

Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature

April 28, 2011

Hard Bargain Farm, Accokeek

Minutes

GENERAL MEETING:

Joe Gill, Deputy Secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources stood in for Secretary Griffin [called to a Cabinet meeting]. Dr. Grasmick, MSDE, was unable to attend due to impending retirement and meetings. Jeff Horan, MD DNR, facilitated the meeting.

Joe inspired participants with his obvious shared passion for getting children outdoors. He called for a change of culture, a change in way of thinking, and the need to consider the way that children are underserved. He highlighted the importance of supporting schools and education. How do we measure success? We should always ask: what are we doing that makes a difference?

Progress reports:

Through the work of the Partnership for Children In Nature, the No Child Left Inside Coalition and all of the many partners in these efforts, we have made significant changes that will allow for rich environmental education for all Maryland students throughout all grades. With persistent participation and commitment of the Partnership, we will continue to accomplish the actions set forth in the Children In Nature Plan.

DNR staff support for the Partnership has looked at the structure of the various workgroups and their tasks. There has been tremendous movement on the school-related recommendations; and much occurring toward connecting children to nature outside of the school day. At this juncture, we're looking at what is progressing, and what work still needs to be done (key initiatives that need to move forward).

Work groups currently identified and active:

(1) Environmental Literacy – Gary Hedges, MSDE

The Environmental Literacy revised language on COMAR 03 is open for public comment through May 9 and due for State Board of Education final vote on June 21. This language provides flexibility and oversight for school systems as they develop effective environmental literacy programs.

The ESEY and Standards and Practices groups are working closely together, and products are intended to help provide a robust package of support for environmental literacy program planning. Results of these groups' work is due for completion by the end of August, 2011.

(a) Standards and Practices [see additional info under Breakout Sessions, below]:

Programs are already in place in many school systems. This group is working with the draft of the eight Environmental Standards – indicators are already in COMAR, so they are looking at revising the objectives; also putting together a matrix of the standards matched with standards for other disciplines such as Science, Social Studies, Health, Language Arts, Math, Career Tech. The goal is to be finished in August for use in 2011-2012 school year through a series of for meetings before the June 21st Board meeting – asking Dr. Grasmick to take to the product to that meeting.

The group is also developing a document to accompany the standards as a guidance piece, "Common Qualities" of excellent environmental literacy programs. It will include models or examples at the full school system level (preK-12); school level; and at classroom level.

(b) Every Student Every Year (ESEY) [see info under Breakout Sessions]

(2) Nature Play Spaces (Sandi Olek, MD DNR) – Projects are currently being installed at Greenbrier State Park and at the Tawes Building (DNR Headquarters) in Annapolis; and one being planned at Sandy Point State Park. The group is addressing safety and liability issues; and will be developing a set of project design ideas (a "pattern book"). Photos of existing examples of Nature Play Spaces are needed – please contact Sandi Olek solek@dnr.state.md.us if you have sites or photos to offer.

- (3) **Communications** (*Britt Slattery, MD DNR*) – Established as of March 2011 to improve communication between workgroups because there is overlap and need for interaction between the groups. We need to get the word out about the Partnership and the work being done. In order to affect culture change we need to figure out how to tie into the nationwide “movement” that includes many different players who are looking at similar issues; and we need to communicate the work we are doing to parents, children, and families.

This group’s co-chairs are also helping to steer Partnership efforts at **measuring success**. Each workgroup needs to focus on measurable tasks and results. More on this soon.

Additional activities under development by Partners:

