Roots & Shoots Educator Spotlight: Betsy Agee
Fifth Grade Teacher
Crozet, Virginia

Jane Goodall’s Roots & Shoots program is all about educating youth on how to be stewards of our world — but that goal wouldn’t be attainable without stellar educators guiding them. One such all-star educator is Betsy Agee, an elementary school teacher from Virginia.

Betsy has been leading her fifth grade students at Crozet Elementary in community service projects for years now, but what set this year apart is that she turned to the Roots & Shoots formula for help. She felt that her classroom was not finding a meaningful need to address in 2015 for their annual service project; she found inspiration, however, from a Jane Goodall’s Roots & Shoots training session.

In November 2014, Betsy attended the Share Fair Nation in Bridgewater, VA, where Roots & Shoots taught a workshop on community mapping. There, she realized that mapping — using technology such as Google Earth to create real-time visual understandings of the community — was the key to finding local causes that required immediate attention.

Motivated to learn more, Betsy took the Roots & Shoots free online course, a professional development program which provides educators and leaders with the tools they need to mentor young people in leading community-based service learning projects. The course is free, which allows thousands of teachers, educators and parents to carry out the effective Roots & Shoots formula for service projects: get youth engaged, map the community to find issues, create a project goal and plan, and report back on the campaign’s success to Roots & Shoots. Those who donate to Roots & Shoots help train each of these leaders to implement youth-led projects that can each, in turn, impact thousands of community members.
Betsy used her new knowledge of community mapping, and a $200 mini-grant provided by Roots & Shoots, to initiate a student-led project: **What is in Our Water?**

Students used their map to identify a community issue — that local road and drainage construction around their school could be impacting their water supply. The map also taught them that the Crozet Community Association met across the street from their school, so Betsy reached out to them to share her students’ concerns about local water purity.

Betsy’s students then got to work on their project by collaborating with community members, speaking with the Nature Conservancy, to understand what challenges healthy water systems, and the Open Water Lab, to learn about remote water monitoring. Local media admired the 49 students’ commitment to their community and covered their ongoing project. Impressed by her students’ dedication, Betsy will have her next group of fifth graders continue to remotely collect data on their surrounding waterways. Her students will then report that data to local newspapers so citizens can understand the impact of development on their water sources.

Betsy is an all-star not only for inspiring her students in such a successful, ongoing Roots & Shoots campaign, but for exemplifying the JGI spirit in using technology and education to further her students’ impact on their community. Her own education through Roots & Shoots’ professional development programs played a key role in the success of the Crozet **What is in Our Water?** campaign.

Betsy called the community mapping workshop which inspired the Roots & Shoots campaign “one of the most meaningful professional development experiences of my twenty-five years of education.”