

Governor Martin O'Malley's

Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature

John R. Griffin, Chair

Secretary, Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Nancy S. Grasmick, Chair

State Superintendent of Schools,
Maryland State Department of Education

September 16th, 2010

10 a.m.-12 p.m.

**Maryland Association
of Environmental and Outdoor Educators
Headquarters, Jessup Maryland**

Draft Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions (5 minutes)

Sec. John Griffin, DNR

Summer Highlights: (20 min each)

- **2010 Maryland Green School Youth Summit**

Bronwyn Mitchell Ex Director of the Maryland Association of Environmental and Outdoor Educators (MAEOE), provided an overview of the MD Green School framework and network of schools, and the recent Green School Summit. The 2010 Maryland Green School Youth Summit was developed as a direct output from the Partnership for Children In Nature's Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP), which calls for an annual youth summit. MAEOE in partnership with DNR reframed the annual Maryland Green School Awards Ceremony into the Youth Summit. Every school in Maryland was invited to attend. She reported that the Green School program continues to grow regardless of the economy, and that this program is a proven vehicle schools can use to drive environmental literacy.

Regarding the Green School Youth Summit, Bronwyn reported that MAEOE was a bit apprehensive going into the event but they jumped right in and in the end it was a great success. Highlights were; the expansion of the awards ceremony, an Environmental Literacy Bizarre, 30 learning stations, multiple ceremonies, a youth leadership component (youth teaching youth). Gov O'Malley joined the summit and surprised them all when he issued a challenge to double the

amount of green schools next year – directing the schools districts to compete against each other. In addition the artist involved with the event made a great video that involved everyone - the theme of which is climate change. Bronwyn showed the partnership the excellent video created by the artist that recapped the event.

The next summit is June 3rd 2011 at Sandy Point State Park and they expect 4,000 participants. She announced the dates for the next MEAOE conference (February 8 -11), and informed the Partnership of an upcoming promotion with Whole Foods Wednesday Sept 22nd.

Action items – MAEOE invites the C in N Partners to attend and help to promote the June 3rd 2011 Summit. They also asked for help with resources, and funding the next summit and help with getting the word out to the schools. In addition Partners should plan to attend and also help promote the MAEOE Conference in February – this being a regional event for outdoor and environmental educators.

- **CJC, Park Quest, Fred Banks / Matt Ritter, MPS**

Fred Banks - CJC Program Manager, reported that 360 kids were hired to work in State Parks this summer including: Seneca, Patapsco, Gunpowder, Assateague, Merkle and Susquehanna. This program which is now in its third year graduated 305 kids up from 108 two years ago. About 70 kids returned from 2009 and some have even gone on to MD Conservation Corp. Fred said that many of these kids have reported that they want to go on to college and follow a career path based on what they have learned while in CJC. Another success is that the attrition rate has dropped due to better recruitment and structuring of the teams. 89% of our kids who sign up in the spring remained this past season - in 2008 only 50% did. As a means to stay connected to the summer crews plans are being developed to expand the program; in Baltimore - working with the Parks and People Foundation, in addition there is a new Teen Ranger Program with 40 kids signed up, and there will be spring and fall activities such as working with schools and teachers. Fred showed the group a great video that highlighted the work CJC kids do and how they feel about their accomplishments. He stated that he was very impressed with the C in N Partnership and believes it has been very helpful to their success.

Discussion – Secretary Griffin complimented Matt Ritter and Fred and Parks and People Foundation for their work. He stated that it is clear there is a demand for this program and it's growing – but stressed the need for resources – and that expanding this model to local parks is very important. Also mentioned was that this program is extremely

well run – kids are engaged – for example there are Baltimore City kids who will take 3 buses to get to the pick up point every day. “This program is beyond anything that any of us dreamed about”, commented Jackie Carrera from the Parks and People Foundation.

