

April 25, 2005

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf, Chairman  
The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-309, Capitol Building  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-6017

Dear Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Mollohan:

We write to respectfully request that you restore level funding of \$5 million in FY '06 for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office of Education and Sustainable Development, including its Environmental Literacy Grants Program. 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 the President's 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 in regard 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 planet<sup>1</sup>. 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 the President's 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 competitive world of knowledge-based, technology-driven economies with increasing demands on ocean and coastal resources.

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

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 schools<sup>2</sup>. 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.

The FY '05 Consolidated Appropriations Act admirably provided authority for NOAA to engage in formal and informal education activities—including primary and secondary education—in support of the agency's mission goals. Given the support, resources, and structure provided by the initial \$5 million dedicated to the program, 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.

In closing, it is quite significant that the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report itself has 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. We hope that it will meet with your approval. If you have any questions, please contact Marialanna Lee at 202-478-6187 or [Marialanna@FundEE.org](mailto:Marialanna@FundEE.org)

Sincerely,

***National Organizations***

Alliance for Earth Observations  
American Meteorological Society  
American Zoo and Aquarium Association  
Biodiversity Project  
Campaign for Environmental Literacy  
Council for Environmental Education  
Earth Day Network  
EarthEcho International  
Earth Force

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

Ecological Society of America  
Education for Sustainability Western Network  
Global Environmental Alliance  
National Audubon Society  
National Council for Science and the Environment  
National Marine Educator's 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 – Center for Environmental Research & Training  
Alaska Conservation Foundation  
Antioch New England Graduate School – Department of Environmental Studies  
Center for Environmental Education Online  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
The Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education  
Florida Atlantic University – Florida Center for Environmental Studies