

Muddy Sneakers to Begin Two-Year Research Partnership with NC State University

In the fall of 2014, Kathryn Stevenson, a researcher with North Carolina State University, reached out to Muddy Sneakers with interest in including the organization in future research opportunities focused around the creation of superior tools for measuring environmental literacy.

Stevenson, in her post-doctorate work at NC State, has focused much of her research on measuring the impact of environmental education and coincidentally credits her passion for experiential outdoor learning to her time attending Green River Preserve summer camp (in nearby Cedar Mountain). Both parties then agreed to seek out funding opportunities to support such a project in the near term. The staff and board of Muddy Sneakers immediately embraced the idea of collaborating with a top research institution to better measure the program's unique impact beyond the data derived from students' annual end-of-grade (EOG) science test scores.

In November, Muddy Sneakers was fortunate enough to secure a two-year funding commitment from the Judith Haskell Brewer Fund, along with in-kind support from NC State, allowing the project to move forward beginning

August 2015. This exciting collaboration will find Stevenson serving as Lead Investigator for NC State alongside a team of talented academics from across the disciplines of Forestry, Environmental Education, Elementary Education, Environmental Sociology, Fisheries, Wildlife & Conservation Biology and Statistics. This group will come together to

1.) evaluate Muddy Sneakers' education within public school curriculum.

Following the completion of the project, both parties will collaborate in presenting their findings at regional and national conferences as well as pursuing multiple opportunities to publish in both academic and popular publications. Muddy Sneakers' partnership with NC State marks a tremendous advancement in the organization's efforts to further quantify its impact and a significant step forward for environmental education.



current programming and 2.) collaborate in the creation of a unique environmental literacy measurement tool. This tool, the first of its kind in the nation, will seek to quantify the program's impact on elementary-level environmental literacy with the goal of it being applicable to other organizations seeking similar measurements. This measurement effort also coincides with a nationwide call to action within the environmental education community to create measurement tools, in alignment with state environmental literacy plans, that support further integration of environmental



Instructor Spotlight: Carlton Burke



What is your background?

I've always been involved with the outdoors. As a child, I roamed the woods and chased and kept snakes, turtles, lizards, and 'possums. After high-school, I got a degree in Fish and Wildlife Management and eventually wound up working for the Western North Carolina Nature Center in Asheville, NC for more than 25 years. I worked there first as an Animal Naturalist/ Keeper and then most of the time as the Curator of Exhibits, taking an early retirement in 2005 to become a freelance Naturalist and Educator.

How long have you been a MS instructor?

I began working with Muddy Sneakers at the very beginning with the pilot program back in 2008.

Why do you like being a MS instructor?

I get to be outside and influence young people to appreciate and respect our wild resources at a variety of outdoor destinations.

What is one of your most memorable moments on a MS expedition?

When I was teaching a lesson to a group of students in Pisgah National Forest and a black bear suddenly appeared nearby – that got everyone's attention!

What is your favorite expedition site?

Almost anywhere in DuPont State Recreational Forest – there are so many places to go with lots of interesting trails and many natural areas to enjoy.

What do you spend time doing when not teaching for MS?

I rescue and rehabilitate birds of prey and other injured or orphaned wildlife as a licensed wildlife rehabilitator, teach classes on native wildlife, trees, and other natural history topics at the NC Arboretum, and present live wildlife education programs for area schools, camps, and other organizations with my teaching collection of reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

Director's Report



It had only been two minutes before one student came rushing back upstream, stumbling with excitement as he maneuvered the rocks in the creek. Eyes wide, classmates gathered around his net with wonder and reluctance. Peering over their shoulders, I too gasped at the site of a small, fluttering trout. Our young explorer looked on, gripping the net tight, grinning from ear to ear. This scene was a highlight of my recent spring day shadowing an 'Aquatic Ecosystems' expedition with Rosman Elementary at Gorges State Park. Knee-deep and bent over a rushing creek, students carefully caught, examined and released an incredible array of species ranging from mayflies and snails to frogs and fish. It was magical to watch the students' excitement as they carried out the scientific method, each disproving their hypothesis that the stream had low biological diversity. With each species identified, students were amazed at their local stream's high "health" score and left informed and engaged about the important role they each play in protecting that biodiversity for all those who live downstream.

Muddy Sneakers, in an effort to increase environmental literacy, continues to facilitate incredible moments of wonder while reflecting on Wendell Berry's definition of

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After seven years of school programming and two years of summer day camp, Muddy Sneakers' alumni community has swelled to nearly 7,000 students served. In Fall 2015, the program's footprint will expand again surpassing a landmark 20 schools across six NC counties and will become multi-state with the launch of an Upstate South Carolina pilot program in Greenville County. This

pilot will be the first step towards growing the Muddy Sneakers program to serve many more schools across the Carolinas and beyond.

In order to continue this growth, Muddy Sneakers counts on the partnership and support of its schools and districts, Corporate Sponsors and most importantly, **local Community Sponsors like yourself.** Your annual Community Sponsorship is directly invested in the students we serve and will contribute towards the 2/3 of program funding needed to match each school's 1/3 contribution. Sponsorship ensures students will experience the natural classroom where they discover and learn from the places we all share and uncover the scientific wonders constantly on display for those who know how and where to look.



Muddy Sneakers Receives Three Noteworthy Grants

Spring 2015 was one of the most successful grant seasons to date for Muddy Sneakers with multiple noteworthy awards. A diverse group of grantors each found Muddy Sneakers' mission to clearly align with their respective efforts to increase time spent outdoors, preserve and interpret the region's natural heritage and innovatively promote science literacy as it relates to STEM.

KEEN Effect II – April 2015

In celebration of Earth Day, KEEN Footwear announced Muddy Sneakers as one of seven grantees to be awarded \$10,000 as part of the KEEN Effect grant program. From a pool of 800 applicants representing 19 countries and all 50 states, Muddy Sneakers was honored to be one of only five U.S. recipients and the only organization located east of the Rockies. Each grantee is expected to use their award to help build stronger communities, a healthier planet and to inspire people to spend more time outside. The KEEN Effect is a grant program that supports non-profits around the world who are inspiring responsible outdoor participation.



'Ignite the Power of STEM' - Biogen Idec Foundation (Triangle Community Foundation) – March 2015

In recognition of Muddy Sneakers' work towards improving core science instruction for elementary students in furtherance of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), the Biogen Idec Foundation recently awarded the organization a grant for \$3,000. Muddy Sneakers clearly satisfies the Foundation's goals of promoting science literacy in innovative ways, enabling teachers to bring new, exciting hands-on science experiences to students, programming with underserved youth and creating excitement around STEM topics.



Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership – February 2015

Funded with public dollars through the National Park Service, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area recently awarded Muddy Sneakers a grant for \$7,000. This grant is significant in that it marks the organization's first federal award. Each BRNHA grantee must promote one of five themes related to the preservation, interpretation and development of the heritage resources of Western North Carolina. Muddy Sneakers' work directly impacts the BRNHA theme of 'natural heritage' and funding support will be applied towards the organization's expansion into two to three additional schools in the 2015-16 school year.



Muddy Sneakers Teacher of the Year: Brian Ballenger

Muddy Sneakers is delighted to honor Brian Ballenger, fifth grade science teacher at Vance Elementary School, as our Teacher of the Year. Mr. Ballenger has served as a lead teacher for Muddy Sneakers expeditions in each of the past three years in the classroom. Previously an environmental educator at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, he has been a tireless advocate for increasing access to outdoor learning opportunities for his students and others within Asheville City Schools. One Muddy Sneakers instructor noted, "It's a joy to share a day in the field with Brian. His excitement for the natural world is contagious, and he always offers his students the same respect that he asks of them." Mr. Ballenger will be presented with the award at his school's Fifth Grade Awards Program on June 11.

-Ben Nelson, Assistant Program Director / Field Instructor



We'll Miss You, Mr. Fred!

If you have been in the field with Muddy Sneakers lately, you may have noticed something missing. Enthusiastic students? (They're here!) Science Notebooks? (Check!) Backpacks, compasses and magnifying glasses? (Still have them!) Take a closer look at our team of naturalists and you may notice a larger-than-life figure missing from the bunch. Fred Roane, aka 'Mr. Fred,' a Muddy Sneaker pillar from the very beginning, has officially retired but will remain connected with the program as a substitute instructor. The organization would like to take this opportunity to thank Fred for his passion in sharing the natural world with thousands of youth over the last seven years.

A Blue Ridge Master Naturalist, wild edible expert and favorite among 5th graders across the region, Fred began working with Muddy Sneakers prior to the inaugural 2007 pilot program. Even before Muddy Sneakers launched, Fred scouted sites, helped develop curriculum and was a mentor to the new staff. Fred tirelessly volunteered with fundraising efforts, program development and even was known to make special appearances in the classroom. During field expeditions, Fred's students always came back from their day with laughter, enthusiasm and amazing finds to share with the group. Students routinely requested Fred to be their instructor and even gave him nicknames that he fully embraced such as Grandpa Fred, shortened on occasion to 'G-Fred'. Thank you Fred, for the passion and dedication you shared with all those in the Muddy Sneakers community. We will miss you dearly but look forward to seeing you on the trail!

-Molly Gillespie, Assistant Program Director / Field Instructor



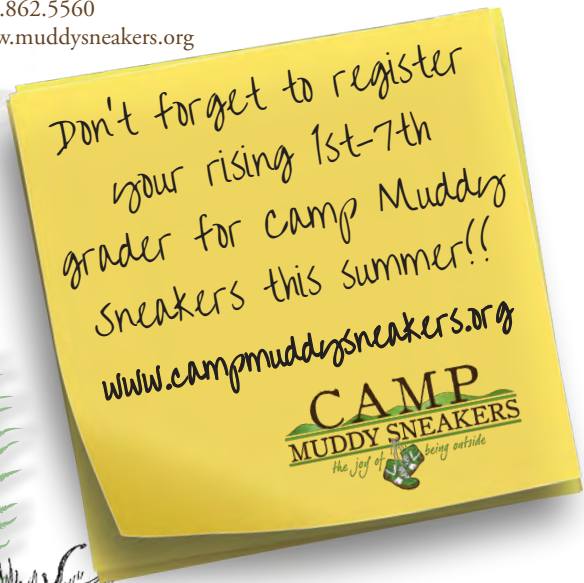


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the joy of learning outside

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JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

Become A Community Sponsor

With ever-increasing school interest, Muddy Sneakers relies on the support of its Community Sponsors to grow this incredible program and **we need your help!** 'Sponsors' serve as the organization's annual members, a group of donors committed to ensuring their financial contributions directly translate into more children connecting with the natural world. Visit www.muddysneakers.org to learn how you too can join the movement!



"This is what school should always be like. You are teaching us and we are learning, but we cannot even tell we are learning. We are just having fun out here!"
-Pisgah Forest Elementary Student

"After one minute of silent hiking all of the sudden it's like BOOM! you're connected with nature!"
-Savannah, Edneyville Elementary

