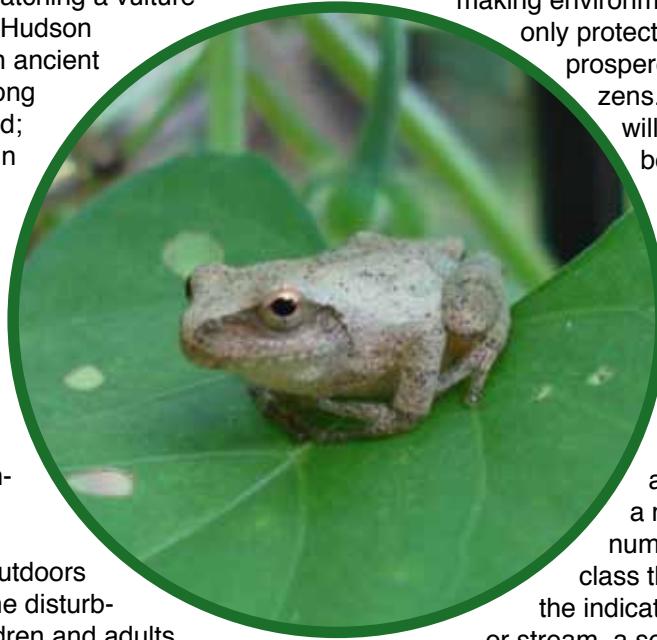


New York, the Living Classroom

Have you been outdoors lately? If you have, you probably have a story to tell: tasting a grape from a winery near Lake Cayuga, or an apple grown in the Mohawk Valley; walking among towering black cherry trees on the Allegheny Plateau, or breathing the scent of balsam in the Adirondack forest; feeling the water rush from Lake Erie to Ontario over Niagara Falls, or watching a vulture sail the thermals high above the Hudson River; collecting stones left by an ancient glacier or collecting seashells along the sandy beaches of Long Island; flying a kite among skyscrapers in Central Park. Many of us have experienced special moments outside the door, where nature has a surprise all around us. New York's diverse natural resources provide a living classroom that awakens a sense of awe and wonder, challenges us to expand our understanding, and inspires discovery and invention.

However, if you have not been outdoors lately, you are probably part of the disturbing trend that indicates both children and adults are spending less and less time in the outdoors and becoming disconnected from the natural world. Reversing this trend is imperative, for each moment in the outdoors cultivates us to become the environmentally literate citizens who can make informed decisions about the world we live in.



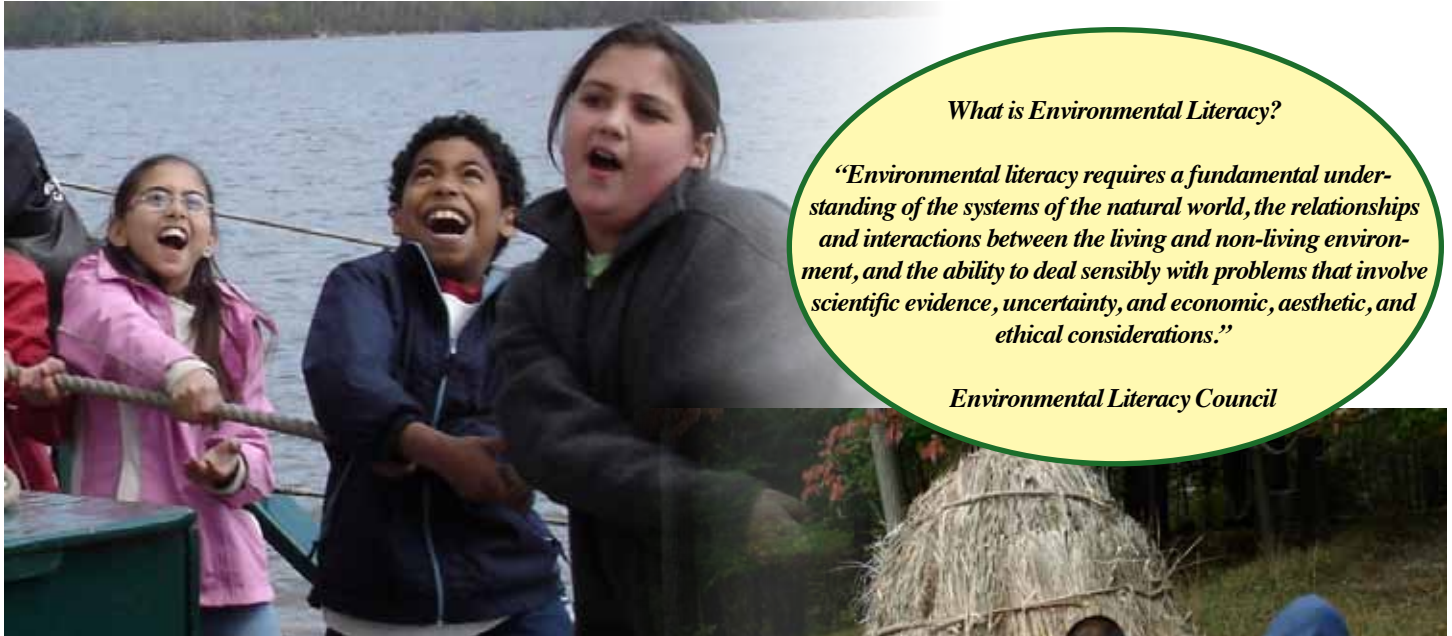
The Need for an Environmental Literacy Plan

