

Collaboration with Community Partners

From the beginning, PEI has been rooted in collaboration. Its board of directors in its early years as a nonprofit connected directors of the leading education associations and multiple state agencies with leaders in the natural resource management industries, an unusual and compelling combination.

“Our first few board meetings were extremely popular because these people had never met each other,” recalls Ferguson. “We had the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the director of the Department of Fish & Wildlife, the Washington State Principals Association, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, and representatives from several timber companies.” Ferguson also said of the early meetings, “One of our strategies was to never have a board meeting without an educator present. Our board would then hear directly from educators about what they were doing in their classrooms. That really energized everybody.”

In-house, Ferguson and Tudor were bringing Project Learning Tree, Project WILD, and Project WET together under one roof as the programs’ respective statewide coordinators. “We became strong by working together,” says Tudor.



Another EPA grant created an opportunity for Tudor to work with university professors running teacher training programs to incorporate environmental education. “Our interest was to bring Project Learning Tree and Project WILD into their training through state standards and an assessment,” Tudor explains. “These professors were very interested and thought it was an important aspect to include.” Those teachers/trainers later conducted PLT and Project WILD workshops around the state.

Even before PEI became an official organization, an important foundation of our work was centering our partnerships with indigenous tribes and leaders across the state. Ferguson worked with several indigenous partners including the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission in the late 1980s to produce and publish *The Indians of Washington and the Environment*, which helps “students gain an awareness of tribal ways of life through exploration of historical and contemporary interactions with the natural world and non-Indian people.”

The collaboration continued through the creation and publication of the [Shadow of the Salmon](#) resource guide to accompany the video that follows a young Indigenous man as he learns about the history and environmental legacy of the Pacific Northwest. In recent years, PEI has partnered with indigenous leaders across the state to incorporate indigenous ways of knowing throughout the climate science materials: [Solutions Oriented Learning Storylines](#).



OSPI has also been a key partner. Ferguson and Tudor participated in Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) committees as advocates for the integration of environmental education with its own set of standards. “I was on the social studies committee, and we had someone on the arts committee,” says Ferguson. “We were very well received by the teacher groups that were carving out the EALRs because they saw how Project Learning Tree and Project WILD activities met the academic standards they were looking for.”

Along the way, PEI developed relationships with other groups, such as the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary. The two organizations have been collaborating to deliver Ocean Science workshops to Olympic Peninsula educators since 2016. PEI has also been working with the Washington Invasive Species Council (WISC) since 2015 to develop curriculum and workshops that introduce educators to the many ways invasive species can be integrated into lessons. The partnerships benefit both organizations. For WISC, training teachers to educate their students about invasive species multiplies the number of people on the lookout for non-native plants, insects, and animals. For PEI's part, invasive species are a relevant topic that easily engages both educators and students.



Students participating in an early field investigation.

