

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**STATEMENT OF  
JOHN KASPER  
ACTING DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR  
FOR COMMUNICATIONS, EDUCATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS  
U. S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND FAMILIES  
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**June 27, 2000**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the importance of the Environmental Protection Agency's environmental education initiatives and program activities under the National Environmental Education Act of 1990 (NEEA). EPA believes that citizens have a right and a responsibility to participate in the environmental protection decision-making process. We believe that the best way to encourage full citizen participation is to provide them with the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to make informed choices for themselves and their communities. The ultimate goal of environmental education is to develop an environmentally literate citizenry.

Environmental education provides opportunities to understand how ecology, economics and social issues are interdependent. Environmental education helps citizens understand the value of a clean environment to good health and a sustainable economy. It encourages the public to develop an attitude of commitment to protecting the environment. To be successful, environmental education must involve students, teachers, parents, school administrators, policy makers and the general public.

EPA has been promoting environmental education ever since its establishment. Environmental education initiatives cut across all EPA program offices and are a crucial component of our regional

activities. EPA works with federal, state and local government agencies, colleges and universities, business and industry, state and local education and natural protection agencies, primary and secondary education systems and not-for-profit organizations, in partnership, to advance quality environmental education and make environmental education available to all citizens.

EPA's Office of Environmental Education (OEE), has responsibility for the implementation of the National Environmental Education Act. OEE, working directly with the Environmental Education (EE) community, has developed a strategic vision for environmental education that is aligned with the Agency's environmental and health protection goals and with the needs and priorities of the education and environmental education communities. These strategic goals build upon the successful implementation of the NEEA and are designed to focus resources on the most important issue areas in environmental education. OEE's goals are:

- To ensure long-term effectiveness/sustainability of EE programs by supporting State **Capacity Building**
- To increase the quality and quantity of environmental education in grades K-12 by linking EE and **Education Reform**
- To encourage **Research** in environmental education that assesses EE's effectiveness in environmental protection and education improvement
- To improve the **Quality, Access, and Coordination** of EE information, resources, and programs
- To **Communicate and Demonstrate** the importance and relevance of environmental education to the public

These strategic goals are designed to make the most of the resources we have to reach the largest number of people possible. The first three goals focus on the most important issues in environmental education today—state capacity building, education reform and research. Capacity building is developing the “infrastructure” of EE providers at the state level by enhancing leadership and organizational development skills that improve the coordinated delivery of EE across states. Education reform focuses on changing curricula, teaching methods and how schools are organized to improve student achievement. The last two goals are focused on helping the EPA improve its education and information programs. All activities undertaken by EPA’s Office of Environmental Education should fit under one of these strategic goals.

### **OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

Since 1992, the Office of Environmental Education has successfully implemented programs mandated by the National Environmental Education Act and is recognized as one of the leaders in the field of environmental education. OEE staff regularly participate as presenters and participants in national education conferences and are routinely called upon to work with other EPA program offices in the design, development and implementation of environmental education programs, projects and materials.

#### **Training Teachers and Other Education Professionals**

Under Section 5 of the National Environmental Education Act, EPA has awarded two multi-year cooperative agreements totaling over \$18 million to deliver training and related support to education professionals. We will be awarding the third multi-year cooperative agreement later this year to build

upon the work of the previous consortia, especially in state capacity building. Through this program, EPA and its partners seek to advance the field of environmental education by demonstrating how EE can help achieve state and local education goals and improve training opportunities for educators who work across the country using the latest Internet technology. **To date, over 100,000 education professionals have received EE training under this program.** Training is provided by experts in existing EE programs, including Project WILD, WET and Learning Tree. Among our other accomplishments under this program are the development and implementation of:

**National Environmental Education Guidelines**—a set of voluntary national guidelines for materials development and evaluation, learner outcomes, and teacher preparation that were developed by Dr. Bora Simmons of Northern Illinois University and reviewed by hundreds of educators and professionals in the education and environmental education communities

**State Leadership Clinics and Workshops**—an opportunity for education professionals to develop skills for state capacity building. Leadership clinics have been held in Wisconsin, Missouri, California, and New Mexico.

**EE-Link**—an electronic database that links to other sources of environmental education information through the Internet

**Ed Gateway**—an Internet-based tool to help educators, in both the formal and non-formal settings find, organize, and share events, discussions, organizational information and documents. Currently, Ed-Gateway includes environmental and science educators and those involved in education reform

### **Providing Resources and Support for Local, State and National Environmental Education Efforts**

Under the National Environmental Education Act, EPA provides funding to support local, state, tribal and national environmental education initiatives that enhance the public's awareness, knowledge and skills to make informed and responsible decisions that affect environmental quality.

