

# directions

Journal of the Association of Nature Center Administrators

## the TETON SUMMIT August 20 - 23, 2008

Kathy Haskin, Summit Coordinator, Teton Science Schools, Jackson Hole, WY

It is time once again for nature center directors throughout the territories to make plans for their annual rendezvous. The ANCA Summit, in its 14th year, will draw registrants westward, to the wilds of Wyoming; habitat of the majestic moose and bold bison, landmarked by the towering Teton Range and the most complete ecosystem in the lower 48 states.

Located less than two miles from the town of Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is Teton Science Schools' newest campus. Perfectly poised to benefit from Jackson's unique setting and community, the nearly 900-acre Jackson Campus is comprised of creeks, ponds, aspen, conifer, grassland, and sage habitats—all-in-all, an outstanding outdoor classroom.

Ecological work at this campus specializes in field science experiences within the suburban-rural

interface and human-use impacts on our natural communities.

The Jackson Campus is located within easy driving distance of Grand Teton National Park, Bridger-Teton National Forest, and the National Elk Refuge.

Pre-Summit field trips begin the morning of August 20<sup>th</sup> as participants choose from a variety of explorations into the interpretive centers, wildlife, and the wild lands of Jackson Hole. There is plenty of room for generations of travelers in the historic town of Jackson, gateway to Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks.

At the gathering's official start, participants will assemble at Teton Science Schools' Jackson Campus, an example of both environmental architecture and a multi-use campus for educational experiences.

(continued on page 3)



photo courtesy of Teton Science Schools

*The Teton Summit will offer spectacular scenery, abundant wildlife, and, of course, a fabulous gathering of nature and environmental learning center professionals.*

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Founded in 1989, the Association of Nature Center Administrators is a private non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and supporting best leadership and management practices for nature and environmental learning centers.

Serving nearly 500 organizations, ANCA is the leader in the profession.



Rooted in Experience. Reaching for Excellence.

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**2 Director's Notes:**  
**ANCA's New Look**  
by Jen Levy

**4 From The Field:**  
Point:  
**Lawsuit Helps Nature  
Center Understand Risk  
and Enhance Safety**  
by Rich Patterson

**8 Counter Point:**  
**the Fear Factor**  
by Ken Finch

**11 News Flash!**  
**Our Nature Center is  
Finally Safe!**  
by Ken Finch

**12 Profiles:**  
**Nature After Katrina**  
by Amy LeGeaux



photo by Jen Levy

# Director's Notes

Jen Levy  
Executive Director  
Association of Nature Center  
Administrators  
Logan, UT

We have a new look! Last fall, the ANCA Board adopted a marketing plan that included updating the ANCA newsletter, website, logo, and tagline to provide a stronger brand image.

ANCA has a strong identity among its members, but we needed a new look to clarify our value and purpose to those unfamiliar with ANCA or its acronym. We chose to work with Bolger + Battle, Inc. from Midland, MI to design our new logo and tagline.

The new logo design built on the existing ANCA logo elements to create an updated and engaging logo. The unique font combines sophistication and warmth to present ANCA as a professional organization that welcomes new members and partners. The close placement of the letters and the connection through the "c" up into the leaf convey the primary value ANCA places on connection and networking among its membership and the further connection to environmental stewardship. The upswept line connecting the "c" to the leaf communicates growth, optimism and a positive impact on the world.

Taken together, the elements of the logo communicate an organization that is professional, yet readily accessible to those who may benefit from its expertise and resources.

The tagline, "Rooted in Experience. Reaching for Excellence." was developed to clarify ANCA's value and purpose. We are rooted in the experience of our many members and our almost twenty year history. We are reaching for excellence by identifying and promoting best practices for the nature and environmental learning center profession.



*Jen Levy shows off ANCA's new logo to Board Members Larry Richardson and Carolyn Chipman Evans during the winter board meeting at Squam Lakes Natural Science Center in New Hampshire.*

We look forward to using our new look to reach out to members and to enhance the awareness of nature centers among all audiences.

In other news, I attended the Midwest Regional ANCA Summit at the Cincinnati Nature Center on January 29, 2008. This one-day gathering included all management level staff at nature centers within driving distance to Cincinnati.

Staff from more than twenty centers had the opportunity to network with other centers in the region. Following a true ANCA model, the Summit utilized the "Open Space" format to identify the topics important to those attending.

Those in attendance included executive directors, program and education directors, farm and facilities directors, development and marketing directors, and volunteer coordinators. Monday evening, we were treated to "dinner on the farm" at the Gorman Heritage Farm – what a feast! I want to thank the folks at the Cincinnati Nature Center and Gorman Heritage Farm for hosting this event.

With this successful model, I am hoping to identify other regions that could support a regional Summit. If you are interested in hosting a Regional Summit at your facility, please contact me at [jlevy@natctr.org](mailto:jlevy@natctr.org).

Teton Summit (continued from page 1)

Teton Science Schools ([www.tetonscience.org](http://www.tetonscience.org)) strives to connect people, place, nature, and education through the many aspects of its programs and practices.