- (1) **Connecting children to nature** (*Carrie Lhotsky, MD DNR*) – DNR’s Land Acquisition and Planning has some Program Open Space funding (~\$200K) available to acquire or protect property that will help provide physical land connections between children and nature, such as natural spaces for people to enjoy, pathways or areas that connect communities to parks and/or provide for safe walking between schools and parks, trails, water access, etc. A request for proposals will be distributed soon, and help from the Partnership is needed to identify potential projects to propose through municipalities or county partners. Last year, two projects were funded: (1) in Frederick County, acquired 16 acres to provide direct connection between current parkland and Appalachian Trail easement properties, to conserve forest land and provide a passive recreation area; and (2) in Baltimore County, acquired a perpetual conservation and public recreation access easement bounding a Rail Trail of Gunpowder Falls State Park, in an area that includes forests, steep slopes, stream valley and floodplain.
- (2) The **Park Equity Analysis** (*Sandi Olek, MD DNR*) is being developed with the help of Morgan State University. Demographics from Census and GIS data are being compiled to produce a map that can be used to evaluate where access to parks and open spaces is lacking in underserved communities statewide – based on (1) population density; (2) income; (3) density of children (age); (4) access to parks (distance); and they may be using health data in the model later. Data will be ready to look at in the next two months (shape model). The Partnership can help – the project needs local partners, those interested in GIS and who understand the issues, to help review.
- (3) **Financing strategy** – *Jamie Baxter, CBT*
This Partnership has accomplished an impressive amount of work, due to the leadership and because of what we’re all contributing toward reaching the goals we’ve set. Yet on other hand, it’s a daunting amount of work, and the budget climate has not been ideal. We need more adrenaline and more funds – lots of enthusiasm and interest, need to keep the momentum of this movement increasing. This is the premise for pulling together this financing charette. The idea is to get group of influential people together for a facilitated brainstorming discussion, lay out what we’ve accomplished and our goals/ what we can accomplish, and see what they can bring up that will help us reach our goals – e.g., public, private \$; policy initiatives; etc. There would be an emphasis on engaging new and influential partners, e.g. Fed/ state/ local elected officials, state agency leadership, school officials, parks & recreation directors, foundation representatives (private, community development, national and regional education foundations), corporate representatives, etc. Would like Governor’s involvement as “chief convener” if appropriate, at a prestigious location tba. Desired outcome of meeting: a series of recommendations to present to Governor, who would ideally move those priorities forward; create a dedicated fund for CIN initiatives – not just money but could also leverage what’s going on, build capacity, connect decision makers. *Discussion followed*; logistical concerns would need to be addressed re defining parameters of funding mechanism and process, etc. As this initiative is developed, will need the Partnership’s ideas of who to include in charette; and it will require coordination between all work groups, to report what’s been done to date, where they are headed, anticipated outcomes and funding needs.

The Partnership’s Organization – *Jeff Horan, MD DNR*

It is time for us to look at the Partnership as a whole, and may be time for change; the Plan may need to evolve to best meet current needs and allow for additional efforts. There was originally a set of clearly defined appointees, many of whom have remained very active even beyond the appointment term. We’ll be calling each of the appointees individually to determine if they want to continue to serve and at what level. We are looking for input on who else needs to be a part of the Partnership to be able to reach our goals.

Announcements:

2011 YOUTH SUMMIT (*Bronwyn Mitchell, MAEOE*): As a Partnership for Children In Nature initiative, the Maryland Association for Environmental & Outdoor Education (MAEOE) has again taken the reigns on organizing the second annual Maryland Green Schools Youth Summit at Sandy Point State Park, June 3rd, 2011 from 9:00-3:00. The summit will feature the Maryland Green School Awards Ceremony, as well as a wide variety of learning stations, leadership activities for students and much more. **Volunteers and participants are needed** for this exciting event, expected to draw 4,000 students, teachers, and parents. [Click here for more information](#) or contact greenschools@maeoe.org.

NATIONAL NEWS (*Don Baugh, CBF and NCLI*):

- The federal No Child Left Inside Act will be reintroduced this month. ESEA (formerly known as “No Child Left Behind”) is being rewritten now and we expect the authorizing committees to produce bills in the coming months. We are hopeful that the provisions of the NCLI Act will be included in the reauthorized legislation.
- The U.S. Dept of Education recently announced its Green Ribbon Schools program, which will recognize schools that have taken great strides in greening curricula, buildings, school grounds and overall building operations. The goal of the program is to applaud schools for their efforts to go green while awarding them cash to complete eco-projects. Visit [Green Ribbon Schools](#) for more information.
- Proposed cuts of \$151 million to the budget of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) could significantly diminish or completely end Chesapeake Bay B-WET funding. The B-WET program funds critical conservation, restoration and environmental education programs and projects involving thousands of Maryland students, educators and citizens. Comments should be directed to Senator Barbara Mikulski for her strong support to maintain current NOAA B-WET funding levels.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

The Every Student Every Year (ESEY) Workgroup:

Led by Don Baugh, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and Laurie Jenkins, Montgomery County Public Schools

This group is developing recommendations and guidance to support schools as well as service providers aiming to meet the annual outdoor experience now required for each student. The group reached consensus on various strategies for meeting four recommendations: (1) an outdoor environmental experience for every student every year; (2) a minimum of four off-site experiences, one at each grade band [i.e., grades Pk-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12]; (3) professional development for teachers and administrators; and (4) direct support to teachers by school-based lead teachers who are informed by an LEA person responsible for outdoor environmental education. The group further recommends that each LEA submit an environmental literacy plan that would detail how they expect to graduate environmentally literate students, including how the LEA will embed the Standards and Practices and ESEY Workgroup recommendations into their plan, in addition to other suggested measures such as accountability.

