educator, nature writer, environmental engineering, wildlife biologist, eco-tourism, eco- products business owner. Workshop leaders provided examples of the some of the tools of their trade: maps, architectural models, prototypes, and more. Several workshops engaged students in a hands-on problem-solving activity. Students and teachers had the following to say about the workshops.

"I really liked the wildlife biologist because he was very informative about the initiatives taking place in Lake County and also about how to get into the field of wildlife biology and ecology."



"The customs agent job is awesome! I didn't know that it was a job. Made me think about it more."

"I liked the Eco-products presentation because it's the exact job I want to have."

"I loved the Joel Sartore presentation. He has such a creative job with such a strong message. He worked for a very clear purpose."

"I found the chef presentation the most interesting because it's not your typical 'eco-friendly' job."

"The woman who led the eco-tourism workshop shared how passionate she was for her career and everything she talked about grabbed my attention. I've never met anyone who travels to the North Pole for work."

"A fantastic day. Keep them coming! It's such a valuable experience for our students."



During lunch students chatted with each other, with workshop leaders, ate pizza and perused the college materials available featuring academic programs in environmental and conservation tracks.

Friends of Ryerson Woods gratefully acknowledges the Lake Forest Garden Club for their generous support of the 2010 Youth Environmental Symposium. We also thank Piero's Pizza of Highland Park, Al Westerman for donating apples, the third graders at the Lake Forest County Day School for their delicious array of baked goods and Sunset Foods who provided granola bars and coffee throughout the day. Students and teachers received a green cinch sac purchased from Ecopromotions Online at the end of the day.



Ryerson Woods

Set in Deerfield, Ryerson Woods is one of Illinois' premiere natural and architecturally significant areas. It is listed as a Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places and is also part of the Illinois Nature Preserve System, a designation given only to the most ecologically significant natural areas in the state.