At the Teton Summit participants will have opportunity to highlight the heritage and happenings of their own organizations. And in doing so, the sharing begins.

As always, the Summit will promote learning through shared knowledge. Workshops will introduce and engage participants in topics ranging from sustainable practices, to educational demographics, finances, board leadership, and new directions in programming. All explorers will assemble to hear the insights of Larry Selzer, leader of the Conservation Fund and the Summit keynote speaker.

Whether someone is seasoned to the Summit through years of participation or new to the rendezvous having heard word of its importance for nature and environmental learning center directors, everyone present at the Teton Summit will know that this is the time to learn - learn from leaders, colleagues that have perspectives to add to their own.

The final day of the gathering will open the conference to additions, topics still unexplored and able to be addressed by the knowledge in the

room through Open Space Sessions.

Ever-present at each Summit gathering will be the Annual Auction with its "Cash Gator" and "Fund the Need," the membership meeting, as well as the shared network and

social activities throughout the week.

The ANCA Summit is a gathering of professionals, mandatory in every director's calendar. Prepare now by setting the dates aside, sending in your registration materials and making your travel plans. Early efforts are needed for airline seats into the valley. August 19<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup> will include most pre and post

conference experiences.

Teton Science Schools is proud to host this year's assembly of knowledge and experience and has set up an email address to answer any questions ([anca@tetonscience.org](mailto:anca@tetonscience.org)). 🌿



photo courtesy of Teton Science Schools

***Details of the Teton Summit, accommodation options, travel suggestions, and registration information are posted on the ANCA website - [www.natctr.org](http://www.natctr.org).***



photo by Clay Custer



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# Lawsuit Helps Nature Center Understand Risk & Enhance Safety

Rich Patterson  
Director  
Indian Creek Nature Center  
Cedar Rapids, IA

An event happened on an otherwise quiet March afternoon in 2002 that changed the Indian Creek Nature Center forever.

The Nature Center occasionally rented its auditorium for social functions but had experienced problems with alcohol use and general abuse of the facility by renters. In response the organization developed a policy stating that the director needed to personally approve all rental requests. Only “low impact” rentals likely to create few problems were to be approved.

In early 2002 a rental request came across my desk. A neighbor, who had served on our board of directors, asked to rent our auditorium for a christening ceremony for her new daughter. It was to be held on a Sunday afternoon.

No alcohol would be served, and guests would be families. The renter was familiar with the operation, policies, and facility. It seemed as problem free as any activity could be, so I approved it.

That afternoon families enjoyed the ceremony. However, during the following social time some parents allowed five and six year old children to wander outside for a long duration. Several walked about 800 feet to the confluence of Indian Creek with the Cedar River. Their path took them

under a railroad bridge. Some children climbed up a steep embankment and crossed the creek on the bridge. A freight train approached. When the engineer spotted the children he applied emergency brakes and blew his whistle, but it was too late. The train struck two boys, carried them



photo courtesy of North Cascades Institute

*Risks and dangers are ever present in the great outdoors. Precautions can be taken to protect your nature center and visitors while allowing exploration and discovery.*

across the trestle, and flung down a 20-foot embankment. One was killed. The other was injured but eventually made a full recovery.

The Nature Center receptionist and maintenance staffer were on duty and responded appropriately. Within minutes ambulances, police officers, senior staff, and several board members arrived. So did the media. The boys were tended to, and after many hours everyone left.

The next morning staff wrote a detailed description of the events of

the afternoon. The Nature Center sent a letter of condolence to the families, and I attended the boy's funeral several days later. Staff thoroughly examined the events to determine if any policies, emergency procedures, or facilities may have been a factor in the accident. We concluded that

they were not, and that we had acted professionally and appropriately. Our board also held a detailed discussion of the accident and reached the same conclusion.

Under Iowa law an adult has two years to file a lawsuit. A minor child can bring suit until he or she reaches age 18.

Two years to the day of the accident we were served notice that the parents of the dead boy were bringing suit

against the Nature Center.

Within a few days our insurance company informed me that a settlement could reach a dollar figure way beyond the \$1 million limit of our liability coverage. They assigned an attorney to defend us.

Then began a series of depositions that spread over more than two years. The plaintiffs were questioned under oath. So was I. Several expert witnesses were also deposed. It was a time consuming and nerve wracking experience.

As the lawsuit progressed argument points of the plaintiffs and Nature Center were clarified as follows:

#### PLAINTIFFS

- A nature center is a park and is, therefore, a safe place for children to play unsupervised.
- The Nature Center did not specifically warn families that there are railroad tracks nearby.
- The Nature Center did not have railroad-warning signs in place.
- The Nature Center did not fence the tracks.
- By accepting the rental, the Nature Center provided “supervision” to the group.

