

The Arkansas Forestry Association (AFA) and Arkansas Project Learning Tree (PLT) recently honored Kathy Rusert, of Mena, as its 2011 Outstanding PLT Educator at the group's annual meeting in North Little Rock.

“Kathy truly represents the best of the best in environmental education,” said Arkansas PLT Coordinator Rob Beadel. “We are pleased to honor her work with this award.”

For the past 24 years, Kathy Rusert has taught environmental education at Acorn School, near Mena. This includes all grades one through eight and as sponsor for grades 9-12. In addition to regular classroom teaching assignments, she teaches “Methods of Teaching Science” to college seniors for Southern Arkansas University. Project Learning Tree and Projects WET and WILD are included in the curriculum for all of her classes and provide relevant learning matched to Arkansas frameworks.

Mostly forested with tall pine and oak trees, the area now has natural walking trails throughout with large stones containing tree identification and providing a place for visitors to sit. Students in grades Pre-K through 12 frequent the area, as well as the general public. There is a large gazebo for class groups, a shaded wildflower garden, bird blind, tracking boxes, bird/bat houses, a pond, a creek and a natural spring. Adjoining the forest is a greenhouse and garden plot, as well as a picnic area. Science students in grades 7-12 did all of the work.

To increase awareness, Kathy has made presentations about environmental education to numerous local civic and education groups. On a national level, she has arranged for a complete student body assembly presented by the Alliance for Climate Education (ACE) and guided students in the “Go Outside” project.

As a freelance writer for PBS Teacher Source, many of her environmental education articles and activities have been featured. Kathy's classes have been national recognized in the Disney Planet Challenge, Teaching Tolerance magazine, Progressive Farmer magazine, NEA Today, and the ASTA Newsletter.

Kathy and her husband live on a cattle farm in Cherry Hill, where she enjoys gardening, hiking, fishing and playing with their granddaughter.

For more than 60 years, the Arkansas Forestry Association has been the only nonprofit association representing the state's entire forestry community. With more than 1,200 members, the organization promotes the wise use and management of forestland. For more information about AFA programs, look online at [www.arkforests.org](http://www.arkforests.org).

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Caption: (Left) Acorn School educator Kathy Rusert receives the Outstanding Project Learning Tree Educator (PLT) award from Arkansas PLT Coordinator Rob Beadel (right).