

Washington County staff participates in Seedkeepers Forest School Program



By Michaela Slagle-Saylor, Washington County SWCD office manager

Seedkeepers Forest School Program is a nature-connection recreation program designed for children 3-9 years old. This program is in Jonesborough, Tennessee. They integrate many varieties of education for hands-on learning for a deeper understanding and respect for the environment. Teaching young minds to understand big things is what they do daily. They teach children about plant and wildlife identification, community building skills, map making, gardening, seed saving, and how to be more mindful and make more thoughtful conservation decisions. The Seedkeepers Forest School Program works fervently with children to instill conservation education. This program helps to teach children about the importance of conservation education and provides a deeper understanding of the world and the environment and ecosystems. They also integrate



fire safety skills, early literacy skills, math, and problem-solving skills. Seedkeepers Forest School was the Washington County Conservation Educator of the Year and the Regional Conservation Educator of the year.

The Forest School Program movement is popular in Europe and is beginning to take root and shape here in the United States. These programs help children to understand the world and give space for the children to discover through play throughout the year's season cycles. The foundations of teaching and guiding through this method can deepen their understanding in self-awareness, self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, empathy, social communication skills, independence, resilience, positive attitudes, confidence, and develop their relationship with the natural world by creating opportunities for the children to follow their own curiosity and wonder, learning through discovery. The educators look to the transformations in the landscape throughout the seasons to inform the Seedkeepers' curriculum and create plenty of opportunity for free play and exploration.

Kinsley Graves, soil conservationist, and Michaela Slagle-Saylor, Washington County SWCD office manager, went to Seedkeepers Forest School and toured the campus. They played Pollinator Bingo, read "Sammy Soil," and made Sammy Soil Babies. The students led a nature walk and showed, Kinsley and Michaela their garden, bat boxes, and various wild plant species that grow in the area. After touring the school, it is easy to see that by teaching these young minds about water, soil, nature, and the outdoors it is easy to see how the next generation will be able to succeed and continue to restore the education gap of conservation because of the valiant efforts of these educators.

