

PROTECTING SOUTHWEST FLORIDA'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND WILDLIFE THROUGH
POLICY, ADVOCACY, RESEARCH, EDUCATION AND HABITAT STEWARDSHIP



Audubon Western Everglades

Conservation Leadership Program

Creating Tomorrow's Environmental
Leaders Today

CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP

AN AUDUBON WESTERN EVERGLADES PROGRAM

WHY THIS PROGRAM

The Southwest Florida (SWFL) bioregion, anchored by the Everglades, barrier islands, beach environments, tidal estuaries and the 10,000 Island archipelago, is an incredible natural resource at risk and is dying. It is also an essential economic driver, recreational resource, and environmental classroom used by Florida residents, domestic and global ecotourists. Yet, many of SWFL's inhabitants are not even aware that ever increasing environmental and climate warming threats are impacting its very existence. Increasingly, frequent algae blooms in its rivers and canals and red tide infestations along its coastal waters have dramatically impacted commercial and sport fishing businesses; caused massive die-offs of shore birds, sea birds, wading birds, inshore game fish, crustaceans, dolphins and manatees, and raised public health concerns. Tourist and hospitality industries are reeling due to negative news coverage on traditional and social media platforms. Indicators abound—the most dramatic being the loss of freshwater aquifers, collapse of wetlands, climate warming, urban sprawl and loss of species habitat—and forebode incalculable and potentially irreversible negative consequences to our natural and human ecologies.

AWE believes that the solution rests with reversing four prevailing community education conditions:

- The limited knowledge many youth and adults have about the place in which they live and its connection to a larger bioregion, thus feeling neither motivated nor empowered to preserve it.
- Schools seldom supply the holistic experiences and skills needed for students to fully grasp their home natural environment, its connection to the greater bioregion, and the importance it plays in maintaining a healthy human community.
- Science is largely taught abstractly from books and in the laboratory rather than from sensorial immersion in, and journalistic reflection about, the places in which we live.
- Skills, such as observation, mapping, field data collection and analysis, presentation of recommendations and findings to the community, and mobilization for action—precisely the skills required for science-based stewardship—are not part of standard curricula. Reversing these leads to a science with commitment and an activism with understanding.

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This Conservation Leadership Program (CLP) focuses on building student environmental awareness that prepares them to advocate for local actions that protect natural habitat and wildlife; understand how community conservation policy evolves; experience how teams of students can make a difference, and explore future environmental educational and career pathways.

Given this after school and classroom learning adventure, students will:

- Focus on key environmental issues facing Collier County and Southwest Florida local ecosystem ranging from the challenges of urban sprawl, impact of invasive species, diminished wildlife habitat, protecting keystone and indicator wildlife, importance of water quality and climate warming resiliency.
- Learn skills that help create broad-based community awareness of science-based conservation and stewardship in the Southwest Florida bioregion.
- Explore environmental science and human ecology issues through “connecting with nature” field adventures and classroom sessions using film and guest speaker presentations to spark informal group discussions.
- Share conservation actions with their communities and other regional student groups through social media postings and publishing *Climate Voice*, a student authored digital online newsletter.
- Observe, collect, analyze data and study conservation actions for Marco Island’s burrowing owl colony, gopher tortoise creep, and Collier County migratory shore-bird flocks.
- Use GIS mapping software and “drone cameras” as planning and analytical tools that foster a deepened sense of connection to the bioregion.
- Prepare for a life-long commitment to environmental activism and community engagement.

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TYPICAL PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Students will have the rare opportunity to explore their local ecosystem through a unique experiential and comprehensive learning model that is delivered by outstanding experts in the field.

Educational Focus	Hours	Venue	Instructors	Transportation
1) Why Conservation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program overview • Climate change • Local challenges • SWFL environmental history • Using your Journal 	4 hrs	School	Brad Brittany	No
2) Field Adventure Corkscrew <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo safari • Keystones/Indicators • Habitat • Corkscrew Video • Using your Journal 	6 hrs	Corkscrew	Dr. Jane Brittany Site Staff	14-seat van
3) Marco Conservation Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owl Watch • Gopher Tortoise • Habitat • Science/Research • Local resources 	6 hrs	School	Dr. Jane Brittany Nancy R.	14-seat van
4) Field Adventure Rookery Bay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boat excursion • Coastal Environments • Habitat threats/protection • Rookery Bay AV presentation • Shorebird Stewardship/research 	6 hrs	Rookery Bay	Dr. Jane Brittany Site Staff	14-seat van

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5) Community Education Classroom Session	2 hrs	School	Ted	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking action • Climate Voice publication • Editorial design/review team • Leveraging Social Media • Using your Journal 			Brittany Lori	
6) Fledgings Awards (Date)	2 hrs	School	Dr. Jane	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program review • Student presentations • Climate Voice publication • Future education/professions • Birding as a life-long activity 			Brittany MIA Mentors Lori Ted Brad	

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PROGRAM STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

My name is Haylen Irvan and I am a member of the Conservation Leadership Program here at Marco Island Academy, in partnership with Audubon of the Western Everglades (AWE). On Saturday, February 12th, I was given the opportunity to visit Tigertail Beach with two of my teachers and a group of fellow students. I can safely say that while I already have a knowledge and passion for conservation, this trip opened my eyes to much more. The difference between learning in a classroom and learning in the field is massive. It is truly amazing what can be learned when we, as humans, step back and let nature be our teacher.

I was able to meet many influential people along the way at Tigertail Beach, one being Tish Roland. She is a UF/IFAS Collier County 4-H Agent and she guided us around the beach. Roland was far more than your stereotypical tour guide; her energy and personality kept us engaged and awake (which is difficult for high school students at 8:30am). She led us through the dense mangroves, over soft mud flats, and through shallow water where oyster bars and seagrass beds awaited our careful footsteps.

