



Environmental Literacy in New Jersey: A Call to Action



Section 2 Purpose, Goals and Design of the Plan

The purpose of *Environmental Literacy in New Jersey: A Call to Action* (referred to as *A Call to Action*), is to cultivate an environmentally literate citizenry. The commission and work group adopted a description for environmental literacy that is based on descriptions used by the Environmental Education and Training Partnership and Environmental Literacy Council. It reads as follows:

An environmentally literate citizen understands that:

- *Natural systems and the interactions between the living and non-living environment;*
- *Choices they make as humans, including as consumers, affect the environment;*
- *Choices can either help or harm the environment and the earth's ability to sustain human and other life;*
- *How to deal sensibly with problems that involve scientific evidence, variability, uncertainty, and economic, aesthetic and ethical considerations; and,*
- *What they need to do – individually or as part of a community – to keep the environment healthy, sustain its resources, and create a good quality of life for themselves, their children, and future generations.*

An environmentally literate person is able to understand the complex relationships that exist between nature, people, and the ways in which people live their daily lives. Using this understanding, this person can become motivated to think and act responsibly regarding the environment. The cultivation of an environmentally literate person transpires over many years through an individual's collective experiences and lessons about natural and built systems, green practices, and sustainability.

The field of environmental education provides the necessary foundation for in-depth learning about the environment. In New Jersey, environmental education experiences and information are delivered daily into peoples' lives by various media forms as well as through classrooms, homes, the outdoors, workplaces and employers, communities and technology. Environmental literacy thus depends greatly upon the efforts of numerous environmental education providers and practitioners. This relationship between environmental literacy and environmental education is explored further in **Section 3**.

The ultimate benefactors of *A Call to Action* are New Jersey adults, families and youth of all ages. The targeted audiences for using *A Call to Action* are New Jersey's environmental education providers and practitioners. Providers include the governmental agencies, schools, colleges and universities, educational facilities, nature centers and parks, organizations, companies, foundations and media sources that develop, provide or support environmental education and that are largely based in New Jersey. Practitioners include the teachers, professors, naturalists, instructors, scientists, counselors, scout leaders, volunteers, public and private sector employees, parents and youth who deliver environmental education in various instructional settings throughout New Jersey.

Environmental Literacy in New Jersey: A Call to Action, is New Jersey’s third environmental education master plan. It 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. *A Call to Action* is designed to guide, align and coordinate, improve and recognize, promote and monitor environmental education initiatives in New Jersey, in school-based settings as well as informal instructional settings.

During such economically challenged times, *A Call to Action* puts into motion state level strategies to increase opportunities for partnerships, collaboration and the leveraging of funds, without stressing already-limited services and resources. These strategies will enable state leaders to more effectively and efficiently coordinate environmental education activities between and within agencies and with large-scale educational efforts, as well as share with environmental education professionals information about the state’s priorities and any new resources and opportunities related to the field.

The center-piece of *A Call to Action* is New Jersey’s Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP). The intent of the NJ ELP is to cultivate the environmental literacy of students in grades pre-K through 12. This plan provides a framework for New Jersey schools to expand and improve their environmental education programs. It reflects many of the priorities of the NJ Department of Education and how resources are already being used to integrate environmental content and skills into various school-based initiatives, as well as how federal funds for environmental education will most likely be used, pending passage of the *No Child Left Inside* bill. Regardless of whether this bill passes, the NJ ELP will provide useful guidance to the NJ environmental education providers that provide services to New Jersey students. Details regarding state and national trends in environmental education are discussed further in **Section 4**. Plans to accommodate these federal initiatives, along with state-level action strategies to be carried out by the commission, work group and other partners, are described in **Section 5**.

This plan also issues a “call to action” directly to New Jersey environmental education providers and practitioners to take ownership of it by participating in its implementation, contributions and results. It unites all environmental education efforts by identifying the overarching purpose of environmental literacy and introduces four goal-oriented strategic initiatives that can be supported locally. They are:

- 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.

Each strategic initiative is accompanied by background information, the overarching goal of the initiative, what the environmental education community can do to help implement or support it, actions recommended for specific audiences, and metrics for measuring success. These actions and a timeline are presented in chart form and address three broad audiences: adults (in any and all capacities as individuals, community members, business leaders, parents or consumers), educators (formal and informal, all ages), and youth. The four strategic initiatives are explored further in **Section 6**.

By moving forward this framework of realistic and practical state level and locally based strategies, *A Call to Action* will help strengthen New Jersey’s ability to cultivate an environmentally literate citizenry. Through its implementation New Jersey should benefit, even during economically constrained times, by improving upon the delivery and use of existing environmental education resources and services and by laying proper groundwork for the use of fiscal resources secured during the years ahead.