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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



New Resource Provides Educators with Tools to Connect Young Children to Nature

Mississippi Museum of Natural Science Education Team to Launch Innovative Program

Jackson, MS – The Mississippi Museum of Natural Science will serve as the state’s primary sponsor of *Growing Up WILD*, a national early childhood education and training program for educators and caregivers of children ages 3-7. *Growing Up WILD* is a new initiative of the Council for Environmental Education (CEE) that builds on children’s sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Through a wide range of activities and experiences, *Growing Up WILD* provides an early foundation for developing positive impressions about nature and lifelong social and academic skills.

In step with the children and nature movement, and aligned with the goals of the federal “No Child Left Behind Act,” *Growing Up WILD: Exploring Nature with Young Children* is designed to help educators and caregivers engage young children in activities that encourage exploration of the natural world. Written by educators and wildlife professionals, and reviewed by experts in early childhood education, the guide provides an early foundation for developing active, healthy children who appreciate nature and are prepared to enter school with ample learning skills.

“Mississippi faces some of the nation’s most critical health and education challenges. *Growing Up WILD* will not only improve emotional and physical health, but also social, language, and cognitive development,” explains Angel Rohnke, Museum Education and Project Wild Coordinator.

The museum will expand their effectiveness for reaching educators (i.e. childcare leaders, preschool educators, kindergarten and first grade teachers, home childcare providers, etc.) in Mississippi by offering professional development opportunities. Workshops provide an interactive, hands-on approach allowing participants to experience *Growing Up WILD* activities and to discover how using them can help accomplish educational goals.

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“Life-long connections with nature begin at an early age,” says Josetta Hawthorne, Executive Director for the Council for Environmental Education. “By targeting children ages 3-7 and the adults who care for them, *Growing Up WILD* will impact these audiences by increasing the chance that children will receive exposure to nature, increasing opportunities for nature play, increasing comfort levels with the outdoors, and increasing positive memories of time outside at an early age.”

Growing Up WILD goes beyond building connections to nature and prepares young learners for future academic success by emphasizing scientific inquiry. The guide also includes literacy components to provide word-rich experiences for young children that will aid in reading readiness. Additional skills addressed in *Growing Up WILD* include beginning inquiry, word recognition, speech, observation, classification, sequencing, measuring, listening, and cooperating.

Growing Up WILD demonstrates through its materials and training programs how early childhood learning objectives can be reached through use of the outdoors and nature-themed activities combined with art, music, and play. It also builds the confidence of early childhood educators to lead outdoor explorations by providing ready-made activities, easily digestible background information, and high quality training programs.

The *Growing Up WILD* activity guide:

- Is written especially for early childhood educators of children ages 3-7.
- Features 27 field-tested, hands-on, nature based activities in a full-color 11”x17” guide.
- Includes crafts, art projects, music, conservation activities, reading and math connections and much more.
- Involves social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive domains to help foster learning and development in all areas.
- Supports developmentally appropriate practice allowing children to learn at levels that are individually, socially, and culturally appropriate.
- Is correlated to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Standards and the Head Start Domains.

For more information about how your agency can benefit from *Growing Up WILD*, contact: Angel Rohnke at 601-354-7303 ext. 105 or by email: angel.rohnke@mmns.state.ms.us.

The mission of the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science is to promote understanding and appreciation of Mississippi's biological diversity through collections, research, scientific data bases, education, and exhibits; and to inspire the people of our state to respect the environment and to preserve natural Mississippi. The museum is located at 2148 Riverside Drive in Jackson. Call 601.354.7303 or visit www.msnaturalscience.org for details. The Museum is part of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks. The Mississippi Museum of Natural Science is an Equal Opportunity Employer and is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Growing Up

WILD™

Providing an Early Start for Connecting Children to Nature

Growing Up WILD is an early childhood education program that builds on children's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Through a wide range of activities and experiences, *Growing Up WILD* provides an early foundation for developing positive impressions about nature and lifelong social and academic skills.

Growing Up WILD is a valuable tool for helping fish and wildlife agencies meet their conservation education goals. *Growing Up WILD* recognizes that:

- ✿ **Children start developing attitudes towards wildlife and nature at an early age.** *Growing Up WILD* provides 27 easy-to-use activities to help educators and caregivers introduce nature to young children.
- ✿ **Many early childhood educators may not have the knowledge and skills to teach about nature.** *Growing Up WILD* provides the background information and professional development needed to help educators be successful.
- ✿ **Nature-based recreation has been declining.** *Growing Up WILD* provides activities about outdoor recreation and a "Take Me Outside" component for every activity.
- ✿ **A conservation ethic starts in childhood.** *Growing Up WILD* provides a "Helping Hands" conservation suggestion for every activity.
- ✿ **Adults with active outdoor lifestyles were encouraged by their parents to go outside as children.** *Growing Up WILD* provides "Home Connections" cards with activities families can do outside together.
- ✿ **A public supportive of wildlife management and conservation has sufficient scientific knowledge and problem-solving skills.** *Growing Up WILD* provides developmentally appropriate activities that lay the foundation proven by research to be necessary for acquiring these.

For more information about how your agency can benefit from *Growing Up WILD*, contact:

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A division of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks

Exploring Nature with Young Children

Ages 3-7 Project **WILD**™



Growing Up WILD



Exploring Nature with Young Children



Ages 3-7