There was a question to Fred about the low attrition rate – and Fred shared that he believes their success is based on how and who they recruit. He said they now do a better job with recruitment – and literally go out to schools putting a lot of effort on the front end. They looked for kids who want to do this – not because they got in trouble – and they reduced the ratio between DJS kids – and Baltimore kids in general and reconfigured the teams. Fred talked about how they work with the teams, that the way they structure them is very important - such as keeping genders separate, having small Teams, and keeping age groups together. He also said their staff always refers to the kids as leaders and since many of the adjudicated kids are natural leaders - this counseling helps. Finally he stressed the importance of mentors and how much the kids look up to folks like us and our influence when we spend time with them.

Matt Ritter, Chief of Interpretation for Maryland Park Service, said that the Parks staff took the CJC kids on two day three night camping trips this past summer – where many sleep in tents for the first time. Matt told the group about a new program called Park Quest – a 2 hour self led program for families that has recently built into a large program that is conducted at 24 state parks. This year they doubled registration to 750 families – which maxed out in two weeks. Each family has to complete 10 quests to be invited to the finale. They had 50 sponsors – with 14 grand in cash and prizes. 147 teams qualified – and 130 came to the finale. If you want to see pictures of PQ Matt suggested the Partners to go to its Face Book page and read some of the comments.

Matt described for the group DNR’s goal of having a naturalist in every park. He said that 93,000 children attended a program lead by a ranger in 2009 and that just this summer alone they had 50,000 kids participate in a park lead activity. MPS has opened up new nature centers in Fort Frederick and Sandy Point State Parks and in 3 months they have seen over 2,000 people visit the centers. In addition he talked about junior the ranger program, and Scales and Tails.

Matt asked the Partnership to feel free to give him ideas and suggestions on how the MPS could improve opportunities for children to experience and learn about nature in the parks.

Nature Play Spaces

Sandi Olek – DNR, reviewed the concepts of what is a nature play space which she had outlined in a handout for the Partners. She asked the Partners to provide feedback on natural play spaces concepts / and reported to the group that the Natural Places workgroup is trying get a few NPS established in Maryland State Parks.

Tracey Bowen said that although she had not been active with this workgroup – she has learned that whether real or not these spaces are not being built because there is a perception they are either not in code, are unsafe or require a lot of maintenance – and for this reason there are big barriers in having more NPS built in communities. Jurisdiction and or state laws should be looked at to see if they need to be changed to address these barriers. One example is national safety standards that have to be followed by parks when building play grounds. Tracey asked Sandi if she felt she had the appropriate membership on this committee to help address these barriers – and if not the Partnership could help fill the holes in the group’s membership.

Dave Vismara from Montgomery County told the group about their Nature Exploration Areas in Montgomery County, and how his parks department was not able to call these areas play grounds because they did not meet national standards. A questions was ask if these national standards are adopted to local code? Dave reported that he was not sure about that but the MNCPPC designation was based on a safety standpoint and liability issues.

The group discussed how a park system could get around limitations and barriers and it was suggested that they go through some of the big playground companies. At a recent MD Recreation and Parks Association meeting there were a lot of big playground companies exhibiting that advertised that they were moving towards more natural playgrounds. It was suggested that having these companies as partners is key because they assume the liability. Mary Hardcastle reported that the National Wildlife Federation is developing guidelines for natural play spaces. Sandi let that group know that there is a Natural Play Spaces WIKI – and she plans to post this information - such as the fact that Play Corp is presently merging national safety into this natural play space world.

Action: The Partnership was asked to provide feedback to the group, help find examples of NPS, help with building out a web site, working

with parks and The Program Open Space program. Also the Partnership was asked for help with the groups attempt to define exactly what is a “natural play space”? David Vismara invited any Partner to come visit the MNCPPC Nature Exploration Areas – Claudia agreed to coordinate a site visit in October.

National Update

- **Maryland No Child Left Inside Coalition**

NCLI Coalition, Julie Dieguez, CBF

President Obama and Secretary Duncan included EL recently in the proposed federal budget (first time in history) and the U.S. Dept. of Education’s “Blueprint for Reform”, both promising indications.