#### NATURE CENTER

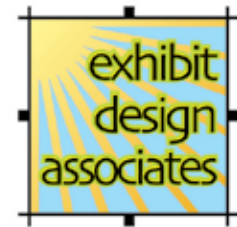
- A nature center is not a park and includes, or is near, many hazards that include roads, creeks, rivers, poisonous plants, biting insects, dead trees, ravines, a railroad, and others.
- Even in the safest urban park very young children need supervision.
- The Nature Center can’t specifically warn every visitor about every potential hazard, either verbally, in writing, or via signs.
- It is not feasible to fence a railroad embankment located in a flood plain subject to periodic rushing water. Railroad tracks are rarely fenced. They are a hazard that is obvious and visible.
- The railroad tracks are private property. The accident did not occur on the Nature Center.
- The front desk receptionist is not a group supervisor and we never agreed to provide supervision.
- The children were too young to read signs that might have been in place.
- People need to exercise good judgment to be safe. Parents or other adults must supervise children too young to comprehend hazards.

As the lawsuit progressed the Nature Center’s case seemed to strengthen and the plaintiff’s weaken.

A trial had been scheduled to begin in late April 2007. A few months earlier our attorney filed a motion to dismiss the suit. This went to a judge who has the power to either dismiss or allow the suit to proceed to settlement or trial. A hearing was held before the judge about ten days before the trial was to start. It was something like a high school debate. Our attorney verbally presented the reasons why the suit should be dismissed. The plaintiff’s attorney presented reasons why it should not. Our attorney rebutted his remarks. Following the session the judge told us she would act on the motion within the next five days.

Those days passed with no word from the judge, however the attorneys and insurance company were quietly negotiating a settlement. They reached agreement, and it was over. There would be no trial.

Although I was relieved and pleased that the suit was settled, it was also disturbing. None of the points that we’d been arguing for



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three years were answered. There was no clarification of anything. It was simply.....over.

WHAT THE NATURE CENTER LEARNED

- Have good insurance. Our insurance company paid all attorney and related costs with nothing out of pocket for the Nature Center.
- Have good attorneys. Although we had no control over who would represent us our insurance company provided a top-notch attorney and support staff.
- Have good emergency procedures in place and a well-trained staff.
- The legal system is filled with jargon. I asked for clarification many times.
- Be careful what you say to the media and people who call for information. Have one media spokesperson.
- Conduct periodic official visits by outside experts. The Nature Center had completed two IMLS/AAM institutional assessments in recent years. Outside experts came in, evaluated programs, facilities, and more and filed a formal written report. Neither expressed concern (or even mentioned) the railroad, and this proved to be a strong legal point in our defense. An ANCA consult would serve the same function.
- Maps are informational and also show potential hazards. Although not specifically identified as hazards the road, tracks, and river on maps provide visitors with knowledge that these are present.
- Be specific on supervision, both in writing and verbally. For example, we now print on our rental agreement that the renter is *responsible for supervising his or her guests*. Also, when we host a group and a staff member or volunteer finishes a program and “releases” the children to their teacher, scoutmaster, or other leader we now clearly state, *the children are now under your supervision*. This clarifies responsibility.
- Social rentals are risky. We

weighed the benefits and threats of social rentals and no longer rent the building for parties or receptions, although we continue to rent it for business meetings and retreats.

The Nature Center has made a few changes in the aftermath of the lawsuit. We doubled our coverage to \$2 million. Staff carefully clarify with group leaders when they are responsible for supervising. During visits to the facility our attorney pointed out potential hazards that we have changed. At the advice of our insurance agent we formed a safety committee composed of two staff and two board members. Our agent funded a visit by a professional safety expert to provide us with suggestions on how to enhance safety.

I've been a nature center director for 32 years, and this is my only experience with a suit against my organization. It's one I hope to never duplicate.

Intellectually I agree with the current belief that children benefit by spending unsupervised time in nature, however I just ended a multi-year difficult situation involving supervision of children at a nature center.

It's prudent to operate in a manner that reduces the likelihood of a suit and offers a strong defense should one occur. 🌿

*Rich Patterson has been director of the Indian Creek Nature Center in Cedar Rapids, IA since 1978. He is a founder of ANCA and received ANCA's 2007 Nature Center Leadership Award.*

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# From The Field: Part 2

## the Fear Factor - a Personal Commentary

Ken Finch  
President/CEO  
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Omaha, NE

As a young instructor for an adventure programs company, I once found myself standing amidst a circle of unhappy teenage backpackers, in a small mountain clearing in Maryland. We had just been attacked by a mob of yellow jackets; every one of us was stung at least once. We were miles from the nearest road, and it was years before the advent of cell phones and cheap portable radios. All our staff members were expertly trained in wilderness first aid, but we were not allowed to carry epinephrine. I was worried.

For even as I tried to calm down the kids, I was seething inside, silently cursing my assistant patrol leader who had just admitted that she had neglected to pack the teens' medical forms. So one-by-one I quietly asked each of them, "Are you allergic to bee stings?" Relief followed relief, until the last child. Stung four times on his bare chest and still fighting back tears, he looked up at me and said, "Nah, man — but last time I got stung I had to go to the hospital."

