

## Earth Team Volunteers, Conservationists Bring Tree Lessons to Jackson Classrooms

By Justin Fritscher, NRCS Mississippi

*Jackson, Miss.* — Trees are important natural resources—this is the lesson that a dedicated group of Earth Team volunteers shared last week with Mississippi youngsters.

Members of the Earth Team, the volunteer work force of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), read Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax* to students at Van Winkle Elementary School in Jackson last week.

The children's book promotes the importance of the conservation of natural resources, and it was a good way to connect the Hinds County Earth Team group with youngsters in their community.

The book is about a character named the Once-ler, who is profiting from the harvest of Truffula trees. The Lorax pleads with the Once-ler to conserve use of the trees, warning that once all are removed, the environment will be in peril. This book, first published in 1971, is a favorite of environmental educators.

Seventeen volunteers practiced their Dr. Seuss vocabulary and wore *The Cat in the Hat*-style hats to accustom the students to the importance of environmental stewardship through this fun book.

Lynn Porter, the group's coordinator, said the book is a perfect fit. This Earth Team effort was coordinated with the National Education Association's Read Across America Day, promoting the reading of *The Lorax* in classrooms across the U.S. This Earth Team group read the same book last year.

Volunteers left each of the 24 classrooms with its own copy of the book and gave each student a bookmark. Volunteer Nancy Lau gave the school a DVD of the classic cartoon, *The Lorax*. This volunteer effort also coincided with the March 2 debut of the movie *The Lorax*, based on the book, and Dr. Seuss' birthday.

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Earth Team volunteers in Hinds County received state and regional accolades last year for their dedication to environmental education for youngsters.

“We hope that one day, when it’s their turn to make policy and steer our nation, [these children] will be aware of our nation’s unique—but sensitive—ecosystems,” said Porter, district administrator for the Hinds County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Mississippi’s Arbor Day is held in February, and Earth Day is in April, making trees a popular subject this time of the year. The SWCD partners with the county’s NRCS employees and Earth Team to hold a tree giveaway in early February.

This year, district employees visited 24 schools, giving trees to nearly 2,000 students to take home and plant. This event was followed by two weeks of educational programs in schools on the importance of trees and how to plant them. It originally started as “Tree Planting Week,” but because of its popularity, Porter and the SWCD extended it to two weeks.

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*(Left) Wyvette Robinson, district clerk of the Hinds County Soil and Water Conservation District, reads The Lorax to students in Jackson. (Right) Members of the Hinds County Earth Team group gathered at Van Winkle Elementary School to give an environmental education program.*

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