



A PLAN FOR ADVANCING
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
IN WISCONSIN



EE 2010

WISCONSIN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BOARD

JULY 2006



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Environmental Education Is...

"A lifelong learning process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, ethical awareness and sensitivity for the relationship between humans and the environment, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions. By these actions, environmentally literate citizens will help ensure an ecologically and economically sustainable environment" (WEEB 1999).

THE WEEB AND ITS ROLE IN SETTING THE COURSE FOR EE IN WISCONSIN

The Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) was established in 1990 by the Wisconsin State Legislature. The board is made up of individuals appointed to represent K-12 and higher education, state agencies (Department of Natural Resources, Department of Public Instruction, UW System and UW Technical Colleges), environmental organizations, nature centers, legislators, industry, agriculture, forestry, energy, and teachers. Since its inception, the board has been an active working group. In addition to operating an environmental grants program, the board is recognized as a consensus-building group on environmental education issues. The unique make-up and mission of the board position it to provide needed leadership to environmental education while recognizing the importance of building common purpose and direction among diverse community sectors and stakeholders. It is with this in mind that the WEEB facilitated *EE 2010: A Plan for Advancing Environmental Education in Wisconsin*.

THE WEEB MISSION

To provide leadership in the development of learning opportunities that empower Wisconsin citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to make wise environmental decisions and take responsible actions in their personal lives, workplaces, and communities.

WEEB BELIEFS

Environmental literacy and skills are needed by all citizens because environmental stewardship is everyone's responsibility.

Government agencies, educational institutions, private organizations, and businesses need to work in partnership to provide quality environmental education for everyone.

Relevant environmental curricula and instructional materials need to be available and used in all educational delivery systems.

Model environmental education programs should be encouraged and promoted throughout the state.

Teachers and other leaders should be able to obtain continuing professional development in order to provide environmental education of the highest possible quality for all citizens of the state.

WEEB CENTRAL PURPOSES

To **provide positive leadership**, advocacy, and policy-making in the comprehensive arena of environmental literacy and education.

To support the **development of local leaders** and citizens to become environmentally aware and concerned enough to act on and work toward the prevention of practices that negatively impact the environment.

To advocate the **development and implementation of** integrated environmentally-based **curricula** at all levels of the educational system.

To further the continuing **professional development** of staff at all levels of formal or nonformal education to enable them to accomplish needed environmental education goals.

A RICH HERITAGE AND A BRIGHT FUTURE

Wisconsin has a long history of citizen involvement and commitment to a sustainable natural resource base. Since the late 1800s, outdoor and nature education have been provided in Wisconsin schools. In 1935, a law was passed requiring teacher-training colleges to provide conservation education. In 1985, The Wisconsin legislature enacted a curriculum planning standard requiring that school districts develop and implement a K-12 environmental education curriculum by September 1, 1990. To support this curriculum mandate, in 1990, the state legislature authorized the creation of the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board with a grants program and also the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education located at UW-Stevens Point. Academic standards for environmental education were established for K-12 education in 1998.

Environmental education (EE) planning has a long and successful history in Wisconsin. Statewide planning and capacity-building for EE was formally done as early as 1974. In 1994, the WEEB initiated a statewide planning process that included a stakeholder survey and "summit" meeting. In 2000, the WEEB again solicited input from citizens and stakeholders to create *EE 2005: A Plan for Advancing Environmental Education in Wisconsin*. This document along with associated action items guided the WEEB and other organizations through 2005.

PURPOSES OF THE EE 2010 PLAN

EE 2010 builds on all past planning efforts and will set the course for statewide EE efforts over the next five years.

The identified goals and associated objectives reflect the opinions of stakeholders from throughout Wisconsin and, as such, are designed to guide not only the WEEB but all institutions which are working to enhance the environmental literacy of Wisconsin's citizens.

This plan serves as both a vision for the future and a prescription for achieving the vision of environmentally literate citizens who will help ensure an ecologically and economically sustainable environment.

