March 8, 2006

The Honorable Frank Wolf, Chairman
Science, State, Justice &
Commerce Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Alan Mollohan, Ranking Member
Science, State, Justice &
Commerce Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Mollohan:

We write to respectfully request that you again restore funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Education and Sustainable Development, including its Environmental Literacy Grants Program, in the amount of $12 million. In the two prior years, these funds have been vital to advancing ocean and atmospheric literacy in the United States, a major goal of both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report and the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan. This initiative has been well received by the ocean and atmospheric literacy community, and you are to be commended for your leadership in making these funds available in the past.

As noted by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report, **an interested, engaged public is needed** to successfully address increasingly complex oceanic, atmospheric, and coastal issues, balance the use and conservation of natural resources, and realize future benefits from the ocean and atmosphere. As such, the public must be armed not only with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices, but also with a sense of excitement about the marine and atmospheric environments. Individuals should understand the importance of the ocean and atmosphere in their lives and should realize how individual actions affect the Earth system. Moreover, public understanding of human impacts on the marine and atmospheric environments should be balanced with recognition of the benefits derived from well-managed ocean resources and effective protection of the atmosphere. The connection between the ocean, the atmosphere, and the land requires involvement from inland communities as well as seaside communities.

Yet the disheartening reality is that the ocean and atmospheric literacy gap is increasing—even at the very moment in time when we need it to be decreasing. As a recent national survey indicates, the American public has only a superficial awareness of the importance of the ocean and atmosphere to their daily lives, let alone its importance to all life on the planet[1]. For instance, nearly 75 percent mistakenly believe that forests—rather than oceans—are the major source of oxygen on the planet; and 40 percent are unaware of the essential role oceans play in regulating climate and atmosphere.

Furthermore, as the President's Ocean Action Plan notes, the nation needs a diverse, knowledgeable, and adequately prepared workforce to make decisions regarding these complex and interrelated ocean, atmosphere, and coastal issues - particularly in

[1] Roper Starch Worldwide, *Lessons From the Environment*, p. 1-2, May 2001.

light of today's competitive world of knowledge-based, technology-driven economies with increasing demands on natural resources. By helping to produce an environmentally literate and trained workforce capable of analyzing complex threats to our quality of life and economic vitality, this program promotes **non-regulatory alternatives to environmental protection legislation and litigation.**

The public agrees on the importance and need for such environmental education. In fact, **public support for environmental literacy in general could not be higher**: fully 95% of adult Americans believe environmental education should be taught in schools[2]. To that end, NOAA's Environmental Literacy Grants Program provides the direct support necessary for schools, teachers, students and community groups to meet this demand. And perhaps most importantly, the program maintains a focus on advancing educational rigor, teacher-training, and balanced perspectives.

Increased funding of $12 million for FY07 would be used to implement the education recommendations agreed to under the President's U.S. Ocean Action Plan, particularly the goal to strengthen collaboration among public/private sectors, states/regions, scientists/educators and the federal agencies. The increase would provide additional funds to:

- Further leverage existing capabilities of formal and informal education partners through competitive Environmental Literacy Grants;
- Coordinate regional education efforts, such as the education component of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance; and
- Establish a coordinated education and outreach message across Federal agencies.

Much of the $6 million increase would go to the Environmental Literacy Grants Program, which has already demonstrated success. In its two years of existence, the program established new partnerships to deliver ocean and atmospheric education materials to thousands of teachers and students through established educator training programs, web-based systems, and new partnerships with aquaria and museums.

In closing, we would like to vigorously endorse the salient remarks of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report: "It is particularly important that funding for ocean-related education be sustained over time (for periods of at least five years) to allow programs to become established, produce results, and identify potential nonfederal funding sources. Continuity of funding ensures that successful education efforts can be continued, expanded, and replicated. A dedicated, secure, sustained source of support for formal and informal ocean education efforts is needed to supplement existing low levels of ocean education funding." And the need for significant and sustained funding for atmosphere-related educational programs is just as acute.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We hope that it will meet with your approval. If you have any questions about this letter, please contact James Elder, Campaign for Environmental Literacy, at 978-526-7768, or elder@FundEE.org.

[2] Roper Starch Worldwide, *Lessons From the Environment*, p. 1-2, May 2001.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Earth Observations
American Meteorological Society
American Society of Limnology and Oceanography
American Zoo and Aquarium Association
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
Association of Nature Center Administrators
Botanic Gardens Conservation International (US)
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Consortium for Oceanographic Research and Education
Council for Environmental Education
Earth Day Network
Earth Force
Ecological Society of America
National Audubon Society
National Association of Biology Teachers
National Council on Science and the Environment
National Marine Educators Association
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
National Wildlife Federation
North American Association for Environmental Education
Ocean Alliance
Second Nature
The Ocean Project

Regional Organizations:
Alabama A & M University-Center for Environmental Research and Training
Alabama Environmental Education Consortium
Aquarium of the Pacific
Florida Atlantic University-Florida Center for Environmental Studies
Monterey Bay Aquarium