

# Developing Citizen Stewardship through Environmental Education

Donald R. Baugh

*Chesapeake Bay Foundation, U.S.A.*

The clean-up of the Chesapeake Bay has reached a turning point that gives us both optimism as well as some sobering thoughts about what needs to happen next. While the Bay has responded to a massive restoration campaign, in order to continue improvements in the Bay's water quality, the next phase of the campaign must be bolder, with deeper societal commitments. We have achieved what in many ways is the easiest part of the clean-up, regulating point source discharges. We must now look at changing the way we think and act.

If the Bay is to be saved, we need to develop a strong commitment to the environment that will endure time. This ethic must be broad and strong enough to compel the government to adopt more stringent pollution control measures. This ethic must also be strong and broad enough so that people are willing to make personal sacrifices in the way they live.

Educational programs offered by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a private non-profit environmental group, develops a strong ethic in the people through hands-on field experiences that develop empathy for the Bay, and through classroom experiences that develop critical thinking, problem solving, and decision-making skills. Field experiences which allow participants to interact with the environment are powerful in creating connections between the participant and the environment. Field experiences are offered in participants' "backyards" to provide new insights to an area that already has meaning for them, or in remarkable natural areas holding significance and spirit. The classroom experiences are aimed at developing the skills necessary to analyze and solve pertinent environmental issues. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation provides such field and classroom experiences for 36,000 students, teachers, and adults each year at sixteen centers located through-out the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay.

A sustainable environment can only be achieved by a population that thinks and acts in environmentally sound ways. Environmental education is critical in developing strong citizen support. Only through the commitment and strength of the people will society be able to solve the enormous environmental problems that we face.