

July 15, 2013

John Holdren, Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20504

Sylvia Mathews Burwell, Director
Office of Management and Budget
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Washington, DC 20503

Cecilia Muñoz, Director
Domestic Policy Council
Executive Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Dr. Holdren , Ms. Burwell, and Ms. Muñoz;

We, the undersigned environmental education-related organizations, appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on the Administration's recently released budget proposal regarding science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education programs. This proposal is the most ambitious and sweeping effort to reorganize federal programs related to STEM education in many decades. We greatly appreciate the clear commitment of the Administration to elevate STEM education as a national priority. We also support your comprehensive and strategic efforts to coordinate, evaluate, and review all federal STEM programs on a regular basis to ensure that effective programs are scaled up and that underperforming programs are improved or eliminated.

However, we are deeply concerned that this consolidation proposal eliminates the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's and Environmental Protection Agency's education grant programs and would not replace this lost funding. We urge you to consider the following facts:

1. The education grant programs at NOAA and EPA represent the only three grant programs within the federal family of agencies which are dedicated to environmental education. Consolidating the funds from these three programs into a much broader STEM education pool of funds ignores the specific need of the federal government to foster environmental literacy. Eliminating the NOAA and EPA programs would also leave the environmental education community without any federal funding program that understands the particular needs and opportunities in our field.
2. The consolidation proposal undermines the specific education mandates given to NOAA in the America COMPETES Act signed into law by President Obama in 2011, the National Ocean Policy Implementation Plan announced by the White House in 2013, and the National Global Change Research Plan 2012-2021 released in 2012.

The proposal also undermines the environmental education commitment made in 2012 by the White House Summit on Environmental Education.

3. Environmental education is a proven tool for exciting students and engaging them in science, as well as math, engineering, and technology. However, environmental education is more than science and other STEM topics. Environmental education is a truly interdisciplinary field, including social sciences and humanities such as economics, policy, sociology, law, ethics, and psychology. Thus, subsuming environmental education into STEM education does not advance many important aspects of the field.

4. These proposed changes also raise a number of serious policy questions about the relative and proper roles of federal agencies in supporting STEM education fields within K-12, undergraduate, graduate, informal, and workforce settings which are specific to their agency's needs and expertise. NOAA, for example, focuses its environmental education on ocean and climate education, and brings tremendous assets and tools to their environmental education work which no other agency can provide. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine another agency being able to help prime the pipeline to serve NOAA's future workforce and the related workforce in state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector who are grappling with issues related to severe weather, flooding, drought, coastal erosion, sea level rise ocean acidification, overfishing and more.

The Obama Administration has demonstrated a deep commitment to addressing our country's overwhelming environmental issues. We believe that the collective wisdom of our nation's citizens, gained through various forms of environmental education, will be the most compelling and successful long term strategy for dealing with challenges such as mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Transforming our nation's economic, energy, and environmental systems to move towards a clean, green economy will require a level of expertise, innovation, and cooperative effort unseen since the 1940s war effort to meet the challenges involved. Architects, engineers, planners, scientists, business managers, financial experts, lawyers, entrepreneurs, political leaders, resource managers and many other workers will all be needed – not to mention environmentally literate consumers - to drive this new green economy.

Our education system sends 3 million graduates out each year into the workforce armed with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge either to advance a green economy, or to continue "business as usual." And the impact, good or bad, of each of these 3 million individuals lasts a lifetime. American workers, managers, and professionals at all levels and in all sectors must understand the foundations of a green economy in order for this transition to be successful, foundations which are being taught now in leading environmental education programs across the country.

In sum, it is time to strengthen rather than weaken environmental education. We would be delighted to work with you on developing new ideas towards this end. Thank you for considering our thoughts.

For questions about this letter, please contact James Elder, Campaign for Environmental Literacy (Elder@FundEE.org, 978-526-7768).

Sincerely,

National NGOs:

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance
American Meteorological Society
Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
Association of Children's Museums
Association of Nature Center Administrators
Association of Science-Technology Centers
Association of Zoos & Aquariums
Brookfield Zoo/Chicago Zoological Society
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Choose Outdoors
CLEARING Magazine
College of Exploration
Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education
Council of Environmental Deans and Directors
Ecological Society of America
Friends of the Earth
Idaho Environmental Education Association
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
MGR - Youth Empowerment, GREEN Community Schools
National Aquarium
National Center for Science Education
National Council for Science and the Environment
National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education
National Wildlife Federation
North American Association for Environmental Education
Oceanliteracy.net
Sierra Club
The Groundwater Foundation
The Ocean Project
U.S. Green Building Council
Wetlands Institute
Will Steger Foundation
Yampatika
YouthMuse

State and Local NGOs:

Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education
Aquarium of the Pacific
Arkansas Wildlife Federation
Audubon Naturalist Society
Audubon Society of Rhode Island
Bedford County Learning Academy
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge
Chabot Space and Science Center

Connecticut Science Center
Delaware Nature Society
Discovery Southeast
E3 Washington
Ecology in Classrooms and Outdoors
Environmental Education Alliance of Georgia
Environmental Education Association of New Mexico
Environmental Education Association of Oregon
Environmental Education Council of Ohio
Exploratorium
For the Love of Nature
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
Hackensack Riverkeeper, Inc.
Hilton Pond Center for Piedmont Natural History, York SC
IslandWood
Inverness Associates
Jenkinson's Aquarium
Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education
Kentucky Association for Environmental Education
Kentucky Environmental Education Council
Living Classrooms of the National Capital Region
Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership
Maryland Science Center
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago
Openlands
Minnesota Association for Environmental Education
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago
Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators
Pacific Science Center
Place-Based Education Northwest
Reading Public Museum
Rhode Island Environmental Education Association
River Source
Saturday Environmental Academy
Science Museum of Minnesota
Seacoast Science Center
Siskiyou Field Institute
Travis Audubon Society
University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum, Earth Partnership for Schools program
Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education
Wisconsin Environmental Education Board
Wisconsin Environmental Education Foundation
Wyoming Association for Environmental Education