Under Section 6 of the NEEA, awards are granted to state, local and tribal education or environmental agencies, not-for-profit organizations and non-commercial educational broadcasting entities, to develop projects that must enhance critical-thinking, problem-solving, and effective decision-making skills, as well as teach individuals to weigh various sides of an environmental issue. The grant program is administered by OEE Headquarters, with a portion of the funds allocated to EPA's 10 regional offices to ensure grants are equitably awarded in each state across the country. The majority of grants are awarded by our regional offices for proposals requesting \$25,000 and half of those are for \$5,000 or less. Headquarters awards grants over \$25,000 and up to \$250,000 with a broader, national focus and usually fewer than a dozen a year. Our education priorities are for projects that:

- Build state and local capacity to deliver EE programs;
- Advance state/local education reform goals;
- Educate the public through community-based initiatives;
- Train education and health professionals about the health threats of pollution, especially as it affects children;
- Improve teaching skills;

-Promote environmental careers; and

-Educate low-income or culturally-diverse audiences about environmental issues.

**Since 1992, EPA has awarded over 2,000 grants in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and US territories totaling over \$20M.** Projects have ranged from pesticide safety workshops for homeowners in Delaware, to linking teachers across the state of Colorado to develop standards-based environmental education, to workshops for Indiana teachers to improve their environmental education knowledge, to working with Philadelphia 8<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents to study the impact of community water usage on the Delaware Estuary. We are providing, for the record, profiles of projects which received funding from 1992-1999.

Under Section 4 of the NEEA, EPA enters into interagency agreements with other federal agencies, especially those on the Federal Task Force on Environmental Education, to design and implement innovative EE programs. Our federal partners have included the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy and Interior, Coastal America, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Peace Corps and the National Science Foundation.

Since 1992, **over 40 collaborative projects, with a total contribution of approximately \$4.2 million in EPA funds, have leveraged more than \$12 million from other federal agencies and their state and local partners.** Projects include “Hands-on -the-Land”—an initiative to improve student learning by better use of the educational resources available on public lands in Florida, California, Utah, New Jersey, Washington, Nevada, Nebraska, Alaska and Oklahoma and National EE Guidelines Training Workshops—delivering training to education professionals on the use of the EE Guidelines for materials, learners and educators.

Under Section 4, OEE is also supporting environmental education research that assesses the effectiveness of EE programs to improve student learning and to reach environmental protection goals. OEE is also supporting needed research to assess environmental literacy in the country and the use of education and information programs, economic incentives and non-economic social science to reach individuals, households and small- and medium-sized industries.

OEE is working with a number of leading environmental education researchers, providers, practitioners and policy makers to develop a national EE research agenda that details the specific research needs in environmental education. We are also currently working with the National Academy of Sciences to examine the success of education, information, social marketing and market incentive programs in reaching health and environmental protection goals.

### **Reaching Out to the Public and Other Audiences**

EPA can not make decisions regarding our nation's environmental resources without involving the public. Helping the public understand the complexity of environmental issues by improving their knowledge and skills is one of the most important jobs we have at EPA. OEE funds benefit the public and promote environmental careers in several ways. These include:

#### **1) Providing access on the Internet to quality environmental education materials**

The **OEE Web Site** is one of the most popular in EPA and has served as a model for other EPA web sites. We have also supported the development of web pages devoted to **Kids, Students, and Teachers**. These sites contain hundreds of evaluated EPA environmental education materials specifically designed for the Internet



## **2) Inspiring students to start environmental protection projects in their communities**

The **President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA) Program**, begun in the early 1970's, recognizes young people across the country for local community projects. The program encourages individuals, school classes, schools, summer camps, public interest groups, and youth organizations to promote local environmental awareness and to channel this awareness into positive community involvement. Participating students are recognized at the regional level with certificates and winning projects are recognized at the national level.

## **3) Promoting environmental protection careers**

The **National Network for Environmental Management Studies (NNEMS)**

**Fellowship Program**, established by EPA in 1986, encourages college students to pursue environmental professions. The program is designed to provide students with an environmental research or training experience linked directly to their field of undergraduate or graduate study.

**To date, over 1,100 fellowships have been granted to students in colleges and universities across the country.**

We are very proud of what has been accomplished under the National Environmental Education Act. Our funds have benefitted individuals, communities and organizations across the country and have had a major impact on the environmental education community. Our programs are well established and well respected. Under Section 4 of the National Environmental Education Act, OEE develops and supports programs, activities and initiatives designed to improve understanding of the natural and built environment and the relationship between humans and their environment. The only recommendation we would make for improving the National Environmental Education Act would be to allow more flexibility

in the use of Section 4 funds to make a broader range of awards.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's invitation to appear here today and we look forward to continued work with the Subcommittee in pursuit of our mutual environmental education goals.