

# Summit Summary

## 2011 Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Summit

### *Strengthening Educational Partnerships towards a Sustainable Future*



#### OVERVIEW OF THE 2011 SUMMIT

The seventh biennial Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Summit was convened by the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office and the Chesapeake Bay Trust to support the work of the Mid-Atlantic Education Workgroup. The Environmental Literacy Summit provides federal, state, and regional partners with a forum for policy-level discussions and strategic planning to support efforts to ensure that elementary and secondary students in the region graduate with the knowledge and skills to make informed environmental decisions.

In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to work towards the 2011 Summit's theme of "Strengthening Educational Partnerships towards a Sustainable Future." At the Summit, this theme was supported by:

- The participation of 96 individuals from the federal government, national non-profit organizations, and state, local and non-governmental organizations in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, DC.
- The engagement of previously under-represented, but critical partners such as the US Department of Education.
- Sessions in which Summit attendees learned from and participated in discussions about the essential role of scientific inquiry in environmental literacy, utilizing inquiry based learning about the environment beyond the classroom, defining metrics to assess environmental literacy, enhancing the Bay Backpack teacher resource website, and engaging and sustaining support for environmental literacy plans.

#### KEY TOPICS, OUTCOMES, AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

##### **The Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Strategy**

The 2011 Environmental Literacy Summit was kicked-off with the launch to the public comment period for the Mid-Atlantic Elementary and Secondary Environmental Literacy Strategy. This federal strategy, which aims to ensure that federal programs and resources are coordinated, informed by state priorities, and fully available to and used by state partners, was developed with NOAA leadership and support from over 12 federal agencies. The non-profit affiliate Environmental Literacy Strategy that was developed as a parallel effort to the federal strategy, and utilized shared goals and outcomes with the federal strategy, is testament to the strength of partnerships in the Mid-Atlantic region. The contents of both of these strategies and the process used to develop them were reviewed, and summit participants were given a chance to provide their comments. General approval of both strategies was given.

#### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

##### **Defining New Metrics to Track Success in Environmental Literacy**

**Objectives:** Determine whether or not to continue the MWEE field experience indicator and explore potential new indicators.

**Discussion Summary:** The group determined that the MWEE field experience indicator should continue with a stronger instrument to ensure the data collected is accurate and complete. The group also suggests the addition of a metrics on green schools and/or green ribbon schools. In addition to these output measures, the group recommends that the Chesapeake Bay Program undertake a periodic assessment of environmental literacy in the Mid-Atlantic region based on the National Environmental Literacy Assessment framework.

### Next Steps:

- Determine the feasibility of conducting a literacy assessment specific to the Mid-Atlantic.
- In consultation with state education agencies, develop a MWEE field experience questionnaire and determine the appropriate mechanism and timing for its delivery.

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## Enhancing Bay Backpack to Fully Support State Environmental Literacy Objectives

**Objectives:** identify areas where short-term fixes and long-term improvements can be made to the website and discuss proposed enhancements which will better serve teachers and school divisions.

**Discussion Summary:** The Chesapeake Bay Program's [Bay Backpack website](#) is a one-stop shop for teachers and non-formal educators to find environmental and Chesapeake Bay-related teaching resources, field studies, trainings and funding information. The development team provided an overview of the site and highlighted worked to continually enhance the site's content and capabilities. Improvements to the Teacher Resource section and methods for improving product promotion were emphasized during the group's discussion.

### Next Steps:

- Conduct user-reviews with educators and promote Bay Backpack at the 2012 MAEOE conference
- Explore options for improving and incentivizing use of the ratings and comments options on the Teacher Resource page
- Add a "source" field to identify the developer/host of materials on the Teacher Resource page
- Promote Bay Backpack on the Chesapeake Network and investigate additional online promotional opportunities
- Field test the website and blog to make sure teachers can actually access it at school and that it is not blocked by their school system servers
- Host additional conversations about how to improve the Field Studies page
- Strengthen outreach targeted at new and pre-service teachers by connecting with University staff and Professional Development providers

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## Engaging and Sustaining Support for Environmental Literacy Plans

**Objective:** Explore potential partnerships to support environmental literacy and identify additional organizations/individuals to include in the Mid-Atlantic Education Workgroup as well as existing members not fully engaged at an appropriate level

**Discussion Summary:** The group suggested greater involvement of federal partners such as US Department of Education, Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Army Corp of Engineers. For an academic member of the workgroup, it was suggested Cornell University be engaged given their recent EPA environmental education grant. Participants emphasized need for a signature document solidifying support for environmental literacy across jurisdictions. The signature document would request commitments authorizing support and participation in environmental literacy planning efforts. Several groups were identified as potentially introducing and adopting such a policy statement including:

- A. Chesapeake Bay Program
- B. National Governors Association

### C. Council of Environment Chief Operating Officers around the individual jurisdictions (ECOS)

Finally, the group discussed the need to strengthen partnerships between the environmental literacy community and natural resource personnel such as wildlife biologists, foresters, and environmental scientists. It was suggested an events calendar be created for Bay Backpack and promoted through our agencies that would facilitate greater environmental literacy content at natural resource events, as well as more natural resource agency participation at environmental literacy.

#### **Next Steps**

- Conduct a meeting with EPA Office of Environmental Education staff to explore areas for greater collaboration
- Assess current membership of Education Workgroup and reach out to additional organizations identified in this session
- Determine feasibility of modifying Bay Backpack calendar to incorporate broader natural resources meetings and events
- Explore potential for the creation of a new environmental literacy signature document at future workgroup meetings

### **ADDITIONAL SUMMIT COMMITMENTS**

As a result of the discussions that occurred during the Summit, the Mid-Atlantic Education Workgroup and its partner organizations will work together to:

- Formally revise the structure of the Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Workgroup. The currently proposed enhancements would establish an executive committee, a federal advisory group, state delegations composed of state departments of education, natural resource agencies, universities, NAAEE affiliates, and at large members, and regional representation from federal government agencies and non-profit organizations.
- Continue conversations about the role of scientific inquiry and Science, Technology, Math, and Engineering (STEM) education in environmental education and strengthen partnerships related to these initiatives.
- Conduct user reviews to identify and implement key strategies for enhancing the Bay Backpack teacher resource website to fully support state environmental literacy objectives.
- Pursue additional and continued engagement from the US Department of Education and Environmental Protection Agency.