

Maryland Partnership for Children In Nature
PROGRESS REPORT – April 2012
Highlights of recent actions and achievements.

Promoting Outdoor Play and Learning (Outreach & Communications)

Leads: Britt Slattery, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), bslattery@dnr.state.md.us
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Celebrate Maryland Outdoors Days – The Partnership is hosting an exciting joint event **June 9 – 23**, involving numerous events across the state that will help to connect, children, families and others to nature. The event will help increase awareness of how rich Maryland is with great places to go and things to do outdoors, promote participation in outdoor nature activities across the state, support families building skill in outdoor activities, demonstrate that spending time in nature is a shared cultural value here, and contribute to and promote Great Outdoors Month. Any and all sites or groups that are hosting events, have a place to experience nature (hike, canoe, fish, watch birds, swim, camp, etc.), and/or offer outdoor environmental programs during these two weeks are invited to join the event as a host – whether a park, nature area, outdoor center, after school program, faith or community center, watershed organization, etc. Hosts will be organized under the joint event umbrella and advertised together. We will collect participation statistics from the individual activities or sites to document the collective result statewide. This is a great way to help advertise sites and programs! For more information, email mdoutdoorsdays@gmail.com. Information for the public will be made available soon online through the Partnership's site www.dnr.state.md.us/cin.

Environmental Literacy – Support for EL in Schools and the Community

Lead: Julie Dieguez, Maryland No Child Left Inside Coalition (MD NCLI), jdieguez@cbf.org

Training /Professional Development: A series of seven regional environmental literacy workshops were conducted throughout February & March with participation from all 24 school systems (Local Education Agencies, or LEAs) and over 300 educators. The workshops proved extremely valuable for enhancing environmental literacy plans (ELPs) and facilitating enhanced coordination and collaboration amongst educators, particularly regarding outdoor experiences and professional development. A summary is being compiled of common issues, challenges and solutions (using examples from various counties), highlights of LEA ELPs, and next steps all of which will be shared widely in May. Additional next steps include: Supplemental efforts for further environmental education (EE) provider communication; establishment of regional liaisons to facilitate collaboration and to support ELP implementation; an MSDE-hosted summit for county ELP planning teams (August); and follow-up sessions during the 2012-2013 school year.

Student Focused Actions & Policy: Efforts are also underway to improve coordination with higher education, develop recommendations and a data collection tool for student EE experiences, and to participate in Federal EE initiatives.

- **Higher education** – Preliminary discussions are being held to plan a forum with higher education representatives to address improving coordination between higher ed and preK-12, teacher preparation, and professional development programs in environmental literacy.
- **Meaningful outdoor environmental experiences** – Written recommendations for effectively providing a meaningful outdoor environmental education (EE) experience for every student every year are currently being drafted. The recommendations expand on the *Common Qualities of Effective Environmental Literacy Programs* guidelines for schools and EE providers.
- **How many students are getting outside?** A data collection tool to more accurately collect and report numbers of students participating in quality outdoor EE experiences is also under development. A symposium on research based best practices will be held in September focusing on the refinement of criteria and metrics to more accurately track student experiences across states. Based on this work, a Maryland data collection tool could be expanded to capture additional metrics as applicable to CIN goals.
- **National connections** – The workgroup continues to monitor the progress of Federal initiatives, such as the Chesapeake Bay Executive Order and the newly formed Federal interagency EE task force, to identify and pursue opportunities for support and collaboration.

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Communities and Community Planning

Lead: Sandi Olek, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), solek@dnr.state.md.us

The **Park Equity Analysis**, which includes a statewide GIS analysis that identifies underserved communities in need of access to park space, has completed a data peer review. Final edits are being made to the data and a public interface is being developed. An interactive map will be available to partners for use at the local level by summer 2012. Future uses of the data could include identifying trail connections, school ground greening projects, local park development potential and identifying other health connections.

Health and Food (Agriculture) Connections

Leads: Health – Kim Martinez, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), martinezk@nwf.org

Food/ Agriculture – Karen Fedor, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), FedorKM@mda.state.md.us

Healthy Maryland Children – Plans have begun for hosting a forum to explore how the Partnership can support or advance aspects of outdoor time that will benefit human health. Health stakeholders from around the state of Maryland will participate in a round table meeting on May 20th to discuss issues related to children's health. The work group will identify several common trends from the round table conversation to provide a framework for future action by the Partnership. Collectively, members will host and co-promote events to raise awareness of children's health issues related to "nature deficit," encouraging families to get their kids outdoors.

Agriculture Education – Agriculture educators are working to better integrate agriculture topics into school environmental literacy programs, through science, social studies, and other subject areas. Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, and Maryland Extension 4-H educators were active participants in the environmental literacy regional workshops, making connections with formal educators as well as EE providers. They will be collaboratively planning supplementary materials for the classroom that are aligned with environmental literacy standards. As a more immediate action, MDA and Maryland Green Schools staff are exploring options to infuse agriculture initiatives such as the Farm to School program into the Green Schools application. Farm to School works to bring more Maryland-grown products to school lunches with the aim of educating students about where their food comes from, how it is produced, and the benefits of a healthy diet – fitting well with Children In Nature initiatives.

Additional Actions

The **Maryland Conservation Jobs Corps (CJC)** is a six-week summer program for disadvantaged or at-risk youth, operated by the Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Park Service and overseen by the Maryland Conservation Corps (MCC). The CJC is structured around four Essential Pillars which identify and guide youth toward positive outcomes, while protecting and improving Maryland's natural and cultural resources – including teaching job and life skills through conservation service, restoring natural and cultural resources, developing environmental citizenship through stewardship, and building personal connections to nature through outdoor recreation and nature interpretation. In the 2011 program, there were 310 youth participants, 281 of whom graduated from the program (over 90%, up from 77% in its first year, 2008, when 181 youth completed the program). Also in 2011, 70% of the youth from the prior year returned to participate in the program again. One of the most significant improvements to the program is the growing number of returning staff as well as youth, which strengthens the program. 2012 will encompass programs at seven parks across the state, including six state parks and one Baltimore City park; with full partnership funding and some new grant opportunities.