As it turned out, he was fine — but his answer damn near caused my heart to stop! That was the first time I consciously faced the life-and-death dangers inherent to my work, but far from the last.

On the long, strange trip of my career, the list of near-tragedies I have dealt with includes a copperhead bite, dislocated joints, hard falls, poisoning by Amanita mushrooms, a runaway

child, underage alcohol use, a car crash, and even a bizarre terror situation involving the U.S. Park Police SWAT team. But I have been lucky: I've never had a person killed or permanently injured during my programs or at my centers. Rich Patterson has (see article on page 4).



photo by Ken Finch

*Are these climbing rocks at the Morton Arboretum Children's Garden a potentially deadly hazard that should be removed, or a valuable opportunity for young visitors to develop judgment and confidence through outdoor play?*

In this issue, Rich shares the tragic story of a child who was killed by a train while visiting his nature center — a story he verbally recounted at last summer's ANCA Summit. Rich, his Board, and his staff went through months of legalistic hell as they contested the resulting liability suit.

Most of us in the audience were probably squirming, as we realized that a similarly horrible accident could happen at almost any nature center, despite the best of precautions.

In the end, Rich's center essentially won the lawsuit. Abiding by a confidentiality agreement, Rich could only tell us that there was a settlement for "a very small amount," implying that no significant liability was placed on the nature center. Nothing can ever remove the tragedy of the death, but Rich now shares very good advice about policies and procedures that nature centers can adopt to help protect themselves from similar liability lawsuits.

However, I was troubled by one of Rich's conclusions at the Summit. Noting recent calls to encourage more unstructured nature play, Rich advised us that we should not allow unsupervised children's play at our nature centers. In the context of his experience, it certainly seems a reasonable response — but I think it merits a bit more consideration.

I won't now review the many positive impacts of frequent, unstructured, childhood play in natural areas. Those have been noted many times in this and other publications, as well as in the public media and ANCA workshops. However, perceived

dangers seem to doggedly haunt efforts to restore such play. So is unsupervised nature play dangerous?

Certainly the answer must be yes, in terms of statistical probability. Children have been and will be hurt while playing outside, with and without supervision. But this isn't really

a fair view of the situation. The more meaningful question is one of comparative risk — a gut check on reality. You could be hit by a meteorite as you read this, and your organization could be sued for not having a sufficiently strong roof to repel the projectile. The former is highly unlikely, and the latter is insanely unreasonable — but, statistically speaking, both could happen!

Are you now peeking out the window, watching for a streaking meteor heading your way? I hope not. Fear can be paralyzing, and it can destroy so much potential good. Many of us have openly lamented the contemporary pattern of parenting through fear — that is, parents going to such extremes to protect their children from physical injury that they risk causing them even greater developmental harm. Should we, in the nature center world, now begin managing through fear?

With our new-found understanding of nature play's power to create lasting conservation values, we in the nature center profession face a dilemma. Clearly, nature play is valuable, but not only does it potentially damage sensitive ecosystems, it can also harm the children. I believe most centers can manage the former challenge by focusing nature play opportunities on specific tracts of land that are not too ecologically sensitive, and that can even be augmented for children's play.

The injury concern may seem like a more vexing matter, but is it actually a significant change? After all, if we are really, truly concerned about injuries to children and other visitors — and the liabilities that accompany them — why haven't we built security fences around all the water bodies on our properties? Most nature centers I know have water features, but I've never seen even one of them fenced off or provided with full-time lifeguards. And yet, guess what the second greatest cause of accidental death among American children is.

That's right — drowning. It's a far more common killer than any form of routine nature play, not to mention trains.

Care to carry the line of thought a bit farther? The number one cause of accidental children's deaths in the U.S. is motor vehicle crashes. Nevertheless, day in and day out our nature centers encourage parents and teachers to put kids into automobiles and head for our grounds. Are we guilty of putting children in harm's way? Truth is, there are some serious dangers that we accept as routine, and even as essential in order for our centers to effectively accomplish their conservation missions.

Ultimately, there is no guarantee of safety in nature, with or without supervision. The best "lifeguard" — and the only one that anyone can constantly have watching over them — is good judgment. For generations, American children learned that good judgment, in part, by climbing trees, leaping over streams, throwing all manner of projectiles at each other,



