

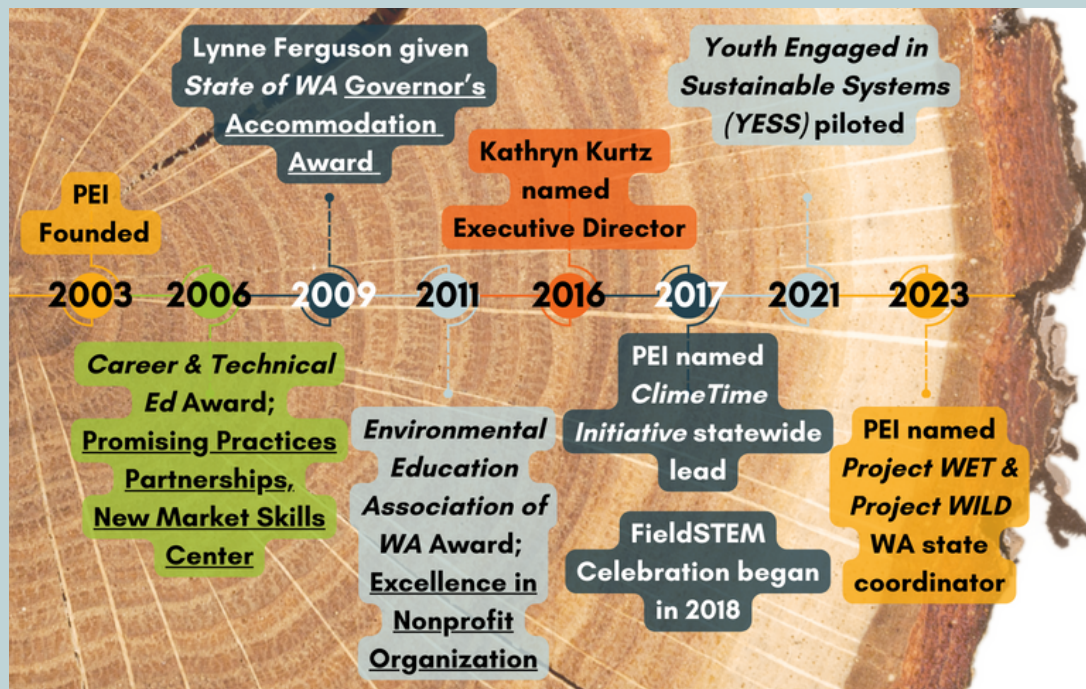
20 YEARS OF COMMUNITY-BASED SCIENCE, OUTDOORS

The Origins of PEI - A History

PEI was born amid the confluence of two complementary circumstances: the need for locally relevant environmental education resources for K 12 teachers throughout Washington State and a strong desire within the timber industry and state agencies to help the public understand the ecological considerations - and benefits - embedded in their work.

In 2003, the good news was that the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction had an environmental education department. The department, however, had few resources and little manpower. "There was one dedicated person," says PEI co-founder Lynne Ferguson. "It was a programmatic approach that reached only people where that person lived, and there didn't seem to be any real statewide plan for environmental education."

On the industry side, public perception was at a historic low. Retired Port Blakely President John Warjone recalls industry approval ratings hovering around 30%. "We were getting really bad press," he says. "We concluded that we needed to do something to explain how the industry works and how we're doing the best we can. We thought of having an association made up of Washington Forest Protection Association members."



In the 1970s, WFPA hired Ferguson as the state coordinator for Project Learning Tree, an international forest-focused environmental education program, to lead the new organization. Aside from WFPA contributions, the first funding came through an Environmental Protection Agency grant to assess the work they were doing. "Those findings would contribute to the overall field of environmental education across the country," Ferguson explains. "

Dr. Margaret Tudor became a frequent collaborator. Tudor was the director of the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife, co-founder of Nature Mapping, and the statewide coordinator for Project WILD, an environmental education program focused on animal habitat and behavior.



Before long, it became evident that more partners were needed, according to Norm Schaaf. The former president of Merrill & Ring was a board member of WFPA in the early 2000s. "Our resources were stretched," he recalls. "We realized that long-term funding couldn't be provided entirely by our membership, so how do we move the program into an independent, nonprofit organization? We wanted to open it up to more groups but still maintain the integrity of the program. There was a careful selection of inviting people with shared interests." Organizations that joined included the Conservation Commission, the aquaculture and agriculture industries, and the Department of Natural Resources.

PEI officially became an independent organization in March 2003 with Ferguson as its first Executive Director. Later, Tudor joined Ferguson as Co-Director.
