

# Introduction

*Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators* is a set of recommendations about the basic knowledge and abilities educators need to provide high-quality environmental education. The guidelines are designed to apply:

- Within the context of pre-service teacher education programs and environmental education courses offered to students with varied backgrounds such as environmental studies, geography, liberal studies, or natural resources;
- To the professional development of educators who will work in both formal and nonformal educational settings, offering programs at the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade levels; and
- To full-time environmental educators as well as for those for whom environmental education is just one of their responsibilities.

Environmental educators work in a variety of settings, at a variety of jobs. They teach in public and private classrooms, and lead activities for children and adults at nonformal educational institutions such as nature centers, zoos, museums, and parks. They teach at universities in education, environmental studies, geography, natural resource, and science programs. They develop curriculum materials and administer national, state, and local programs. Regardless of the setting, *Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators* outlines the experiences and learning that will help them deliver instruction that effectively fosters environmental literacy.

This document presents an ambitious overview of the abilities and knowledge of a well-prepared environmental educator; it does not seek to address more general educational competencies. The guidelines provide a mechanism for gauging the quality of pre-service and in-service preparation programs and the abilities of environmental educators. Instead of offering fixed rules, these guidelines suggest a broad vision—a goal to work toward and a guide for professional and programmatic development.

## ***Environmental Education: A Vision for the Future***

The guidelines are grounded in a common understanding of effective environmental education. For many environmental educators, that understanding is rooted in two founding documents of the field: the Belgrade Charter (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976) and the Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1978).

The Belgrade Charter was adopted by a United Nations conference and provides a widely accepted goal statement for environmental education:

*The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.*

Two years later, at the world's first intergovernmental conference on environmental education, the Tbilisi Declaration was adopted. This declaration built on the Belgrade Charter and established three broad goals for environmental education. These goals provide the foundation for much of what has been done in the field since 1978:

- *To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;*
- *To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;*
- *To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.*

As the field has evolved, these principles have been researched, critiqued, revisited, and expanded. They still stand as a strong foundation for an internationally shared view of the core concepts and skills that environmentally literate citizens need. Since 1978, bodies such as the Brundtland Commission (Brundtland, 1987), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio (UNCED, 1992), the International Conference on Environment and Society in Thessaloniki (UNESCO, 1997), and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (United Nations, 2002) have influenced the work of many environmental educators. By highlighting the importance of viewing the environment within the context of human influences, this perspective has expanded the emphasis of environmental education by focusing more attention on social equity, economics, culture, and political structure.

## ***The Instructional Vision of Environmental Education***

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These guidelines outline the abilities and understandings—or competencies—an educator needs to implement environmental education successfully. Environmental education is a comprehensive and cohesive whole that both draws on and advances broader educational goals and instructional methods. Taken by themselves, these competencies may not capture this rich vision.

Environmental education is, at its heart, an integrative undertaking. Instructors **teach across disciplines**, linking the methods and content of natural and social sciences, arts, mathematics, and humanities to help learners fully understand and address complex environmental issues. Environmental educators need the ability and the commitment to keep the whole picture in mind as they guide students toward environmental literacy.

**The learner is an active participant** in environmental education. If learning is to become a natural, valued part of life beyond school, instruction should **engage the learner in the process of building knowledge and skills** and be guided in part by the student's interests.