

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

The full **2012 Action Plan** can be found online at www.dnr.state.md.us/cin/pdfs/2012_CIN_ActionPlan_Final.pdf.

Promoting Outdoor Play and Learning (Outreach & Communications)

Leads: Britt Slattery, Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR), bslattery@dnr.state.md.us

Celebrate Maryland Outdoors Days – As a contribution to Maryland's promotion and celebration of Great Outdoors Month, the Partnership hosted a joint event June 9 – 23, in conjunction with a number of other partners and some national events. Celebrate Maryland Outdoors Days was “officially” sponsored by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and MD Department of Natural Resources on behalf of the Partnership. The first day of the two-week celebration coincided with National Get Outdoors Day and culminated on the last day with National Wildlife Federation's Great American Backyard Campout. Shared promotion of these events was meant to help connect children, families and others to nature, increase awareness of Maryland's rich diversity of 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, and demonstrate that spending time in nature is a shared cultural value here. The website created for the event demonized information following the Maryland Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights and included not just programs and activities happening during these weeks, but also highlighted service projects and places to experience nature (hike, canoe, fish, watch birds, swim, camp, etc.) Parks, nature areas, outdoor centers, after school programs, faith or community centers, watershed organizations, and others were encouraged to submit information. A total of 257 events across the state were submitted and highlighted on the website www.dnr.state.md.us/cin. The Partnership is currently collecting participation numbers from the event hosts in order to prepare results to post soon, and planning has already begun for enhancements for next year's event. The website itself has received a lot of positive feedback, and may be considered as a standing resource that will be built upon as a one-stop-shop source of information for families and others.

Environmental Literacy – Support for EL in Schools and the Community

Lead: Julie Dieguez, Maryland No Child Left Inside Coalition (MD NCLI), jdieguez@cbf.org **New Lead(s) as of 7/2012:** Laurie Jenkins (Montgomery County Public Schools), laurie_c_jenkins@mcpsmd.org; and co-lead (TBD)

Training /Professional Development: Action taken on recommendations received from over 300 attendees of the seven (7) Spring 2012 regional environmental literacy (EL) workshops includes the following:

- **Clearinghouse:** NOAA was very interested in the strong recommendation for a comprehensive and user-friendly clearinghouse of EE providers & professional development opportunities. They are revamping the Bay Backpack web site, based on specific recommendations from the EL workshops and other regional feedback. The revised site should be available for review and final revision Fall 2012.
- **Online Resource:** Information gathered from the workshops (common issues, challenges & suggested solutions) is being posted as an online resource (CIN, MDNCLI sites – available August, 2012).
- **Workshops:** Continued support for EL implementation will be provided to schools and providers – examples include: (1) MSDE is hosting (in collaboration with Allegany County Public Schools) a statewide EL Summit for 5-person planning teams from each county, August at Rocky Gap State Park; and (2) MAEOE has applied for funding to host EL professional development workshops for EE providers this fall.
- **Regional EL Liaisons:** Teams of at least one LEA and EE provider representative have been identified and confirmed for each region in the state. They will proactively facilitate collaboration between providers & school systems and host regional EL implementation sessions to be held Fall 2012-Spring 2013.

Student Focused Actions & Policy:

- **Higher education:** A forum with higher education representatives is scheduled for 9/27/12 at the Smith Center (Montgomery County). The purpose is to address improving coordination between higher education and preK-12 in terms of EE and EL, teacher preparation, and EL professional development programs.
- **Best Practices & Improved Data Collection for EE Experiences:** NOAA will hold a conference in August with EE researchers to outline recommended best practices, based on the Common Qualities of

Effective EL Programs and recently revised “ESEY” recommendations (to ensure a meaningful outdoor EE experience for every student every year), both developed by members of the EL workgroup along with broader review. Ideally, conference findings will influence the development of and pilot implementation of an improved student EE experience data collection/ tracking tool for the state/region by Summer 2013.

- **The MAEOE Green Schools Youth Summit** was a success thanks to the tireless efforts of MAEOE representatives and partners, featuring over 50 learning stations and 3500 attendees from 130 schools.

Policy & Related Actions: A number of EL workgroup members participated in a June meeting of the Chesapeake Bay Program Mid-Atlantic Education workgroup to discuss strategies and plans across the states in the region for developing and implementing EL plans and moving forward on the **Mid-Atlantic EL Strategy** (called for by President’s Executive Order for the Chesapeake Bay). Another meeting may be scheduled for Fall 2012. MAEOE and MSDE continue to collaborate on efforts to support and improve the **U.S. Green Ribbon Schools** certification process and integrate elements of the Federal program with the Maryland Green Schools program. The EL workgroup continues to monitor the progress of Federal initiatives to identify and pursue opportunities for support and collaboration.

Communities and Community Planning

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

Enhance Access to Green spaces and the trails network:

- DNR is working to develop a free **smart phone Trail App** that will provide trail maps of parks and forests to the public by September. This app will be part of a national product that is being expanded to include MD information, and will include information on all public lands including Federal, state and local lands.
- The web based **Maryland Trails Interactive Map** should be final by August. This product will draw from multiple agencies and will provide information on safe on-road connections to state and local trails.
- The **Park Equity Analysis**, a statewide GIS analysis that identifies underserved communities in need of access to park space, has completed a data peer review. A public interface is being piloted for one county and will be available in the next quarter. A local partner is still being sought to pilot the data with additional data and layers.
- A white paper is being written on the benefits and challenges associated with **Nature Play Spaces**. The workgroup continues to develop demonstration projects including the next phase of the Annapolis Play and Learn, and a series of urban community play space projects. Two urban sites have been considered for the installation of a community NPS, including identifying partners, funding and site plans. These ultra urban sites will pose a new set of constraints and lessons for establishing nature play in public spaces.
- The DNR Land Trails Office will complete its review of the **County 5-year recreation plans (LPPRP's)** by the end of July, and together with the Community Planning workgroup will develop recommendations regarding Children in Nature enhancements at public recreational facilities throughout the state.

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: Stakeholders from around the state participated in a **health forum** on June 13th at Robinson Nature Center, Columbia. Partnership leaders facilitated an interactive presentation, inviting representatives from outdoor education, parks and recreation departments, universities, state agencies, non-profits, and the health industry to share program successes, gaps in programs/support, and ideas for collaboration. Collectively, the group identified and prioritized the greatest needs for addressing children’s health issues in Maryland. The Health workgroup has compiled the responses from the stakeholders and will develop an action plan, with additional input from the Partnership, to address these shared issues: Communication, Networking/ Collaboration (Sharing information, articles, research, ideas), Urban Initiatives (e.g., Nature Prescription Initiative, Docs in the Park Program). Smaller work groups will be formed to promote events to raise awareness of children’s health issues related to “nature deficit,” encouraging their families to get their kids outdoors.

Agriculture Education: Work continues among agriculture educators and other educators to better integrate agriculture topics into school environmental literacy programs through various subject areas, and including them in the MD Green Schools application.