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PROJECT LEARNING TREE AND SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY INITIATIVE JOIN FORCES TO EXPAND YOUTH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

AWARD WINNING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM PARTNERS WITH SUSTAINABILITY LEADER TO REACH NEW GEOGRAPHIES AND AUDIENCES ACROSS NORTH AMERICA

WASHINGTON, DC — The Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc. (SFI) and the American Forest Foundation (AFF) announced today that SFI has become the new home of Project Learning Tree (PLT). PLT is an award-winning environmental education program that uses trees and forests as windows on the world to increase youth understanding of the environment and actions they can take to conserve it. PLT's integration into SFI provides an opportunity for the program to expand its reach and impact. And SFI's role as a sustainability leader will be bolstered by PLT's expertise in education, an increasing focus in SFI's community engagement work. PLT was previously housed at the American Forest Foundation.

PLT has consistently received prestigious awards and recognition from leading educational and community organizations. PLT state coordinators, workshop facilitators, and educators have won the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching and the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators. More than one quarter of U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools are PLT GreenSchools. PLT's instructional materials are aligned with state and national academic standards and meet or exceed the North American Association for Environmental Education's Guidelines for Excellence. PLT's Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood curriculum won a Learning Magazine Teachers' Choice Award and PLT has also received straight A's in environmental education from the California Department of Education. More than 20,000 educators attend PLT workshops every year and this partnership between PLT and SFI will help the program grow and reach new audiences across the globe in diverse ways.

"SFI has enthusiastically supported Project Learning Tree for years. Formally making PLT part of the SFI Program offers an exciting opportunity to strengthen SFI's growing youth education efforts and to build on PLT's enormous success. We begin this relationship from a position of strength given SFI's role as a leading sustainability organization focused on responsible forestry, conservation and community engagement" said Kathy Abusow, President and CEO of SFI Inc. "We have big plans for the future and are committed to continuing PLT's work as a high-quality education program. Ultimately, we would like to be able to say that every teacher across North America and beyond recognizes Project Learning Tree as an invaluable resource for professional development, environmental education curriculum, and taking children outdoors to learn."

The benefits of educating youth about responsibly managed forests are not just environmental. Experiencing nature through forests and other means at an early age are important components of a healthy lifestyle. The majority of PLT lessons get teachers and their students outdoors and active. This helps to address common health issues in children today, such as obesity, attention deficit disorder, and depression.

"For more than four decades, Project Learning Tree has taught countless students how to think, without telling them what to think. It is the unbiased education that educators demand," said Tom Martin, President and CEO of the American Forest Foundation. "The AFF Board approved the transfer of PLT as



well as funding to help ensure the program is maintained for the next five years. We believe this will enable SFI to focus its energy on mechanisms to strengthen and expand the reach of PLT.”

“Given Project Learning Tree’s focus on environmental education and SFI’s mission to ensure the future of our forests, bringing the PLT program under SFI’s umbrella will further both SFI’s and PLT’s reach in ensuring today’s youth can be effective future leaders with a strong understanding of the value of well-managed forests,” said Laura Downey, PLT Education Operating Committee Co-Chair and Kansas PLT State Coordinator. “Over the years, we have worked directly with SFI to help youth make a commitment to sustainability, and to give them the skills to make responsible decisions about the environment.” Effective with SFI becoming the new home for PLT, Laura Downey joins the SFI Board of Directors in the social chamber.

PLT’s network includes state government agencies, forestry associations, non-profits, colleges and universities that deliver PLT programming across the U.S., British Columbia, Mexico, Japan, Brazil, and Uruguay. SFI’s youth network is made up of more than 20 organizations including Boy Scouts of America, Scouts Canada, Earth Rangers, Forest Ontario’s Forestry Connects Program, Envirothon, 4-H, the State University of New York’s Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, and other Indigenous youth programs. This considerable network will enhance PLT’s relevance as a critical element of youth education in support of future forests.

“SFI is a recognized leader in sustainability and will introduce PLT across Canada and beyond to reach even more educators and youth about the forests we share,” said Gail Wallin, Co-Chair of the Canadian Council on Invasive Species and SFI Board member in the environmental chamber. “I believe both organizations will benefit through this new relationship given the common interests, expertise, and passion for the environment and education.”

SFI’s community engagement work includes a long commitment to youth education including previous funding for PLT through SFI Community Partnerships Grants. SFI Implementation Committees also collaborate with PLT to teach kids about trees, forests, and the natural world through hands-on activities that are STEM-focused and inquiry-based.

“Given the history of SFI’s coordination with Project Learning Tree on a national scale and the shared commitment to educating youth, bringing PLT into the SFI program is a natural progression of the relationship because both organizations will be strengthened. As a member of the SFI Board of Directors, and a State Forester, I am excited about how this partnership will support educators and develop future conservation and forest leaders,” said Bettina Ring, State Forester with the Virginia Department of Forestry and an SFI Board member in the social chamber.

About the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Inc.

The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) is a sustainability leader that stands for future forests. SFI® is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting forest sustainability and supporting the links between sustainable forests and communities through grant programs, carefully targeted research, youth education, supply chain assurances, and partnerships that effectively contribute to multiple conservation objectives. SFI works collaboratively with conservation groups, local communities, youth, resource professionals, landowners and countless other organizations and individuals who share our passion for and commitment to healthy forests, responsible purchasing and sustainable communities. SFI Inc. is governed by an independent three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally. Learn more at sfiprogram.org.



About Project Learning Tree®

Project Learning Tree helps develop students' awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of the environment, builds their skills and ability to make informed decisions, and encourages them to take personal responsibility for sustaining the environment and our quality of life that depends on it. Since 1976, Project Learning Tree has trained 700,000 educators to help students learn how to think, not what to think about complex environmental issues. Learn more at plt.org.

About the American Forest Foundation

The American Forest Foundation (AFF), a forest conservation organization, works on the ground with families, partners and elected officials to promote stewardship and protect our nation's forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners working to keep our forests healthy and producing the clean water, wildlife habitat and sustainable wood supplies that all Americans count on from forests.

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