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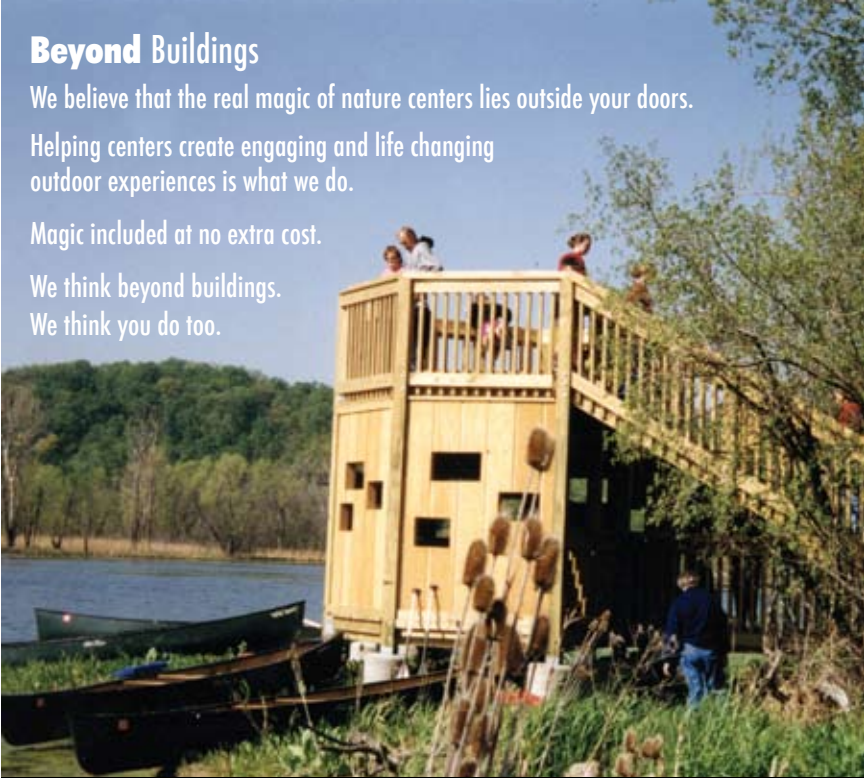
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catching animals, wandering far out of sight of their homes, and a myriad of other such outdoor adventures.

Some children paid a price for these experiences: broken arms, painful bites, nasty cuts and bruises, getting scared, and occasionally even worse. But along the way, they were learning responsibility, judgment, self confidence, and sometimes a dose of empathy, as well.

Today's children have a drastically reduced menu of such opportunities. On their ubiquitous video games, the only result of bad judgment is the need to hit the reset button. Bad judgment on the soccer field gets them an unhappy but safe seat on the bench. Bad judg-

*The essential first step, though, is to reject the tyranny of fear, and put the dangers of nature play into a realistic perspective.*


ment in school gets them poor grades (maybe). Where are they to really learn good judgment? — because it is essential that they do so.

As a parent, I'd much rather my boys learned and practiced good judgment amidst the dangers of wild spaces, than to delay learning those lessons until they are 16 and behind the wheel of a car!

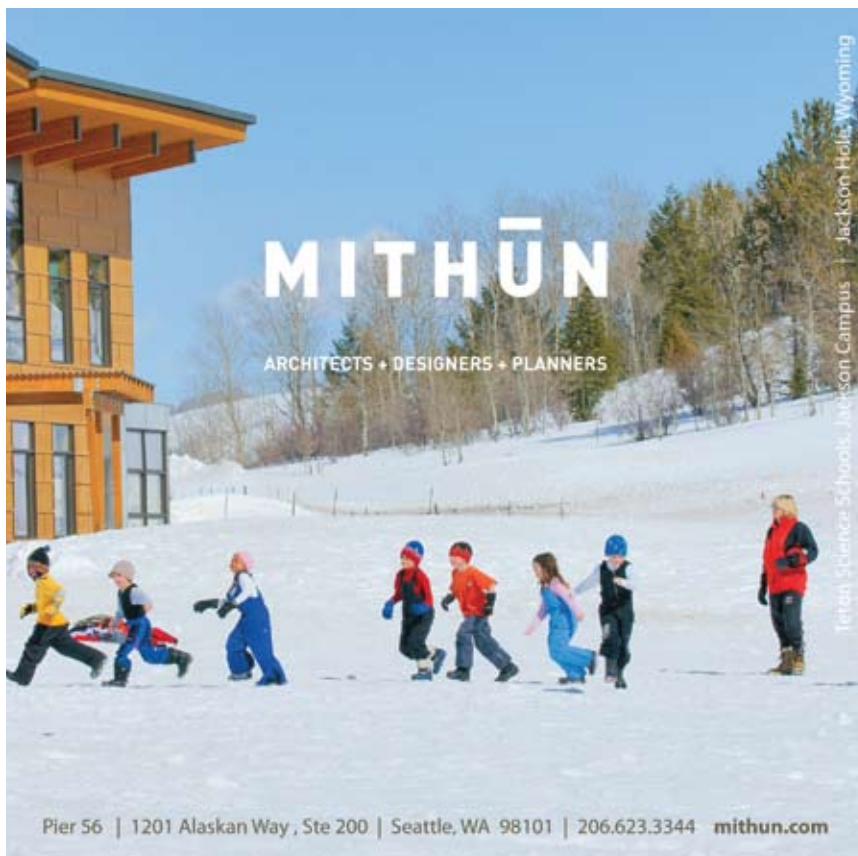
Rich Patterson's advice makes perfect managerial sense, of course. Posting disclaimers and warnings may help if your center should ever

find itself in a lawsuit over injury. But how much do you want to discourage an activity that is a powerful force for sparking conservation values? And are you sure that nature play is any more dangerous than other risks at your center -- for instance, the chance of a visitor having a deadly allergic reaction to a bee sting that they get while strolling through your butterfly garden? (Have you posted ominous warning signs amidst the buddleia and milkweeds?)

