

# 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: