

## National Project Learning Tree Conference Comes to Washington State

by Heidi Smith



*PEI staff led workshops, participated in panels and helped to host the National Project Learning Tree conference in Stevenson, Washington.*

### A few highlights:

On Monday morning PEI FieldSTEM Coordinators Amy Keiper, Megan Rivard and Daniel Cuevas offered a two-hour Trees & Me workshop.

George Geissler, State Forester with the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), officially kicked things off by welcoming the guests on day one of the conference.

PEI board member Hanford McCloud and Nisqually Tribe Education Liaison Bill Kallappa provided the keynote address on day one.

The national Project Learning Tree (PLT) conference in March was a busy time for PEI staff. Many of our statewide team were on hand to lead breakout sessions, participate in panel discussions and both give and receive awards throughout the week. More than 100 PLT coordinators from around the country gathered in Stevenson, Washington for a packed schedule of workshops, presentations and field trips with experts in their field acting as tour guides.



*PEI Board Member Hanford Mccloud of the Nisqually Tribe delivered the Keynote Address along with the Tribe's Education Liaison Bill Kallappa.*

Along with Florida PLT Facilitator Dr. Robert Raze, PEI's Program Director, Denise Buck, received the Gold Star award which recognizes outstanding PLT Coordinators for their years of exemplary service and for their contributions to the mission and goals of the PLT program. Denise has served as the Washington PLT Coordinator since 2017 but has been facilitating PLT, Project WET and Project WILD workshops for much longer.

“Denise is pretty fantastic – she has been sparking joy with PLT for many years. Her empathy and enthusiasm for our work and personal lives help connect and bond us as a community of friends,” said LeeAnn Mikkelson, Oregon PLT Coordinator.



***PEI Program Director Denise Buck was recognized with PLT's Gold Star Award.***



***Lynette Falkner received a PLT Lifetime Achievement Award for decades of practicing sustainable forestry and sharing***

There were few dry eyes in the house when PEI South Sound FieldSTEM Coordinator Lara Tukarski presented Lynette Falkner with the Project Learning Tree Lifetime Achievement Award. Lynette and her husband Bob practiced sustainable forestry for decades at Custer Creek Tree Farm, a property that has been in Lynette's family for 124 years. The Falkners hosted tours for students over several decades, sharing knowledge about tree identification, plot sampling, log scaling, fish habitat and the value of sustainable management practices. Bob passed away in 2022 but his legacy continues through the hundreds of students who experienced the farm.

Laura Six, Forest Ecologist for Weyerhaeuser, Centralia College Professor Emeritus of Earth Science, Patrick Pringle, and DNR Landslide Hazards Geologist, Mitch Allen, gave a fascinating overview of Columbia River Gorge geology and flora and the history of forest management in the region. During an outing to the gorge, Forest Service Field Ranger, Lily Carey, and Park Ranger and Interpretive Specialist, Beth Kennedy added further to the group's knowledge.

Thanks to everyone who made this conference happen and all those who participated in making the week a success!



*Some members of the conference went on an interpretive tour of Columbia River Gorge.*