New York is joining a national movement in stride with the Children and Nature Network founded by Richard Louv, author of the award-winning book, Last Child in the Woods. This movement is intended to reconnect children to the outdoors, helping them become more capable of making environmentally literate decisions that not only protect the environment but lead to a prosperous economy and healthy citizens. An environmental literacy plan will help outline the steps towards a better tomorrow by including environmental and outdoor education in the current New York State curriculum, not as an unfunded mandate, but by integrating it into social studies, science, English, math, art, music and even physical education. Imagine a persuasive essay that looks at alternative energy as a replacement for fossil fuels, a math class that calculates the number of trees per acre, a science class that determines water quality by the indicator organisms that live in the pond or stream, a social studies class that investigates United States history by visiting a local historic site. Students might develop a project that would leave a lasting legacy in town or village. The educational opportunities in our backyards are limitless, but we as a whole are no longer taking advantage of them.

Environmental Literacy: A Historical Perspective

Long before wilderness was fashionable, New Yorkers understood the intrinsic value of the environment to a healthy economy and to healthy citizens. In 1877, the legislature created Article IV of the New York State Constitution, commonly called the Forever Wild Clause, protecting a tract of land in the Adirondacks. Protecting the Adirondack forest ensured that rainwater would be absorbed as if in a giant sponge and slowly released over the year, reducing the impact of severe drought and preventing devastating floods and the loss of precious topsoil during the spring melt. It would also ensure a more steady supply of water to the Erie Canal that stretched from Albany to Buffalo, enabling a commerce corridor east to west connecting the Hudson with the Great Lakes, and north to south joining the Hudson and Lake Champlain. This foresight enabled New York to prosper, and become "The Empire State." Today, New York has more wilderness than any other eastern state and it is here that one can get lost for days. Though saving the forest and its inhabitants was a side effect of their effort to grow a thriving economy, the people of 1877 had a strong connection to the land and demonstrated the power of environmental literacy,

The outdoor classroom is available to every single New Yorker, urban and rural, but we must open the doors and step outside...



What is Environmental Literacy?

“Environmental literacy requires a fundamental understanding of the systems of the natural world, the relationships and interactions between the living and non-living environment, and the ability to deal sensibly with problems that involve scientific evidence, uncertainty, and economic, aesthetic, and ethical considerations.”

Environmental Literacy Council

Join the Adventure

This is bigger than “going green”! We are promoting understanding and inspiration that will inform new ideas in medicine, architecture, engineering, transportation, and beyond. Environmental literacy is important to all of us, in all walks of life -- health care professionals, agriculture and food industry, hospitality and tourism, engineers and architects, computer science, forest and construction industry, and all people everywhere. Why? We are all part of the natural world, and that natural world has more to teach us than we have yet learned. In the words of John Muir,

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.”



- **Children are spending half as much time outdoors as they did 20 years ago. (Juster et al 2004); (Burdette & Whitaker 2005); (Kuo & Sullivan 2001)**
- **In a typical week, only 6% of children ages 9-13 play outside on their own. (Children & Nature Network, 2008)**
- **Children who play outside are more physically active, more creative in their play, less aggressive and show better concentration. (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005; Ginsburg et al., 2007)**
- **Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children’s physical and mental health. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008)**
- **The most direct route to caring for the environment as an adult is participating in “wild nature activities” before the age of 11. (Wells and Lekies, 2006)**

Visit us at www.nysoea.org to find out how the New York State Outdoor Education Association and its partners are working for an environmentally literate NY. Contact us to stay updated on this important issue or consider having your organization or business become partner in promoting Environmental Literacy.

For more information on Environmental Literacy please visit these websites:

- *Children in Nature Network: www.childrenandnature.org*
- *No Child Left Inside Coalition: www.cbf.org*
- *North American Association of Environmental Education; www.naaee.org*
- *The Environmental Literacy Council; www.enviroliteracy.org*

