

April 2, 2015

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, and Science
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, and Science
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Mikulski;

We write in strong support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) Education Program, and urge that funding be provided in the total amount of \$20 million for the Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) and Environmental Literacy Grants (ELG) programs in the Fiscal Year 2016 appropriations bill. We continue to feel it is particularly important that the ELG funds be left unencumbered by specific allocations from Congress, so that their grants are available to *all* in the eligible ocean, coastal, Great Lakes, weather, environment, and climate education communities. Funding B-WET at \$12 million would enable NOAA to return to operating all seven of the regional B-WET programs (California, Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, Hawai'i, New England, and the Pacific Northwest, which impact a total of 27 states and the District of Columbia). Funding the ELG program at \$8 million would return the ELG program to a robust level of grant-making and national impact.

NOAA is mandated to support and coordinate educational activities to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean-related issues. NOAA education activities are authorized under the America COMPETES Act, which obligates NOAA to carry out science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities to improve interest and literacy in STEM subjects. The American COMPETES Act committee report specifically cites the Bay-Watershed Education and Training program and the Environmental Literacy Grants program as NOAA's principal education grant programs. It describes B-WET – a competitive, environmental education grant program that increases environmental literacy and stewardship through hands-on, place-based learning experiences – as a “model” program noted for “its rigorous program-wide assessment of performance and impact among students and teachers.”

B-WET was established in 2002 and has received continuous funding since that time. The B-WET program supports locally relevant, experiential learning in the K-12 environment, with the purpose of increasing understanding of how the quality of a watershed affects the lives of the people who live in it. B-WET supports programs for students as well as professional development for teachers, while supporting regional education and conservation priorities.

In 2014, the B-WET program reached an estimated 69,000 students and 2,600 teachers, through 86 new and continuing projects. The vast majority of B-WET funding is redistributed locally for student activities and has direct economic impacts in the community it serves. Since 2002, NOAA has awarded over \$63 million to support more than 600 projects.

While B-WET addresses specific regional education needs, the Environmental Literacy Grants were established in 2005 to advance STEM education through support for national-scale projects. ELG is the longest standing and most comprehensive national grants program focused

on environmental literacy that is designed to improve and expand the learning, understanding, and application of earth systems science and advance science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. This federal grants program leverages high quality partners and incorporates NOAA's scientific assets in formal and informal learning environments.

The program provides more than 60 million people annually with access to compelling, up-to-date information on the ocean, coasts, Great Lakes, weather, and climate through formal and informal science education programs as well as exhibits such as the Science On a Sphere and the Ocean Today Kiosk. NOAA's ELG program is very competitive: only 10% of peer reviewed applications ultimately receive funding.

The impacts of ELG include:

- Since 2005, a total of 111 environmental literacy grants totaling \$74 million have been awarded to science centers, museums, aquariums, universities, and nonprofit education organizations across the United States.
- In FY2014, more than 6,000 formal and informal science educators received professional development in earth systems science and STEM education related to environmental literacy.
- In FY2014, more than 180,000 youth and adult learners engaged in the learning, understanding, and application of NOAA-related concepts through informal science education programs focused on environmental literacy.

These education programs have enabled NOAA, as the nation's leading expert on weather, coastal and ocean information, to partner with the nation's top non-profit organizations and educators to bring this information and hands-on experiences to students. The programs have demonstrated their effectiveness and value to stakeholder communities. And as our nation begins to grapple with the complexities and challenges of diminishing ocean, coastal and watershed resources, they are timely and highly relevant.

Unfortunately, funding in the past few years has fallen fundamentally short of the level necessary for NOAA to carry out its education mandate. Therefore, we respectfully request an increase to \$20 million (the level of funding in FY 2009 and FY2010) for these two NOAA education programs, so that NOAA can continue to carry out and improve its successful STEM activities. Should you have any questions about this letter, please have your staff contact Jim Elder of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy at (978) 526-7768 or Elder@FundEE.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

Alliance to Save Energy
Association of Nature Center Administrators
Association of Science-Technology Centers
Campaign for Environmental Literacy
Ecological Society of America
Green Schools Initiative
Green Schools National Network
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

National Center for Science Education
 National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education
 National Recreation and Park Association
 National Wildlife Federation
 North American Association for Environmental Education
 Ocean Alliance
 Second Nature
 Sierra Club
 The Ocean Project
 U.S. Green Building Council

Regional Organizations:

Chesapeake Bay Foundation
 Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative
 New England Environmental Education Alliance

State Organizations:

East Bay Regional Park District CA
 Inverness Associates CA
 Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society CA
 Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education CO
 Four Mile Historic Park CO
 Geothermal Greenhouse Partnership CO
 Yampatika CO
 District of Columbia Environmental Education Consortium DC
 Delaware Nature Society DE
 Florida Atlantic University/Pine Jog EE Center FL
 Zoo Atlanta GA
 Hawaii Environmental Education Alliance HI
 Openlands IL
 Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education KS
 Kentucky Association for Environmental Education KY
 Massachusetts Audubon Society MA
 Blandford Nature Center MI
 Environment & Human Systems Management MI
 Kalamazoo Nature Center MI
 Minnesota Association for Environmental Educators MN
 Environmental Educators of North Carolina NC
 Seacoast Science Center NH
 Environmental Education Association of New Mexico NM
 YMCA of Kingston And Ulster County NY
 Environmental Education Council of Ohio OH
 Mohican School in the Out-of-Doors, Inc. OH
 Nature Center at Shaker Lakes OH
 Ecology in Classrooms & Outdoors (ECO) OR
 Environmental Education Association of Oregon OR
 Exploring Portland's Natural Areas OR
 Institute for Applied Ecology OR
 Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators PA

Environmental Programming, Ivy Academy Chattanooga TN
Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont TN
Claytor Nature Study Center VA
Longwood University VA
Virginia Commonwealth University Rice Rivers Center VA
Seattle Aquarium WA
Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education WI

