

## Second Nature Helps Launch West Coast Education for Sustainability Network

Kent Curtis

In late July 2001, Second Nature, Inc., a Boston-based nonprofit organization dedicated to accelerating the transformation to sustainability in America's institutions of higher education, convened an organizing and planning retreat at the University of California, Santa Barbara campus, for West Coast colleges and universities. For nearly a decade, Second Nature has been working with schools across the United States to aid in their transition to sustainability through interdisciplinary education and a change in mindset. Second Nature began presenting regional workshops in 1997. The West Coast workshop represented Second Nature's first efforts in this region.

This workshop marked the preliminary steps among colleges and universities in California, Oregon and Washington toward forming a West Coast Education for Sustainability (EFS) Network. Second Nature defines EFS as "a learning environment providing the awareness, knowledge, skills and values to help all current and future generations achieve good health, economic security, social equity and stability while restoring and sustaining the earth's life support systems."

The underlying principle of EFS, illustrated in efforts like the Talloires Declaration (<http://www.ulsf.org>) that commits college and university presidents to a 10-point sustainability program, is that colleges and universities offer a critical but overlooked point of leverage to initiate a sustainable society. Further, Second Nature has found that this approach to education is promoting better learning overall, increased civic engagement and implementation in local communities, a greater connection to place, and the skills and values needed in the transition to a sustainable society.

The July retreat was attended by thirteen leading faculty and administrators from

nine colleges and universities in California and Oregon. Another 35 faculty and administrators from more than a dozen schools in California, Oregon and Washington expressed interest in joining the network, but were unable to attend this meeting. The meeting was funded by the Compton Foundation, and facilitated by Second Nature staff members Tony Cortese, John Glyphis, Cynthia Staples, and Kent Curtis.

Second Nature led two days of discussions covering the "Best Sustainable Practices" already underway within West Coast schools, brainstorming about projects that should or could be underway, and discussing the kinds of institutional and knowledge support such projects would need in order to effectively occur on a regional basis.

"This opportunity to create leverage among West Coast schools is very exciting," said Anthony Cortese, Second Nature's president. "So many of the schools have inspiring initiatives already underway; the kind of collaboration we are looking at promises to strengthen and advance the efforts of everyone involved."

Participants in the meeting learned about some of the sustainability efforts taking place at the nine schools represented, including a carbon emissions footprint project at Lewis and Clark College, the building of an entirely new campus according to the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) green building standards at John F. Kennedy University, and an environmental indicators project being produced at UCLA. Other schools brought posters highlighting some of their efforts, such as the Sustainable Communities Curriculum at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo and a community-based environmental education program at Santa Barbara Community College.

Participants also engaged in an inspired discussion about the kinds of projects they imagined being planned and coordinated by a West Coast EFS Network. Their ideas ranged from creating funding for student research projects and conferences to share best practices, to creating a peer-reviewed on-line journal dedicated to sustainability

issues. They concluded that the best method for accomplishing these goals would be to form an official network of West Coast schools. They then organized themselves into an interim Steering Committee and pledged to meet again officially before 2001 ends.

The West Coast participants advocated for a continued role for Second Nature in their ongoing organizational and functional efforts. They specifically asked that Second Nature:

- Capture the goals generated during the July meeting
- Draft a proposal for multi-year funding to initiate the network
- Convene and facilitate a Steering Committee meeting in late 2001
- Open a Second Nature office on the West Coast
- Consider convening a West Coast Best Practices workshop in 2002

The optimism and enthusiasm generated during and since the event have been auspicious. Second Nature has already submitted one grant proposal in support of the effort, and has several others in various stages of development in concert with participating schools and members of the Interim Steering Committee.

"This a great opportunity for West Coast schools," said Robert Wilkinson, professor of environmental studies at the University of Santa Barbara and a co-organizer of the meeting. "By combining Second Nature's solid track record and the energy and innovation of people in our West Coast schools, we lay the groundwork for a sustainable future."

Meeting participants also walked away with renewed energies. Some have begun cultivating their contacts in the region, with the ultimate goal of creating a network that includes all West Coast schools. Others have made arrangements for Second Nature to provide on-site consulting at their individual schools. Still others are considering hosting regional workshops on topics like green design or agriculture and sustainability.

For more information about Second Nature and the West Coast Network, visit <http://www.seconnature.org>.

Address correspondence to Kent Curtis, Second Nature, 99 Chauncy Street, Boston, MA 02045; (phone) 617-292-7771; (e-mail) [kcurtis@secondnature.org](mailto:kcurtis@secondnature.org).

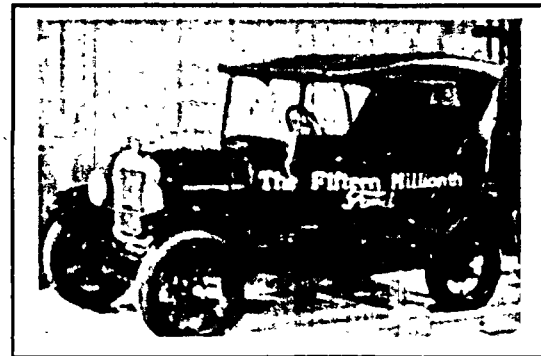


## **NAEP's 27th ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

*Environmental Stewardship –  
Rebuilding and Maintaining  
America's Resources*

Check our web page, [www.naep.org](http://www.naep.org), for complete information and forms, or contact Ron Deverman, Parsons Transportation Group, at [Ronald.Deverman@parsons.com](mailto:Ronald.Deverman@parsons.com) or at 312-930-5142.

**Dearborn, Michigan  
June 23-26, 2002**



**Proposed Tracks**  
NEPA Symposium  
Brownfield Forum  
Land and Watershed Management  
Professional Ethics  
Environmental Management Systems  
Public Participation  
Transportation  
Sustainable Development  
Higher Education  
Environmental Policy in DoD  
Sustainable Methods & Policy  
Science & Technology Integration  
Energy Conservation & Management  
GIS-Based Decision Support  
Urban Ecosystem Restoration