**MINNESOTA EDUCATOR SHEILA WILLIAMS-RIDGE RECOGNIZED BY THE NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, October 22, 2016 — Sheila Williams-Ridge, Director of the Shirley G. Moore Lab School at the University of Minnesota, was recently recognized by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), a leader in environmental education, as the recipient of one of NAAEE’s awards recognizing leadership in the field. At a special awards reception during NAAEE’s 45th Annual Conference in Madison, Wis. Williams-Ridge received the Director’s Award for her significant contributions to NAAEE and the field of environmental education.

Williams-Ridge was recognized for her work chairing the 2016 Nature-based Preschool Conference, the annual conference of NAAEE’s early childhood environmental education initiative, the Natural Start Alliance ([www.naturalstart.org](http://www.naturalstart.org)). A former educator at the Dodge Nature Center preschool, Williams-Ridge is also on the advisory team for the Natural Start Alliance, the National Science Foundation-funded Science of Nature-Based Learning Collaborative Research Network, as well as on the leadership team for the Council of Nature and Forest Preschools. Williams-Ridge’s research interests include the benefits of nature-based play, child-directed curriculum, and the effects of nature play in child and adolescent behavior.

"For more than four decades, NAAEE has promoted excellence and impact in environmental education thanks to the determined efforts of our members, supporters, and affiliate organizations," said Judy Braus, Executive Director. “Our award winners are truly inspirational educators and organizations across North America that exemplify the best in our field, showcasing multiple disciplines, approaches, and perspectives--from classroom to community to research--all working toward a more just and sustainable society."

This year, an impressive slate of individuals and organizations from North America were selected across numerous categories. For more information about the 2016 NAAEE Awards including eligibility requirements and a full list of winners, visit [www.naaee.org/our-work/programs/awards](http://www.naaee.org/our-work/programs/awards).

**About NAAEE**

The North American Association for Environmental Education is a pioneering membership organization dedicated to accelerating environmental literacy and civic engagement through the power of education. NAAEE supports a network of more than 20,000 educators, researchers, and organizational members working in environmental education in more than 30 countries through direct membership and 57 state, provincial, and regional affiliate organizations. Through community networks, publications, signature programs, eeNEWS and eeJOBS, NAAEE provides programming and resources for professionals working in all areas of the field. NAAEE’s annual conference, now in its 45th year, convenes leaders from private and public sectors to advance the field of environmental education. For more information, visit [www.naaee.org](http://www.naaee.org/) and naaee.org/eePRO.

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