Arnot Conservation Education Program

The Arnot Conservation Education Program is designed to engage private landowners, land managers, extension educators, and students in learning about and actively conserving, managing, and enhancing our natural biological communities. Led by Steve Morreale, Senior Research Associate, and Kristi Sullivan, Conservation Project Leader, the program moved forward to further integrate sound, research-based information with extension outreach and teaching. The past year has been great:

- An Interactive Conservation Trail was initiated as the keystone of a high-visibility demonstration site that serves as an "outdoor classroom". The trail traverses a variety of habitats and provides many opportunities for learning about and exploring ecology, habitat enhancement, and conservation of amphibians and reptiles. Along the trail, wildlife habitat was enhanced with the creation of 6 shallow woodland pools. Also, construction was begun on raised wooden boardwalks that allow visitors to more closely interact with animal communities in the pools. As summer approaches, we are amassing volunteers and looking for additional support and donations of materials to finish building the boardwalk system.
- As part of the effort to integrate the Conservation Education Program with formal teaching efforts, the interactive trail was incorporated into the Department's Woodlot Management and Field Conservation Ecology courses. In addition, two Arnot Forest Research and Extension Interns, mentored by Steve Morreale and Rebecca Schneider, helped construct the woodland pools, and conduct research to help determine the value of creating pools for the enhancement of forest biodiversity. A main focus of these studies was to measure early colonization of pools by amphibians, and the importance of initial pond conditions on amphibian development. In short, the pools were very successful in attracting a surprising variety and number of animals. So, our message to landowners is: "build it and they will come".
- Applied research results from these and other projects were incorporated in a series of hands-on educational and training workshops for 4H Career Exploration Days, Boy Scouts, Master Forest Owner (MFO) Volunteers, and members of the New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA). Soon after a workshop, 2 participants successfully installed shallow pools of their own, and had similar success in enhancing biodiversity on their own property. In an unsolicited article for the New York Forest Owner magazine, they wrote of their own ponds, " The ponds drew attention from the wildlife before they even had water. What a theater of activity these ponds have become. They beckon us to pull up a seat and sit a while." These are exactly the type of results that the Conservation Education Program is aiming for. --Two down, thousands to go.
- The Conservation Education Program served as a regional educational model for others. Educators from Corning, NY viewed our demonstration site and trail as a

model of interactive learning for their school district. Likewise, the Trumansburg School District expressed interest in enhancing the habitat on their school property, and using our template for hands-on education. In the upcoming summer, the Cornell Institute of Biology Teachers will be joining us at the Arnot to take advantage of the special opportunities provided by the Conservation Education Program.

- "Hands-On Herpetology, Exploring Ecology and Conservation", written by Rebecca Schneider, Marianne Krasny and Steve Morreale, is an educational tool that has been incorporated into the Conservation Education Program and has been used as a model for teaching youth about the biology, ecology, and conservation of amphibians and reptiles. Over 1,000 copies of this book were sold in 2002.

Through the Conservation Education Program this summer Kristi Sullivan, Steve Morreale, Pete Smallidge, Gary Goff, Rebecca Schneider, Barb Knuth and others will be joining together for a 3-day intensive, hands-on field course for students planning for a future in an environment or natural resource-related career. The course is designed to give students essential skills in modern field sampling techniques, mapping and orienteering, wildlife and plant identification and natural history, and forest ecosystem assessment techniques. Also, for the first time this summer, the Arnot Conservation Education Program will offer trainings and classes for the public in amphibian and reptile biology and identification, habitat enhancement techniques, and deer and forest interactions.

Private landowners learn about habitat enhancement techniques along the interactive trail.

New woodland pool at the demonstration site.