The world of insurance manages to cover the risks of ropes courses, skateboard parks, bike trails, swimming pools, and oversized passenger vans driven by bird-watching naturalists, so it seems that there should be a way to make nature play an acceptable organizational risk, as well.

The essential first step, though, is to reject the tyranny of fear, and put the dangers of nature play into a realistic perspective. 

*Ken Finch has spent 34 years working in nature centers and other environmental education venues; he is a past President of ANCA. Ken can be contacted at kfinch@bigmuddy-workshop.com.*



# NEWS FLASH FROM THE FUTURE

Release Date: February 20, 2020  
Yellow View, USA  
by Ken Finch

## Our Nature Center is Finally Safe!

Today the Yellow View Nature Center announced dramatic new results in their efforts to make the lovely sanctuary completely safe for all human visitors. A month-long test of unique “Sphercycles” has exceeded all expectations.

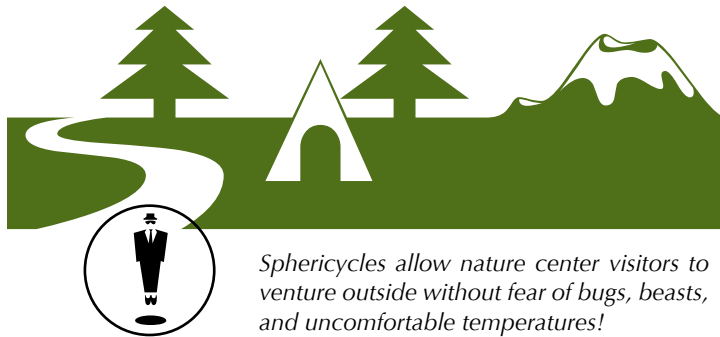
The giant, clear plastic bubbles come in various sizes for children and adults, so each rider can be securely strapped inside. An electrically powered tread wraps around the self-propelled bubbles, which are easily steered with a joystick.

The Sphercycles allow visitors to go wherever they wish on the nature center grounds, rain or shine, easily rolling over roots, shrubs, logs, and other hazards; ricocheting harmlessly off of poorly sited trees; and even churning serenely across the center’s lake.

With interior climate control, Sphercyclists aren’t bothered by uncomfortable temperatures or humidity, and pests like mosquitoes, ticks, and snakes are completely sealed out. The double-walled bubbles even mute the distracting sounds of birds and insects, allowing the riders to completely focus on the natural world flowing past their 360° view.

The bubbles are so strong and safe that they can drop off a 25 foot cliff without injury, bounce softly off a moving vehicle’s bumper, and even roll their riders harmlessly over one of the nature center’s thousands of white-tailed deer.

“This is the best thing the Nature Center has ever done!” gushed Director Ralph Badgerman. “Everyone loves the Sphercycles! They’re great for traditional nature lovers like me, and they’re also drawing hundreds of new visitors, like the motocross daredevils group who came out last week and this morning’s mass ride by a club of jet ski performance artists. Our turnstiles are spinning so fast that we can hardly believe it! Boy oh boy,



*Sphercycles allow nature center visitors to venture outside without fear of bugs, beasts, and uncomfortable temperatures!*

we’re really getting kids back into the woods now!”

Sphercycle rides are offered daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; a fee is charged. Nature Center officials advise that visitors will no longer be allowed to walk on the trails, due to the danger of collisions. 🌿



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# Profiles: Audubon Louisiana Nature Center

## Bringing Nature Back

Amy LeGaux  
Disaster Recovery Coordinator  
Audubon Nature Institute  
New Orleans, LA

Saturday, January 19, 2008 brought to fruition a nearly two year journey into the restoration of the wetlands on the property that, prior to Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005, was Audubon Louisiana Nature Center. Our first restoration planting day was cold, with the wind chill in the 30's. We had to cancel the morning session due to rain, but 168 volunteers braved the afternoon and thanks to the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana (CRCL) almost 500 trees were planted in 4 acres of bottomland and swamp.

On August 27, 2005, I was at the ANCA Summit at the Chippewa Nature Center in Michigan, anxiously watching and listening to every weather report I could. After my flight back to New Orleans on the 28th was canceled, I spent the night in Detroit and was finally reunited with my family on Tuesday the 30th in Alexandria, LA. My daughter and I lived there for the next four months until her school reopened and I was able to return to full-time work for Audubon Nature Institute.

I knew after my first visit to meet the insurance adjusters at Audubon Louisiana Nature Center on October 4, 2005 that I had a tremendous amount of work ahead of me, but I had no idea just how big a challenge it would actually be.

Many acronyms have been at-

tached to the letters FEMA, most of which I can't write here, but I can tell you the F in FEMA definitely does not stand for Fast. Even as I write this the Nature Center buildings still sit with moldy sheetrock and we still await information from FEMA critical for us to make a decision on what will actually be built on the site.