The newly revised Elementary & Secondary Education Act (aka as No Child Left Behind) is expected to be reauthorized in 2011. The national No Child Left inside (NCLI) Coalition continues to advocate for inclusion of NCLI provisions in this reauthorization, an effort which has broad support in Congress (19 Senate co-sponsors and 123 House co-sponsors. A recent survey found that 40 states are in some level of preparing themselves for the passage of NCLI by working on State Environmental Literacy Plans. Colorado plans to debut theirs in April of 2011. Membership in national coalition has 1870 organizational members – very active members.

Julie reported that the MDNCLI Coalition has 224 organizations. Right now Julie has a stack of requests for participation on her desk. Delaware has developed Children in Nature Partnership which they are hoping to model after the MD C in N Partnership and there is a tremendous amount of interest growing in Virginia

EL is garnering support across the State – MDNCLI members sent in supportive comments during the MSDE comment period and state board members who represent their regions. Recently the EL requirement has gotten a lot of press (several regional Op Ed, Salisbury Times, and the Governors OP/Ed piece in July Baltimore Sun are examples. Dr. Maxwell (a Co-chair of the Partnership & AACPS Superintendent), has committed to “every child every year” outdoor experiences in Anne Arundel County. Julie said the coalition is hoping for the best with regard to next weeks vote – and that they are cautiously optimistic. The EE Coordinators will be holding a meeting October 15th to discuss implications and implementation options for the e-lit grad requirement (chaired by Mark Herzog, co-chair of the Partnership E-Lit Committee). Pending the outcome of the state board

vote, a follow-up Environmental Literacy Summit will be held October 20th, co-hosted by MDNCLI & CBT. Both meetings are working in concert; the EE Coordinators meeting is a smaller, introductory discussion with just County EE reps; the summit will incorporate broader public participation (Partnership & Coalition members, EE Coords, potential funders, educators and other stakeholders) to discuss the same topic in depth. She asked the group to please plan to attend and or help get the word out.

Action: Wanted the Partnership to know that the NCLI Coalition is supportive of the other aspects of the State C in N Plan. Working closely with Sandi on nature playspaces and engaging coalition members in other CIN recommendations in which they have expressed interest (CJC, public lands, etc.)

Julie asked the Partnership to please plan to attend the EL Summit and or help get the word out. John Griffin commented that the Dept of Interior lead the way with the Presidents directive to develop an agenda for Conservation in America. This directive speaks to a lot of what we are discussing here - like getting kids out to local parks. At a recent listening session one of the C in N Partnership members, Jackie Carrera, – suggested to the Secretary of Interior to link his efforts to the Secretary of Education / Duncan like we did here in Maryland – and he committed to it.

- **Children In Nature Network, Mary Hardcastle, Parks and People Foundation**

Mary Hardcastle – Park and People Foundation gave the group an update from the Children In Nature Network's grass roots gathering – this event started years ago in Sheppard's Town WV. Mary told the group that she feels a debt to this organization of elevating the children in nature topic and continuing to keep it in the national eye. She discussed their structure and how they do not intend to be an institution or organization – they don't want to get too structured – because they want to be on the move and to evolve. The website is great and has all the most up to date research on the topic of connecting children in nature. Mary discussed the idea that we need more outreach materials, and showed the group a beautiful poster from Idaho and challenge the Partnership to work on a social marketing campaign for children in nature – and this information should be distributed to doctor's offices and schools. Mary also discussed the public health agencies and faith based groups. Reaching diverse sectors is very important and the C in N Network believes there is not a group that does not have barriers – as a result they

have several initiatives to address and work through these barriers such as their Natural Leaders Network. She stated that we need a Maryland Natural Leaders program. There is also a C in N Network Natural Families Network, and a Natural Teacher's Network. In the coming months Baltimore City with the Parks and People Foundation is planning their second Children In Nature conference. In 2008 200 people attend the first conference.

