

PLAIN FACTS

About The New Jersey Commission on Environmental Education And Interagency Work Group (on Environmental Education)

What is the purpose of the commission and work group?

The New Jersey Commission on Environmental Education and Interagency Work Group (on Environmental Education) are state level groups charged with guiding, supporting, promoting, assisting and monitoring the state's environmental education efforts on a statewide and long-term basis.

How were the commission and work group established?

The commission has formally existed through Executive and Administrative Orders since 1989. Both the commission and work group were statutorily established in 1996 through passage of the New Jersey Environmental Education Act (N.J.S.A. 18A:6-91.1 et seq.).

What is ANJEE's involvement with commission and work group activities?

Members of the state's nonprofit membership association for environmental education, the Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education (ANJEE), played pivotal roles in establishing the commission, pursuing passage of the 1996 law, and supporting the continued work of the commission and work group. The Alliance continues to be an active partner in many statewide commission and work group environmental education efforts.

Common goals shared by ANJEE, the commission and work group ensure that efforts are communicated between groups and that their efforts compliment the needs, goals and activities of each other as well as the field of environmental education. Commission and work group members participate in the annual ANJEE environmental education conference and leadership retreat. Occasional joint planning meetings are held in summer between these groups and ANJEE members regularly attend commission and work group meetings.

How is the work of the commission and work group administered?

The commission and work group are administered as "in but not of" groups of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Environmental education staff in DEP's Communications Office provides support and administers any state funds designated for environmental education and/or for use by the commission and work group. Department staff also provides such in-kind services as writing, editing, graphics and mailings.

What is the membership makeup of the commission?

Commission membership is diverse and includes representation from environmental, conservation, civic, youth and faith-based organizations, public and private teachers and administrators, school boards, colleges and universities, businesses and industry, environmental commissions, state and local government, agriculture and environmental health. There are 29 voting members on the commission, each of whom are appointed to serve by the governor.

Which state agencies currently make up the work group and/or commission?

Membership includes representation from the State Departments of Environmental Protection, Education, Agriculture, Health and Senior Services, Community Affairs, Law and Public Safety, Human Services and the Commission for Higher Education. Some of these agencies also hold voting positions on the commission.

When and where do the commission and work group meet?

The commission and work group meet jointly at least seven times per year (usually in September, October, November, January, March, May and June). These meetings are held in Trenton at DEP headquarters or in other central locations in New Jersey. They are open to interested members of the public. There are also committee meetings held at various locations around the state that focus on specific priorities of the groups.

How and why was the *Plan of Action* developed?

Beginning in 1990 the commission researched the status of environmental education in New Jersey and compared it with environmental education implementation in other states. They were then asked by state officials to develop a master plan that would further the delivery of environmental education throughout New Jersey. Commission members and select members of their constituents, through multi-day workshops that involved group discussion, research, strategizing and writing, developed an initial plan. This draft was then reviewed by dozens of environmental education and education professionals, as well as interested citizens, through three regional public meetings. An extensive final review, writing and editing process was then carried out.

Entitled *Environmental Education in New Jersey: A Plan of Action*, the final plan was presented to state officials and New Jersey citizens in 1993. It quickly became a sought after planning tool for environmental education leaders in other states as well as around the world. Thousands of copies of the plan have since been distributed to be used as a reference and planning document for environmental education programs for all ages.

What is the purpose of the *Plan of Action*?

The *Plan of Action* is a collection of goals, guiding principles and recommendations designed to foster environmental literacy amongst all ages statewide. The goal of the plan is to “develop in the citizens of New Jersey the knowledge, attitudes and values, skills and behaviors needed to maintain, protect and improve the environment.” Its purpose is to provide long-term direction for environmental education in the state, as well as to improve communications, networking and coordination among entities involved with environmental education.

What *Plan of Action* components have been accomplished?

During the past fifteen years or so numerous milestone-accomplishments have been achieved, such as:

- A) Inclusion of environmental content in the state core curriculum content standards for grades K-12;
- B) Dozens of environmental education professional development providers registered with the New Jersey Department of Education and are able to provide environmental education training for New Jersey teachers;
- C) Implementation of environment-based student improvement models and special projects, such as the delivery of the *EIC Approach* in nine schools and the use of energy education materials and modules;
- D) State and private funds used for mini-grants for environmental education programs and projects;
- E) Development and circulation of publications related to the field of environmental education or to public education about the environment; and
- F) Annual Environmental Education Week and Earth Day efforts designed to boost public interest in, and involvement with, environmental topics, nature and outdoor activities.

What are the commission and work group's plans and activities for 2007?

Their primary work effort is to revise *Environmental Education in New Jersey: A Plan of Action*, through an extensive, inclusive and comprehensive revision and writing process. Their goal is to present the revised plan to state officials in spring, 2008. They are continuing to distribute the *New Jersey Environmental Primer* to adult audiences and older students. Over 55,000 copies of the primer (in English) have been distributed and 10,000 Primers (in Spanish) are being circulated. Finally, they are promoting the celebration of Environmental Education Week (in April) and are using this celebration to promote environmental education programs and Earth Day events statewide to the public, schools and media (visit www.earthdaynj.org).

Who can I contact regarding commission or work group activities?

Persons interested in being appointed to the commission, participating in commission and work group meetings or helping out on their committees should contact DEP. Commission and work group activities are administered by Tanya Oznovich, Environmental Education Supervisor, DEP Communications Office, P.O. Box 402, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625-0402. She can be reached at (609) 984-9802 or at tanya.oznowich@dep.state.nj.us. In addition, visit the commission's Web site at www.nj.gov/dep/seeds/njcee.