



Outdoor Learning Inspires Teachers and Students to Use Science and Math to Solve the World's Most Challenging Environmental Issues

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Science teachers chosen for fifth annual ECO Classroom professional development program

FALLS CHURCH, Va., June 6, 2016 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- The Northrop Grumman Foundation and Conservation International have selected the 16 teachers – four teams, with four participants each – who will participate in this year's ECO Classroom program. After receiving applications from close to 100 educators this year, teachers were selected based on their motivation, qualifications, and recommendations from colleagues. The teachers selected for the program represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences - crucial elements of the program's success.

The teams going to Costa Rica on the 2016 ECO Classroom program are:

- 1) Highland Hellbenders (Gate City, Virginia) – A team of mid-career teachers from rural Virginia that are eager to bring home new techniques in teaching biodiversity. They will compare biodiversity between Virginia and Costa Rica, looking at both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
- 2) Tropical Smoothies (Smithtown, New York) – Veteran science teachers from Long Island with history of getting students involved in fieldwork. They will compare biodiversity between different habitats (agriculture vs. forests) and quantify abiotic factors (pH, soil moisture, temperature, etc.) and see how these affect biodiversity.
- 3) Douglas County (Castle Rock, Colorado) – A mixed team of young and experienced teachers from Colorado with a global mindset and focus on meaningful group inquiry lessons and fieldwork. This team will investigate how carbon sequestration changes across different forest types and ages.
- 4) The Science Alliance (Los Angeles, California) – A young and ambitious team from California with positive energy that seeks to make their science classes relevant to an urban community with little access to nature. They are comparing the levels of biodiversity between California and Costa Rica.

The potential for project-based learning and real-world examples to generate students' interests in math and science led the Northrop Grumman Foundation and Conservation International to partner in 2012 to create ECO Classroom - a unique professional development program for middle and high school science teachers in the U.S. The program improves environmental literacy in the classroom and help teachers motivate their students to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) so they can develop the skills they need to tackle the world's most pressing environmental issues and become the next generation of environmental stewards.

The ECO Classroom program offers an intensive two-week experience at an active field site in Costa Rica where teachers can learn first-hand from local researchers how to collect ecological data and work toward completing a group research project. Teachers use this experience when they return to their classrooms, giving students practical, hands-on involvement with environmental sustainability and STEM topics.

Conservation International's [Tropical Ecology Assessment and Monitoring \(TEAM\) Network](#), oversees the ECO Classroom program. The TEAM site in Costa Rica, based out of La Selva Biological Station, produced some 200 scientific papers last year, making it an ideal location for educators to learn how science is done in the field. In the past four years, ECO Classroom has provided training to 64 teachers from 13 different states, reaching a total of nearly 24,000 students over the length of the program.

"Going to La Selva was such a wonderful experience for me," says Robin Rumery, a former participant in the program from Ocean Springs High School in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. "I use the information and activities from Costa Rica in my lessons as often as I can and also received a grant for my very own camera traps. The students loved them. We have been doing biodiversity studies on the wet pine savanna behind our school for both species richness and species evenness."

Since 1987, Conservation International has been working to improve human well-being through the care of nature. With the guiding principle that nature doesn't need people, but people need nature for food, water, health and livelihoods—CI works with more than 1,000 partners around the world to ensure a healthy, more prosperous planet that supports the well-being of people. [Learn more about CI](#) and the "[Nature Is Speaking](#)" campaign, and follow CI's work on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

Northrop Grumman and the Northrop Grumman Foundation are committed to expanding and enhancing the pipeline of diverse, talented STEM students globally. They provide funding to sustainable STEM programs that span from preschool through collegiate levels, with a major emphasis on middle school students and teachers. In addition to ECO Classroom, Northrop Grumman and the Northrop Grumman Foundation continued education outreach efforts in 2015 by contributing more than \$17 million to diverse STEM-related groups and activities such as the Air Force Association (CyberPatriot), the REC Foundation (VEX Robotics), National Science Teachers Association and the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering. For more information, please visit www.northropgrumman.com/foundation.

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