Heading into the Fall: Maryland Update

- **Graduation Requirement update, Mary Gable; Assistant State Superintendent for the Division of Academic Policy**

Mary Gable – Maryland State Department of Education reported that the State Board will be meeting next Tuesday September 21st regarding the COMAR regulation for curriculum and the proposed Environmental Literacy graduation requirement. She passed around a handout that had been given to the board and reported on the public comment period. There were 187 comments submitted most of which were positive, with 4 against and 3 neutral. Mary commented that this is a pretty significant support for this proposed regulation change. Dr. Grasmick is moving this regulation forward and these 180 comments will be very helpful – 101 comments want the language to be placed in the graduation part of the code. The vote will be on whether to accept the ELGR in section 04, as it was proposed and published by MSDE. Secondly, the board will vote whether to move forward on the inclusion of the ELGR in section 03 (which would necessitate another 30 day comment period and vote to pass what is being looked at as “a technicality”). The Assistant Attorney General for MSDE has stated that including the ELGR in two places is not legally significant; when it is in one place, it is considered a mandate. However, it was agreed that inclusion of the ELGR in section 03, in addition to 04, was advisable for clarification – but that it just couldn't all be done in one step legally.

Mary said she will now be the point of contact for the Partnership and that Partners should feel free to contact her. In her capacity as head of academic policy at MSDE she looks forward to helping bridge her section with environmental education.

- **CBT, NOAA BWET Funding Opportunities**

Jamie Baxter, Jana Davis, Shannon Sprague

Jana Davis of the Chesapeake Bay Trust discussed with the group the DNR partnership with CJC and a new fund that will pay 15 stipend volunteers throughout Maryland to work on conservation work. October 1 is deadline for this RFP. She suggested anyone interested in a Chesapeake Conservation Corp volunteer to talk with her for clarification and guidelines for the program.

Shannon Sprague from NOAA / BWET (federal environmental education grant program and STEM related program) has awarded \$3.5 million in the Bay watershed and these funds are administered locally. She works in the Chesapeake area as does Bart Merritt from the Oxford Laboratory. Their programs are a part of the Chesapeake Bay Program and Executive Order. The big change this year is that they are focused solely on teacher professional training programs / capacity building – and anything that builds capacity to get kids to have an outdoor meaningful Bay experience. Maryland is the largest receipt of these funds / with about half of Chesapeake Bay Watershed money going to Maryland.

Shannon shared with the group that also required as part of the Executive Order is the establishment of a listing of all existing education programs in the region. In order for them to create this inventory of programs Shannon will need to talk to the Partnership about using them as the single pointing for creating this inventory. The kick off meeting for this effort will be in February. In addition her group will be opening an environmental science training center this fall to train professionals about STEM issues. This center will run out of Cooperative Extension Laboratory in Oxford. Shannon also informed the group about EL grants are now available with the potential of \$1.5 million in grant funds to be allocated annually.

Jamie Baxter discussed with the group that the Chesapeake Bay Trust now provides a multi-year grant that helps schools to accomplish increase coordination and sustainability of their environmental projects. He plans to discuss the success of this muliti-year grant program at the October 20th summit. The Trust also develop an RFP geared toward school systems that want to develop a plan to provide a set of scheduled experiences that would lead to an environmental literate graduate, and he said there are about a dozen interested school systems. Included in these new Children in Nature inspired grant programs is the ability to tracks schools who do extreme school

yard makeovers. CBT wants to expand this program to day care centers, and state and county parks who want to build natural play spaces. The deadline for this grant is October 29th.

Discussion:

Secretary Griffin offered that it would be a neat idea to do a show like the extreme makeover – for the schools / modeled after the tv show.

Tracy Bowen told everyone about the upcoming the Trash Summit and the legislative effort for a plastic bag fee in DC – funds of which are going to Anacostia restoration effort. In Maryland a plastic bag fee could create a fund that would go to CBT.

April – meeting 2011 will be at Hardbargain Farm in Accokeek

Future meetings:

January 27 – Annapolis (location TBD)

April 28 – Annapolis (location TBD)

July 28 – Baltimore at Conference Room 6 on the 8th floor of MSDE, 200 W. Baltimore Street

October 20 -- TBD