



Environmental Literacy in New Jersey: A Call to Action



Executive Summary

“There is encouraging evidence that the public can learn about the environment and complex ecological relationships. That we are far from succeeding in making this a reality is due to the absence of a comprehensive coordinated approach to environmental education.”

- Kevin Coyle, **Environmental Literacy in America – What Ten Years of NEETF/Roper Research and Related Studies Say About Environmental Literacy in the U.S.** The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 2005 (pg. IX, Executive Summary).

There is increasing urgency for today’s adults and youth to be aware of and to understand society’s complex environmental and ecological challenges and how to address them. Just as importantly, people must understand how the problem or issue involves them directly because of their practices or behaviors, as well as how the problem or issue may affect people’s health and quality of life. Having this knowledge and set of skills describes what it means to be environmentally literate.

Environmental education provides a foundation for in-depth, lifelong learning about the environment by providing people with opportunities for experiencing natural and built systems and learning about the complex relationships that exist between nature and people. The collective experiences and lessons that occur throughout a person’s lifetime help cultivate that individual’s environmental literacy.

Motivated by increasing needs and uses for environmental education, the New Jersey Commission on Environmental Education and Interagency Work Group revised New Jersey’s plan for environmental education in the state. The commission and work group are state level groups charged with developing and administering New Jersey’s environmental education master plan.

The purpose of *Environmental Literacy in New Jersey: A Call to Action* is to cultivate an environmentally literate citizenry. This revised New Jersey environmental education master plan is intended for use by environmental education professionals as a five-year planning and action plan, with a timeframe for delivery between 2010 through 2015. Its targeted audiences are New Jersey’s environmental education providers and practitioners and the ultimate benefactors of *A Call to Action* are New Jersey adults, families and youth of all ages.

A Call to Action provides direction and recommends specific state-level actions that would improve the state’s capacity to support the delivery of environmental education throughout New Jersey for all citizens. This plan is focused on four goal areas:

- I. Know and Understand how Ecological Systems Work;
- II. Care for Ecological Systems;
- III. Keep the Environment and People Healthy; and
- IV. Plan for Today and Tomorrow’s Quality of Life.

It provides direction and recommended actions for locally-based environmental education providers and large-scale coalitions, networks and organizations that deliver environmental education programs, services and resources.

This plan also calls for state environmental education leaders and affiliates to strengthen New Jersey's existing capacity to support environmental education by improving upon the infrastructure already in place. While the recommended actions in *A Call to Action* include some new tasks to help achieve this, they primarily depend upon existing services and resources already being provided by the commission and work group, or support made available by the State Departments of Environmental Protection, Education, the Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education, and other affiliate organizations.

When combined, both sets of actions work together to help unify and coordinate, increase, improve, promote, inform, recognize and track environmental education efforts throughout the state.

The importance and relevance of environmental education for all ages is becoming increasingly clear. The urgency to advance its delivery throughout New Jersey, even during such challenging times, validates the ongoing efforts of the commission and work group and reinvigorates state level commitments to ensure that state support is purposeful, relevant, responsive and effective.

This strengthening of structure and support should, over the next five years, help align and improve environmental education and increase the public's participation in these activities.