CREATING THE EE 2010 PLAN

The WEEB strives to review and revise its state EE Plan on a five-year basis. It believes this timeframe allows the plan to maintain the state's strong EE heritage and respond to contemporary circumstances while at the same time establishing a proactive agenda. On a ten-year cycle (i.e., in 2010, 2020, etc.), the WEEB hopes to hold statewide summits as part of its planning process. The interim 5-year planning periods (i.e., in 2015, 2025, etc.) will utilize a process similar to that used for the *EE 2010* document.

The WEEB approached its 2010 state planning effort by commissioning 13 individuals from a larger pool of nominations. These 13 individuals (page 13) were selected so as to represent broad geographic distribution and also to address major EE stakeholder groups. This task force group reviewed all of the following documents as background to a two-day facilitated session where the draft framework for the *2010 Plan* was created.

Background documents used as a basis for the EE 2010 Plan Framework

Environmental Education in Wisconsin. December 1974. (Produced by the Wisconsin Environmental Education Council)

WEEB Summit Strategic Action Plan Executive Summary. July 1996. (This was a "synthesis" of the information gathered via a "Summit" meeting held in May of 1995.)

WEEB Environmental Education Strategic Plan. May 1997.

Environmental Education in Wisconsin: Are We Walking the Talk? (Produced in 1997 by the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education. It reports key findings of research conducted regarding student environmental literacy, and teacher & administrator support for environmental education.)

An Evaluation of the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board's Grant Program (1990-1997).

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards for Environmental Education. 1998.

EE 2005: A Plan for Advancing Environmental Education in Wisconsin. (The strategic plan that was developed by the WEEB in 2000 guided the work of the WEEB from 2000 to 2005.)

Wisconsin Environmental Education Board 2001-2003 Biennial Report to the Legislature. (Produced by the WEEB in October 2003, it highlights where WEEB and EE have been and where we want to go.)

The Forum (Report from an EE communications event sponsored by the WAEE, WCEE, and the WEEB and held in December of 2004. The meeting attempted to generate ideas for dealing with statewide communication issues.)

The draft framework created by the task force group was available for public comment from October 27, 2005 to December 15, 2005. Thirty six individuals provided written feedback. The WEEB Planning Committee (page 15) met on February 22, 2006 to incorporate these public comments into the draft framework. To maintain brevity, action oriented items, which would help to accomplish the identified goals, were edited from this document. However, a record of these edited action oriented items will be provided to each associated ad-hoc committee in an effort to facilitate creation and implementation of annual operational plans.

2006-2010 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and associated objectives have been identified by stakeholders as focus areas for the WEEB in order to promote environmental education in all segments of society. Some of these goals and objectives continue or emphasize strategies that are already working, while others suggest new efforts that, if pursued, will further help Wisconsin grow the quality and quantity of its EE agendas.

Because this plan is meant to guide not only the WEEB, but all institutions interested in enhancing environmental literacy, the goals and objectives have not been prioritized.

Over the next five years, the WEEB will concern itself with initiating specific strategies through its grants program or through policy actions in order to pursue the following broad goals and objectives.

GOAL I

Focus content of environmental education (EE) on holistic outcomes.

Rationale: The need for environmental education is justified by its contribution to helping society understand sustainability and work toward environmental literacy.

- I.1 Focus EE to emphasize an integrated, holistic approach that meets the definition established by the WEEB to engage a larger range of stakeholders and increase environmental literacy.
- I.2 Integrate environmental justice into EE curriculum and programs.
- I.3 Support the integration of systems-based concepts into the framework of EE.
- I.4 Provide learning opportunities that foster the understanding of the interrelationships between environment and economics.

GOAL II

Support and enhance cooperation and communication within the environmental education (EE) community.

Rationale: For environmental education to be efficient and effective there must be communication, coordination, and support among EE providers.

- II.1 Increase interagency and institutional cooperation by creating a Wisconsin Environmental Education consortium of statewide EE providers. The consortium should meet annually.
- II.2 Create a website/communication network that provides EE news, resource information, professional development opportunities, and more.
- II.3 Strengthen the WEEB's communication with state agencies, the legislature, and the Governor's Office.

GOAL IV

Support and enhance the implementation of environmental literacy in institutions of higher education.

