

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm jess_tabolt@hotmail.com

Title: Conservation Matters for Kids, Too!

Written by: Betty Jo Taffe, Past President, Quincy Bog Natural Area / Pemi-Baker Land Trust

Forty years ago Rumney resident Joe Kent had a vision: a vision of protecting a local wetland from imminent development, and of creating an organization dedicated to “preserving natural areas in the Baker River Valley,... keeping [them] open to the public for study, research and education in natural history and for recreation appropriate to a natural area.” The wetland became the Quincy Bog Natural Area, and the organization he founded took on the name Rumney Ecological Systems (known today as the Quincy Bog Natural Area / Pemi-Baker Land Trust).

One of the things Joe loved best about the Bog was the opportunity to introduce children to the world of nature. Pictures from the 1980s show Joe leading school groups around the Bog and proudly bestowing the Quincy Bog Natural Science Award on local science fair winners. Connecting children with nature is still part of our vision, all the more important today because of the extent to which children are inside, plugged in and often alienated from the natural world.

In his book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Natural Deficit Disorder*, journalist Richard Louv argues that exposure to nature is “essential for healthy childhood development”; and links the divide between children and the natural world to the rise in childhood obesity, attention disorders and depression. Connecting children with nature not only improves the lives of our younger generation, but is of critical importance to future conservation efforts. People protect what they value, and they value what they know and love. Quincy Bog reaches out to teachers and parents to ensure that “Conservation Matters to Kids, Too.”

Every year hundreds of school children visit Quincy Bog. Thornton Central School third-grade teacher Barbara Patterson has been bringing students to the Bog since 2004. When asked why, she replied, "Visiting the Bog allows children to take part in project-based, hands-on learning. Kids learn by doing! But more than that, the children love the Bog and never forget it! They become part of Quincy Bog because they're helping to take care of it."

While school groups are welcome to visit the Bog on their own, Bog volunteers help with many of the school visits, leading groups of students around the Bog and interpreting what they see along the trail. During the 2013-2014 school year, Bog volunteers assisted 149 students and their teachers from the Thornton Central, Warren Village, Plymouth Elementary, and Russell Elementary (Rumney) Schools. In past years student groups from as far as Bristol and Belmont have also participated in volunteer-led visits to the Bog. The Plymouth Regional High School AP Biology class has also been a regular visitor, using the Bog as an outdoor laboratory where they apply what they've learned in the classroom. Our Quincy Bog School Coordinator (that's me!) is happy to assist teachers with school visits. I can be reached by phone at 786-2553 or by email (bjtaffe@gmail.com).

In 2009 Quincy Bog launched a new Jr. Naturalist Activity Program for young people ages five to twelve. Children who complete the required number of activities (which varies by grade) and a service project take a pledge to protect special places like Quincy Bog, to continue learning about nature, and to share that knowledge with others. After taking the pledge they receive a badge designating them a "Quincy Bog Jr. Naturalist."

The program was originally designed for children to do with a parent or other family member, and eight children have become Quincy Bog Jr. Naturalists mentored by their grandmothers. But the program has also generated the interest of local schools, two of which have made it a part of their third grade science curriculum. Warren and Thornton third graders use our activity booklets during fall and spring field trips to the Bog as well as for supportive activities before and between visits. Other groups including the Campton 4th grade, the Bristol

Middle School Summer Program and a Londonderry Girl Scout Troop have chosen to complete the required activities in a single visit. Class service projects have included Warren's "The Great Quincy Bog Book," a play presented to 1st and 2nd graders about protecting Quincy Bog, a poster about the Baker River watershed, letters explaining what the students learned at the Bog, and videos about the Bog and the wildlife living there. To date 237 students have become Quincy Bog Jr. Naturalists, promising to protect special places and continue learning about the world of nature.

Parents or teachers that would like to forge a closer link between their children and the natural world can find out more about the Quincy Bog Jr. Naturalist Program at www.quincybog/jrnaturalist.html. The Bog provides activity books to families (available summers at the Quincy Bog Nature Center in Rumney) and school groups, and badges to the children who complete the required activities.

Yes, conservation matters to kids, too, and Quincy Bog is doing its part to forge a closer link between children and the natural world. You can join us by bringing a child to the Bog this summer!