The Standards and Practices Workgroup:

Led by Gary Hedges, MSDE, and Jamie Baxter, Chesapeake Bay Trust

The group is revising objectives of the Environmental Literacy Standards. At this meeting, they reviewed participants' alignment of Environmental Literacy Standards with the Science and Social Studies Standards and also discussed other disciplines where further alignment efforts would be appropriate, e.g., Mathematics, English Language Arts, Career and Technology Education, Health. They also discussed the revised version of the “Promising Practices/Common Qualities” document being developed to guide local school systems in implementing PK-12 Environmental Literacy Programs.

Community and Public Lands:

All participants not involved in the above workgroups met to discuss progress toward the non-school recommendations of the Children In Nature Plan. The recommendations were reviewed and a brief update on status of each was provided, including needs for input or assistance from the Partnership. It was noted that an important step in developing this year's work plan is to refer to the detailed recommendations of the original

Community and Public Lands group(s). These will be used and follow-up communications with the Partnership will highlight actions ready for partners' participation. You will be hearing more about this process soon.

Community and Public Lands current activities discussed here fall under the following recommendations. While we work to develop an updated work plan, there are some ways that anyone in the Partnership can help with these activities over the short term. Contact leads identified for more information.

Recommendation	Contact/ Lead Person	Help Needed (short term)
Incorporate nature play spaces into community health planning, land use planning and community development design.	Sandi Olek, MD-DNR solek@dnr.state.md.us	Project would benefit from local partners, universities, recreation and parks association, etc.; Looking for photos of existing projects.
Develop a strategic state park and public lands Interpretive and Outdoor Classroom Plan, identifying funding needs to support a greater presence of park rangers and seasonal naturalist staff.	Matt Ritter, MD-DNR mritter@dnr.state.md.us	While this is primarily specifically for MD State Parks, and therefore will be written by DNR staff, the aim is for the plan to complement the CIN Plan; so Partnership review and feedback will be very helpful. We may want to consider how to develop a tool that would be more applicable to County/local parks as well (a guidance piece, similar to the "common qualities" document).
Develop and implement a comprehensive program to increase access and utilization of public lands and waterways for underserved communities.	Carrie Lhotsky, MD-DNR clhotsky@dnr.state.md.us Land Acquisition Sandi Olek, MD-DNR solek@dnr.state.md.us Park Equity Analysis	Help identify potential acquisition projects to improve access to parks, trails, waterways, etc. as in notes above. Municipal/ County/ Local partners to submit project proposals. Help review Park Equity Analysis.
Expand & improve existing Conservation Jobs Corps (CJC) model to serve 1,000 at-risk youth statewide by 2015 with conservation jobs and outdoor enrichment activities.	Nita Settina, MD-DNR [and others tbd]	Possible workgroup/ partners to help with planning expanded CJC program, provide ideas, potential projects for youth, funding.
Launch statewide campaign to educate parents, teachers, and other leaders and caregivers about the many benefits of outdoor play / learning opportunities.	Britt Slattery, MD-DNR bslattery@dnr.state.md.us Julie Dieguez, MD NCLI jdieguez@cbf.org	Join the Communications Action Team! Watch for more info to come in your email.
Host annual Children in Nature Summit.	Bronwyn Mitchell, MAEOE director@maeoe.org Joanne Schmader greenschools@maeoe.org	Get more info online about the 2011 Maryland Green Schools Youth Summit, June 3 at Sandy Point State Park, by the Bay Bridge. Sign up to volunteer or lead an activity!
Devise a method of measuring baseline data and increased time spent in nature.	Britt Slattery, MD-DNR bslattery@dnr.state.md.us Julie Dieguez, MD NCLI jdieguez@cbf.org	Be sure all activities are measurable; Identify meaningful ways to measure progress/ success, including tying into existing baseline data or data collection actions.