Audubon Nature Institute has been proactively pursuing the maximum



photo by Amy LeGaux

*Exotic and extremely invasive Chinese tallow has found a strong foothold in many areas of the Audubon Louisiana Nature Center. Manual, mechanical, and chemical methods are being utilized in efforts to get rid of it.*

FEMA funding available to us. I can say this with confidence because the main focus of my job for the past two years has been to facilitate the entire process as Audubon's Disaster Recovery Coordinator.

My first glimpse of the Nature Center was both heart wrenching and awe-inspiring: 10 – 12 feet of storm surge had roared through, along with wind gusts of up to 156+ mph and micro bursts or mini tornados. The water had overtopped the levees along Lake Borgne and the infamous Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Canal, and sat for almost 3 weeks before

completely receding. Five miles to the north at Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge the water had a salinity level of 20 parts per thousand; although probably not as high at the Nature Center, the trees that were not uprooted or twisted and broken by the wind were killed by the waters high salinity.

That first visit we were mystified as to where some trees had gone and how some heavy equipment ended up where it was....until we saw a photograph of the storm surge. We salvaged three items that day: the "marsh ball" from 1965's Hurricane Betsy, the now rusty meteorite collection from the planetarium, and the slightly water damaged winner of the National Water Fowl Carving Competition on loan to us for display.

The next several months brought additional salvage operations, FEMA damage assessments, and a four-day ANCA Peer Consult in May of 2006 led by Dr. Bob Thomas.

In June, we were finally able to clean the debris out of the buildings but had to photograph and inventory everything that was still recognizable for FEMA.

The smell of decomposition, mold infestation, and stagnant water were over-

whelming. In July, volunteer Glenn Ousset who has been doing bird counts for us for 23 years, and I, found the trails for the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to clear. Glenn has seen every species of bird after Hurricane Katrina that he saw before the storm and a few new ones, just not in the same numbers.

Two of the trails were not too difficult to find; one is boardwalk and the other only a mile long with ten 4x4 posts as trail markers. The Adventure trail however took weeks of climbing over downed trees and cutting through underbrush in 90-degree heat

with 90-percent humidity to find any landmark we could, while watching out for venomous snakes and battling salt marsh mosquitoes. Thankfully the poison ivy had been killed off by the salt water at least for the first year!

In September 2006, the meteorites were sent to the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville for cleaning. The University's Center for Space and Planetary Sciences generously donated their time and equipment for this year-long endeavor as their contribution toward New Orleans' recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Many organizations have donated their time and expertise to us.

In November, 2006 the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) Office of Forestry assessed our invasive Chinese tallow (Sapium sebiferum) problem. Tallow seeds float and the Nature Center sits in one of the lowest parts of the city.

This fast growing tree loves direct sunlight and consequently keeps other trees and plants from establishing themselves, having a detrimental effect on natural succession. Tallow is highly insect resistant and without bugs, there will be no birds or other insect loving critters around.


Due to the magnitude of the tallow infestation the USDA-NRCS' recommendation was to kill everything in the forest with herbicide, clear large swaths of land and reforest. With a desire to reforest without such drastic measures and no funding available since "FEMA does not do plants just buildings" we decided to investigate other solutions.

By February 2007 the perimeter was finally secured. Less than two weeks later, a salt water damaged tree fell on the brand new FEMA-paid-for fence causing several thousand dollars worth of damage. After this and at our continued urging, the FEMA Debris Eligibility Specialist and the USACE finally determined that all of the salt water damaged trees within 15 feet of the fence, a road, trail,

or building would be felled but not hauled away (FEMA doesn't fund that either). Although they cut down more than 600 trees, many salt water damaged trees remain that could fall during future thunder storms. This leaves about 10% of the trees in our once closed canopy bottomland hardwood forest alive and growing.

We had to hire an architect & engineering firm to document the scope of work required to bring the buildings back to pre-Katrina condition; which is all FEMA will fund even though no one would build a nature center the same way it was done 25 years ago, especially after a flood. The A & E report helped convince FEMA to "version" (that's FEMA for revise) the buildings Project Worksheets from repair (without mold remediation or all new wiring) to replacement.

By March 2007 the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana had determined that they wanted to help us restore the first 4-5 acres of forest and we also began using groups of volunteers; mostly college kids on spring break to help with trail maintenance



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If you haven't been there yet, be sure to visit ANCA's new & improved web site:  
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and tallow removal.

Our second assessment of the tallow problem came from long time Nature Center supporter, Dr. Mark Schexnayder at Louisiana State University Agricultural Center who recommended “napalm” (good thing we knew he was kidding!).

The third assessment was from the National Park Services Exotic Plant Management Team in April 2007. They had never seen such a large concentration of tallow in such a small area (84 acres, the other 2 are buildings). After considering a controlled burn and deciding that it would not get hot enough to kill the tallow, the team suggested the slash and spray method which includes cutting the tree and spraying the stump with Garlon during the growing season.

