

April 11, 2005

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The FY 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act admirably provided \$5 million in new funding for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Education and Sustainable Development to engage in additional educational initiatives that support the agency's mission goals. As a result of the support, resources, and structure that this initial investment will provide, it 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.

We would like to respectfully request that this important funding be included in your FY 2007 Budget. These funds are critical to advancing ocean and atmospheric literacy in the United States, a major goal of both the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report and your own U.S. Ocean Action Plan.

As noted by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report, **an interested, engaged public is needed** to successfully address increasingly complex ocean- and coastal-related issues, balance the use and conservation of marine resources, and realize future benefits from the ocean. Similar arguments can be made with respect to the need for an educated public with respect to weather and climate. As such, the public must be armed not only with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices, but with a sense of excitement about the marine and atmospheric environments as well. 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 also requires that inland communities be just as involved as seaside communities.

Yet, regardless of this need for an engaged and informed public, 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 to their daily lives, let alone its importance to all life on the planet¹. For instance, nearly 60 percent of Americans do not realize that more plants and animals live in the oceans than on the land; 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 your Ocean Action Plan notes, the nation needs a diverse, knowledgeable, and adequately prepared workforce to enhance understanding of the marine environment and make decisions regarding complex ocean- and coastal-related issues—particularly given today's

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

competitive world of knowledge-based, technology-driven economies with increasing demands on ocean and coastal resources.

In addition, 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 environmental education, which includes the critical topics of the atmosphere and oceans. In fact, **public support for environmental literacy in general could not be higher** in the United States: fully 95% of adult Americans believe environmental education should be taught in schools². To that end, NOAA's Environmental Literacy Grants Program provides the direct support necessary for schools, teachers, students and community groups to be able to meet this demand. Additionally—and perhaps most importantly—the program maintains a focused effort on advancing educational rigor, teacher-training, and balanced perspectives.

In closing, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report itself noted especially salient remarks: “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.” Again, similar remarks could be made in connection to the need for significant and sustained funding for atmosphere-related educational programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact the coordinator of this letter, James L. Elder, at 978-526-7768 or elderjr@aol.com.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

Alliance for Earth Observations
American Meteorological Society
American Zoo and Aquarium Association
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Council for Environmental Education
Earth Force
Ecological Society of America
Education for Sustainability Network
Global Environmental Alliance
National Audubon Society
National Council for Science and the Environment
National Marine Educators Association
National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

National Wildlife Federation
North American Association for Environmental Education
Ocean Alliance
Ocean Foundation
The Ocean Project
Second Nature
World Wildlife Fund
Regional Organizations
Alabama A&M University
Alaska Conservation Foundation
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education
Florida Atlantic University

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