In the United States, children are growing up in artificial environments, resulting in a severe disconnect from nature. Children spend a majority of their time indoors, and are losing comprehension of what it means to experience the natural world. There are mental, physical and imaginative qualities that are developed when a child interacts with nature. The benefits of outdoor education are being lost by a whole generation. One solution to this crisis is federally funded outdoor environmental education curriculum.

Overview

Benefits for Child Development
- Nature Deficit Disorder
  - "the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness" - Richard Louv
- Regulates human emotions and reduces stress
- Foundation for environmental stewardship
- Improves school performance, attitudes and relationships

Goals for Environmental Education
- To create environmentally literate citizens for the future
- To improve critical thinking skills
- To improve problem solving skills
- To improve self-esteem and confidence
- To increase sensory awareness
- To create new patterns of behavior towards the environment

Challenges for Environmental Education
- Not properly funded or given priority in schools
- Lack of teacher training
- Environmental Education too narrowly focused, too specific to certain regions
- Lack of communication and collaborating between organizations

Environmental Education in the U.S. and Minnesota

United States:
- No Child Left Inside Act (No Child Left Behind)
  - Provide necessary funding to support Environmental Education in all U.S. schools
  - Provide educators with necessary training to properly educate student

Minnesota:
- Environmental Literacy Benchmarks Approach
  - Setting standards for environmental literacy in MN

Federally Funded Curriculum
- Funding to transport students from the classroom to outdoor learning facilities
- Successful curriculum development will:
  - Provide unbiased lessons
  - Capture all ages
  - Be specific towards achieving environmental literacy
  - Provide proper training for all teachers

Conclusions
- Urgency and need for environmentally literate citizens continues to increase at an alarming rate
- Environmental education that begins in childhood and continues on into adulthood is the most effective means for creating environmentally literate citizens
- Financial burden of environmental education needs to be relieved from private and non-profit sectors and the federal government needs to do its share.