Hiring a summer intern in June 2006 with a Master’s in Environmental Management from Yale to recruit, train, and supervise, volunteers started a concentrated effort to eradicate tallow. Information about wetland loss and

restoration was also given to every group of volunteers.

We began by pulling seedlings out by the roots then thanks to a generous donation of Garlon by Dow Chemicals we could also eradicate the 1 and 2 year old saplings.

June was a busy month with our pursuit of reforestation

through a USACE mitigation project resulting in a preliminary meeting with the Ecological Planning and Restoration Section. Since we lease our land from the City of New Orleans, the Parks and Parkways Director, also attended a meeting where we learned we met all of the necessary criteria for the USACE to determine eligibility for mitigation through reforestation. Acres reforested are based on the number of acres needed to dig “borrow” pits

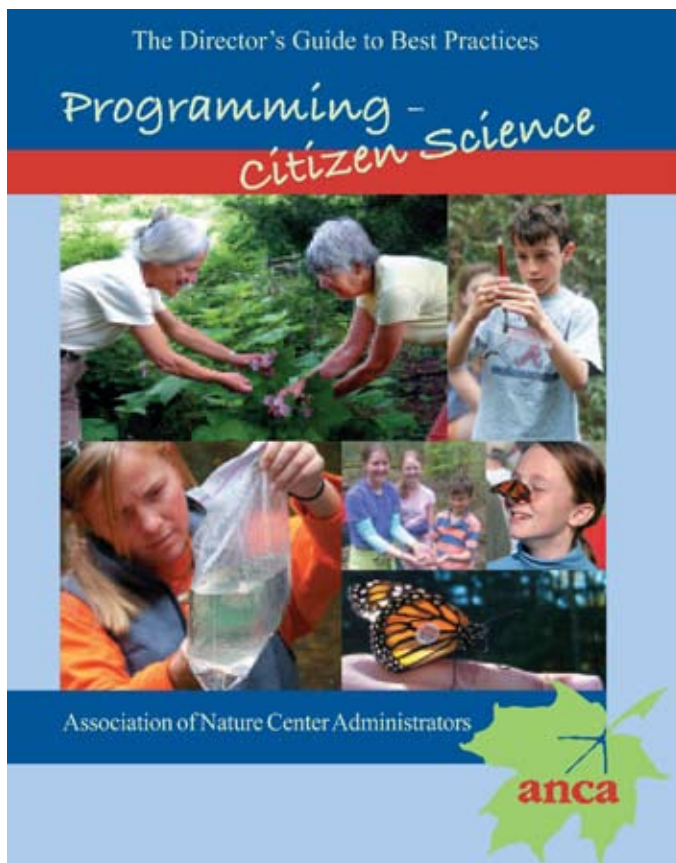
to raise the levees. We also met with the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) Field Director of Gulf Coast Recovery to find out if we could sponsor an AmeriCorps Team. This was also the month we were able to get a roll



photo by Amy LeGaux

*During “Bringing Nature Back” planting day this past January 168 volunteers worked in the cold and rain to plant nearly 500 trees as part of restoration efforts at the Audubon Louisiana Nature Center.*

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off dumpster and port-o-lets (you may know them as port-a-potties).

September 2007 brought the demise of all the remaining mature tallow trees with the help of a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Southeast Refuge Fire Fighter and the Audubon Zoo's Arborist. Tallow drop their seeds in the fall at the tender age of 3 years and just one tree can drop tens of thousands of seeds. The CRCL also finalized the plans to reforest our first 4-5 acres. We began meeting with the USDA-NRCS regarding density and a planting plan. Botanists from LSU Agricultural Center, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and Audubon Zoo's Director of Horticulture helped us identify which trees to plant and locate suppliers.


Operation Nehemiah; a local organization that brings in volunteers from all over the country to help with the recovery process, housed our AmeriCorps team which arrived at the end of November. Our teams first project was clearing paths for transects the USDA-NRCS needed to test dilu-



photo by Amy LeGaux

*Before Hurricane Katrina in August 2005 the Audubon Louisiana Nature Center was comprised of a rich mosaic of native plants with boardwalks and paths meandering throughout.*

tions of Arsenol; a systemic herbicide that can be used year round. The test plots will determine what dilution of the herbicide will kill tallow but allow native flora to grow. The same day the Arsenol was applied, debris removal began on the restoration site. Soon after, we got the news from the USACE Mitigation Team that they want the Nature Center property to be their first restoration project and the final FEMA Project Worksheets were completed.

Our AmeriCorps team left on January 24th after having removed four acres of tallow and were invaluable as team leaders on our January 19th planting day. Audubon Nature Institute eagerly awaits the final funding figures from FEMA and remains committed to the New Orleans East community and the restoration of the site. 

*Amy LeGaux served as Acting Director of Audubon Louisiana*

*Nature Center for the two months prior to Hurricane Katrina and as their Education Curator since 2003. She has been involved in Environmental Education for the past 28 years*

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