It is truly fascinating to learn about how every component of an ecosystem is interconnected. For example, seagrass beds are far more important than they may seem. Their role in the manatee population has proven to be in-

credibly significant as seen recently in Brevard County's Indian River Lagoon. This topic was covered on our visit to the beach as it is becoming a serious concern for Floridians. The manatees are starving due to the lack of vegetation in the area. Seagrass is in short supply due to, you guessed it, humans. The aquatic vegetation

is struggling to grow because of algal blooms caused by eutrophication. This process occurs when agricultural runoff containing excessive nutrients enters the water. It is no shock that anthropogenic practices tend to have a negative effect on the environment, yet we still fail to raise awareness.

While we may only be a small group of high school students, our voices deserve to be heard as we are the future of our planet. Some may not see the monster of a planet humans are creating, but we do! We must educate those around us to ensure that we will have a healthy planet to wake up to the

next day and we must also do our part to take action. Taking action can be simple tasks such as limiting waste on coastlines or using environmentally sustainable products. If you never get out and explore, you will never discover. What are you waiting for? Do your part by experiencing nature firsthand.



“Yes, this sea hare feels exactly how it looks.”

Name: Class

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Program Faculty and Instructors Pool



Dr. Jane Ruprecht, Ph.D. – Educator & Wildlife Advocate

Dr. Jane is a renaissance person with a varied educational and experiential background. She has 43 years of educational involvement as a Physical Education & Health teacher and coach, and Guidance Counselor. Upon moving to Florida, she was hired to start the Alternative school programs for Collier County. During her 25 year tenure she served as: Lead Teacher, Counselor, taught English, Reading and was selected as a Golden Apple teacher in 2007.

Dr. Jane utilized many innovative programs and practices to reach out to the at-risk students such as: coordinating with the United Arts Council where she secured numerous grants to bring in artists and equipment to immerse students in hands on learning experiences. Additionally, she was the forerunner of the “gardening” movement in schools, working with the 4-H program through IFAS Extension services. She had students 20 years ago planting gardens on the campus and selling their vegetables to the local vocational school. Another program was a photo contest with the students. Utilizing donated cameras, she enlisted the donor couple to accompany the students on field trips, and they served as the contest judges. Prior to the field trips, Dr. Jane held photography classes for the students.

Photography has been a big part of Dr. Jane’s life and she has been in shows at Rookery Bay, and the Von Liebig art center. Connecting people with nature and being able to dialogue about the issues that surround us here is important.

Dr. Jane has served as the president of the Collier County Counselors Association for three years, where she is credited with creating and implementing a full day developmental workshop for school counselors, and she also served a year term as the President of the Florida State Counselors Association. While teaching in Middlesex High school in N.J., Dr. Jane also worked for the YMCA running a local youth program and directing major Youth programs for the six-state area. One of these is the Model United Nations program, serving 1,000 youth and another is the N.J. Youth & Government program which served 350 youth.

Dr. Jane completed her Ph.D. degree in Counseling at Barry University in Miami in 1998. She earned her Master’s degree in Guidance and Special Services at Seton Hall University in South Orange, N.J. Her B.A. degree is in Physical Education and Health from Montclair State College, Montclair and has completed the Master Naturalist courses offered by the University of Florida and is recognized as a FMNP Land Steward.

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Tish Roland MS and CIG – UF/IFAS Collier County 4-H Agent

Tish has worked at the extension office since 2011. She is a Florida Master Naturalist and instructor, Project WILD Facilitator, Project Learning Tree Facilitator, and a certified National Interpretive Guide. She loves to engage youth to explore the outdoors and learn about the different habitats that can be found in Florida. In addition, she strives to empower them to make the right choices in regards to environmental issues that our world faces today.

Michael Sipos – UF IFAS Sea Grant Agent for Collier County

Michael's special program focus is on delivering educational materials regarding sustainable fisheries, fisheries enhancement, water quality, coastal estuary and environmental literacy. He is a native Southwest Floridian and enjoys fishing, spearfishing, diving, kayaking and more. Michael is also an avid aquarist and keeps both fresh and saltwater aquariums.

Trisha Aldridge – UF/IFAS Collier County 4-H Outreach Coordinator

Trisha has worked at the extension office since 2004. She is a Florida Master Naturalist, Project WILD Facilitator, Project Learning Tree Facilitator, and a certified National Interpretive Guide. She has a passion for environmental education and teaching youth the importance of preserving our natural resources for future generations.

Marie Morris – UF/IFAS Collier County 4-H Outreach Coordinator

Marie has worked at the extension office since 2006. She is a Project WILD Facilitator, Project Learning Tree Facilitator, and is working on becoming a Florida Master Naturalist. She is devoted to educating young minds on the importance of preservation and conservation of our fragile ecosystems in Florida.

COMMUNICATIONS & LOGISTICS TEAM

Lori Beall – AWE Program Director

Lori has been with AWE for 15-years and found her passion for the environment while working in the marine industry traveling extensively throughout the Leeward Islands in the Caribbean, New England, and the Yucatan Peninsula. She provides program support for AWE's Marco Island Owl Watch, Gopher Tortoise and the Winter Shorebird Stewardship programs and works closely with 60 to 80 local volunteers annually. Lori has years of experience in organizing and leading workshops and presentations on conservation issues on Marco Island and running field trips for a variety of ecotourists, school and business groups. She also manages our social media platforms and website and is professionally and personally committed to preserving the natural habitat that supports threatened and endangered species.