

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

March 2018



Tanya Oznowich

Environmental Education Supervisor

NJ Department of Environmental Protection

For 30 years, Tanya Oznowich has served as Environmental Education Supervisor at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) under 12 New Jersey Governors and several DEP commissioners. Guided by a love of the natural environment, Tanya has spent her career raising awareness and integrating environmental education into schools, communities and homes. With Tanya's help, schools across New Jersey are incorporating environmental education into their curriculum, from kindergarten through college. Tanya said, "I'm grateful that green practices and sustainability have entered our worlds of education, business, development and government; our relationships with Earth systems must be considered and understood in all we do."

For her accomplishments in bringing environmental education to countless classrooms and communities, she has been honored with awards from the New Jersey Education Association, New Jersey Audubon, the North American Association for Environmental Education and the New Jersey Society of Women Environmental Professionals.

Tanya is an active volunteer; she is a founding member and former president of the Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education and has served in leadership roles with the North American Association for Environmental Education, Pocono Environmental Education Center, the New Jersey Science Education Leadership Association and the New Jersey Science Teachers Association.

What is her motivation? Tanya explained that she gains strength and focus from ecology and natural systems. She said, "Nature captivates people of all ages. I cannot live without experiencing nature and I know that being in the woods or in a park makes me feel better, inside and out. I try to share this benefit with others, including adults and children. It has been a salvation for me."

Sustainable Jersey for Schools Student Learning Task Force

Known for her ability to see the big picture, Tanya is an asset to any team that needs a critical thinker to develop a plan of action. Tanya participated in the formation of the Sustainable Jersey program when it was launched in 2009 and is now active in the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program. She is the co-chair of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Student Learning Task Force along with Jamie Cloud who is the founder and president of the Cloud Institute and a thought leader in the field of Education for Sustainability. Tanya also serves on the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Certification Standards Committee.



"Sustainable Jersey for Schools is a strong motivating force that I am grateful to have based in New Jersey," said Tanya. "It offers more than 90 actions where schools can earn points, and most of these provide opportunities to integrate student learning with school and community-based actions." In addition, there are numerous actions that call for the

integration of sustainability into classroom learning across a broad range of disciplines, from art and social studies to science and technology. She added, "Other national sustainability certification programs such as the U.S. Green Ribbon Schools program and Eco-Schools USA, are also vehicles for integrating student learning into school sustainability initiatives and I am glad that DEP works cooperatively with all of them."

New Jersey Commission on Environmental Education

Tanya administers support for the [New Jersey Commission and Interagency Work Group](#) on Environmental Education. These are state level groups charged with guiding the delivery of environmental education through the development and administration of a state environmental education master plan. The commission has formally existed through Executive and Administrative Orders since 1989. Both the commission and work group were statutorily established in 1996 through passage of the New Jersey Environmental Education Act.

New Jersey was one of the first states in the country to develop a statewide environmental education master plan in 1993, titled *Environmental Education in New Jersey: A Plan of Action*. Its goal was to "develop in the citizens of New Jersey the knowledge, attitudes and values, skills and behaviors needed to maintain, protect and improve the environment." Tanya hopes this commission will continue to provide support and direction for environmental education for people of all ages in the state.

State Environmental Education Directory Site (SEEDS)

Tanya and her DEP colleague Marc Rogoff developed and administer [SEEDS](#), an online resource to promote the environmental education curriculum resources and services that are supported by DEP, either through its programs or through its alliances and partnerships. The site also educates the public about extended learning in [outdoor classrooms](#) and features information about [Project Learning Tree](#), [Project WILD](#), [Project WET](#) and [Sustainability Education Resources](#). In most cases the materials can be freely reproduced. Together, Tanya and Marc created and run DEP's [School Facilities](#) directory, a listing of environmental regulations, policies and best practices that pertain to educational institutions. The directory was developed in response to New Jersey's increasing interest in green and sustainable school practices.



Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education (ANJEE)

In 1985, Tanya was invited to join a group of twenty environmental educators from around the state to strategize for enhancing the impact of environmental education on the behaviors of New Jersey citizens. The outcome was the formation of the [Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education](#) (ANJEE), a non-profit whose founding mission was to create, through education, an awareness, understanding and a concern for the quality of the environment and a conviction that human well-being is dependent upon a healthy environment. It was at these early ANJEE meetings that Tanya was introduced to the work of the DEP. Tanya said, "My years involved with ANJEE have been a valuable and rewarding experience." Tanya mentioned that ANJEE is hosting its [Autumn Outdoor Conference](#) (Imagine a World in the Outdoors) on September 28, 2018. The organization is accepting conference presenters through submission of [a form by April 1, 2018 via email](#).



Earth Day Website

DEP has administered the Earth Day – New Jersey website for more than 17 years. Each year, the website attracts more than 40,000 visitors in April through May. Tanya said, "The website features an events calendar, school programs listing,

history of Earth Day and Environmental Education Week and suggestions for what families, schools and individuals can do to help protect the environment and participate in green, sustainable activities.” In celebration of Environmental Education Week (April 22 – April 28, 2018), the website showcases environmental education programs and events that are submitted by [an online form](#).

Educational and Professional Experience

Tanya earned her Bachelor’s degree in Parks, Recreation and Leisure Studies/Interpretive Sciences from Slippery Rock University and her Master’s in Educational Leadership from Delaware Valley College. She had her first summer internship and job at [Cleveland Metroparks](#), a park called the ‘emerald necklace’ because it is a ring of eight lakefront parks. After a visit to the Cleveland Metroparks nature center at age 12, Tanya knew that she wanted to be a naturalist and told the nature center directors that she wanted their jobs. Recognizing her aptitude, the center made her a junior naturalist and at age 13 she worked at the summer camp. She has been engaging the public in natural resources ever since.

After college, she was hired as an environmental educator at the Ranger Rick Wildlife Camp in North Carolina where she conducted outdoor science programs and trail walks. She next went to work at the Lutheran Memorial Camp in Ohio where she coordinated student educational programs. Tanya spent three years at the [Pocono Environmental Education Center](#) as a project coordinator for conferences, workshops and residential programs. She was then employed for four years as the director of education at [Weis Ecology Center](#) in Ringwood, New Jersey where she increased center usage from 600 visitors in 1984 to over 10,000 in 1988. In March 1988, Tanya started working at the DEP as an environmental education professional. Her position at DEP has strengthened her expertise in other professional areas, including public education campaigns and marketing, public speaking and training, grant writing and administration, stakeholder meetings and facilitation and customer service.



Woody Owl, Smokey Bear and Tanya

Tanya is a hobbyist singer and songwriter and said that she has always incorporated music into her programs at the various camps and environmental centers where she worked and even at DEP school assembly programs and environmental events. She laughed when she said, “I would arrive at schools with Woody Owl, Smokey Bear and my guitar and we would give upbeat environmental assemblies. It is fun to engage an audience of all ages in songs about ecology and environmental concepts, along with using some simple props and creative dramatics.”

What You May Not Know About Tanya

Tanya was born in Cleveland, Ohio and raised in the Cleveland suburbs. Her parents grew up on farms and Tanya has good memories of her grandparents’ farm. Her parents spent a lot of time outdoors; they were always hiking or in nature with kids in tow. Tanya said that she and her brother roamed the woods, “Always off the trail and out in all seasons.” Her nature-centered childhood influenced her lifetime work. Tanya now lives in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. In her free time, she enjoys hiking, yardwork, kayaking and biking.



Sustainability’s Three-Legged Stool - Environment, Economics and Equity

Tanya said, “I value the three-legged stool approach to sustainability and especially Sustainable Jersey’s use of ‘People, Prosperity and Planet.’ Environmental education grew out of a global United Nations forum that was held in the late 1970s. When we look for solutions to environmental problems, it is more effective to see the whole picture in terms of the environment and understanding how economics, culture and other societal factors influence an issue or problem. I think environmental education is most realistic when it has an emphasis on all of these areas.”