Rationale: The degree to which graduates of higher education programs are environmentally literate will determine in large part the degree to which society moves toward the concept of sustainability.

- IV.1 Inventory and evaluate Wisconsin higher education programs to identify models that promote the development of environmental literacy within their general degree requirements.
- IV.2 Promote sustainability and EE on campuses throughout the state.
- IV.3 Provide a mechanism through which sharing and planning of EE programs are facilitated.
- IV.4 Encourage recognition, through incentives, for higher education programs or educators that promote the development of environmental literacy.

GOAL III

Support and enhance environmental education (EE) in PreK-12 schools.

Rationale: Educational institutions and state agencies must provide the necessary support to ensure schools are meeting the environmental education needs of all learners. This education provides the foundation to develop lifelong learners that are informed and involved citizens ready to ensure an ecologically and economically sustainable environment.

- III.1 Create and support professional development programs that lead to consistent career preparation (pre-service) and leadership building efforts (inservice) for PreK-12 educators.
- III.2 Inventory EE in districts to identify innovative programs and curriculum and provide a mechanism through which sharing and planning are facilitated.
- III.3 Revise the K-12 state standards to ensure that holistic EE concepts are covered.
- III.4 Create and establish a set of exemplary criteria by which schools can self audit their EE programs toward a goal of standards-based self-improvement.
- III.5 Promote recognition of excellence in EE within PreK-12 schools.



GOAL V

Support and enhance the expansion of non-formal and non-traditional environmental education (EE).

Rationale: Environmental programs should provide opportunities to prepare citizens of all ages, from all walks of life, to participate in public decisions affecting our working, living, and recreational environments.

- V.1 Create and support professional development programs that lead to consistent career preparation and leadership development for non-formal environmental educators.
- V.2 Inventory, promote and support non-formal programs/sites/facilities that consistently work towards the incorporation of EE.
- V.3 Encourage community based EE, including programming designed for adult participants and/or the involvement of non-traditional audiences.
- V.4 Encourage businesses and industries to be directly involved in statewide EE efforts.
- V.5 Increase the cultural diversity of EE by inviting ethnic groups to interact with the WEEB on cooperative efforts to develop EE.
- V.6 Promote media attention related to environmental education.
- V.7 Encourage recognition, through incentives, for non-formal and non-traditional programs or educators that promote the development of environmental literacy.

GOAL VI

Develop a research and evaluation agenda for environmental education (EE).

Rationale: Environmental education practices and programs will be more efficient and effective if grounded in findings from both educational and scientific research and evaluation.

- VI.1 Establish and convene a research working group to identify a research agenda for EE in Wisconsin.
- VI.2 Assure that all EE programs and curricula are based on research findings.
- VI.3 Conduct ongoing inventories and assessments of the status and needs of EE providers.

GOAL VII

Secure long-term funding for environmental education (EE) in Wisconsin.

Rationale: The state legislation creating the WEEB also directs it to secure funds to support the development of environmental education programs in Wisconsin.

- VII.1 Continue strong support of the Wisconsin Environmental Education Foundation (WEEF) as a privately-funded source of continuing funds for EE grants.
- VII.2 Focus on development of an endowment fund, and pursue partnerships with private individuals, groups and organizations to increase the support base for development of EE funds.
- VII.3 Continue to explore options to increase state funding for general EE.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

By facilitating the creation of this document, the WEEB has strived to set a course for Wisconsin's EE community. The WEEB recognizes this is an ambitious plan. Progress will be directly dependent upon the collective action of countless individuals and institutions across the state who desire to build upon Wisconsin's history of citizen involvement and commitment.

Ad-hoc committees of the WEEB will be charged with initiating and overseeing specific action strategies associated with these goals and objectives. If you are interested in learning more about proposed action strategies or serving on an ad-hoc committee, please contact the WEEB.

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WEEB Planning Committee

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FAITH IN A SEED

Though I do not believe
that a plant will spring up
where no seed has been,
I have great faith in a seed.
Convince me that you have a seed there,
and I am prepared to expect wonders.

We find ourselves in a world
that is already planted,
but is also still being planted
as at first.

HENRY D. THOREAU

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