Nature Center Dedication: Work and plans are progressing on the Nature Center that replaces our old library space at the Livingston Demonstration Center. The building will be dedicated at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, June 6th, to kick off ASPI's 20th birthday celebration. Though the Nature Center will not be fully furnished, future plans will be on display. There will be refreshments afterwards.

Appalachian Sustainable Forest Center

Trail System: Two of three nature trails have now been completed and our hope is that the third will be ready by the year's end. The Michael Francis Zalla Trail will be dedicated at 2:00 p.m. on June 8th. Michael Francis Zalla is a young naturalist who was killed in a tragic car accident in 1986. All are invited to see and walk on this beautiful one and a quarter mile trail, starting on the ASPI land and proceeding westward through the adjacent Sand Hill Community Land Trust property.
Policy Change: Due to the fragile nature of our forests ASPI now requires that trail hikers have explicit ASPI approval or guides. Contact Jack Kieffer at (606) 453-2105 for information.

Meetings: ASPI hosted the Lucy Braun Association at its annual meeting on March 21-22.

An Educator's Day will be held on April 19, 1997 at the Appalachian Sustainable Forest Center. This will cover available materials and educational resources on water quality and forest issues. Arranging field trips to the Sustainable Forest Center will also be covered. Teachers, librarians, and other educators are invited. Contact Joshua Bills at (606) 256-0077.

Al Fritsch speaks at Loyola University of Chicago on April 11th on the "Threat to the Eastern American Forest." He will give another talk at Centre College, Danville, Kentucky on May 15th.

The Eastern Old Growth Clearinghouse is now operating and is dedicated to preserving and restoring old-growth forests of the eastern U.S. It is publishing news of interest on a quarterly basis in Wild Earth. Readers may send questions and information on specific old-growth stands to Mary Davis P.O. Box 131 Georgetown, KY 40324 or call her at (502) 868-9074.

Educational Outreach: In the second half of the 1996-7 school year we continue to present the "Forest Treasure" slide show in grade schools all over eastern Kentucky. Our current emphasis is on water quality issues and the ways in which they relate to forest health. This semester about 6,000 students and teachers in about 60 schools will see this presentation by Joshua Bills and Dan Bond. This major undertaking is supported in part through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

4th graders from East Bernstadt Elementary pose with Dan and Joshua after the "Forest Treasure" slide show

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Plastic Houses: Can they be environmetally green?

Al Fritsch, SJ & Consultants

There is nothing ecological about plastic houses! They use large amounts of non-renewable resources and energy to produce. Their permanence is questionable; they are expensive; and they burden segments of society who can least afford it with debt rather than **affordable** and **appropriate** housing which can often be built and maintained by residents themselves.

In Eastern Kentucky so-called "Ecological Plastic Homes" are now being built as permanent low-cost housing for the poor, yet these houses are neither low-cost nor ecologically sound and their permanence is in question. The basic building material is a high-tech corrugated board made of polyethylene or polypropylene virgin plastic, supplied by Eagle Plastics Systems of Pompano Beach, Florida and its holding company Eagle Capital Management. The company's principal clients are missionary groups trying to supply temporary housing for the Third World homeless and disaster victims. Using this source of materials the Appalachian Development Corporation, a group associated with the Christian Appalachian Project, has begun fabricating plastic four by eight-foot panels that are supported by sheet metal studs and fashioned into structures considered permanent for Appalachian people.

ASPI does not fault the efforts at supplying Third World people with temporary housing. Even such houses which have limited lifetimes and are made from non-renewable petroleum products are satisfactory in such emergency cases. Modifying this technique and adapting these materials for use as permanent housing in our country is a different matter altogether. After considering available data, ASPI comes to the following conclusions:

Myth: The Appalachian Plastic House is Ecological.

ASPI is convinced that housing needs are best met using native renewable materials such as wood, e.g., cordwood (see ASPI Technical Paper 5), stone, clay, pressed earth (TP 37), or a variety of low-cost wood and mixed materials (TP 8). We recommend products that are environmentally friendly, low-cost, easy to handle on the part of builders, and have no environmental safety or health hazards associated with "Sick Building Syndrome."