April xx, 2018

The Honorable Richard Shelby                                      The Honorable Barbara Shaheen
Chairman                                                            Ranking Member
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building                                  125 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510                                            Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We are writing in strong support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA’s) education programs, specifically the Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program and the Environmental Literacy Program (ELP). We urge you to fund these important programs at the FY 2018 enacted levels of $5,000,000 for ELP and $7,500,000 for B-WET in FY 2019. We also urge you to separately fund the Office of Education base account in order to not diminish the funds allocated to these two grant-making programs.

NOAA environmental education funds have been essential to the advancement of the climate, ocean, and environmental literacy in the United States, a major goal of the America COMPETES Act and the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) Committee on STEM (CoSTEM) Education’s Federal STEM Education 5-Year Strategic Plan. NOAA’s B-WET and ELP programs have been well received and utilized by the climate, ocean, and environmental literacy communities.

These two environmental literacy programs are central to fostering student interest and achievement in STEM, which supports the development of a workforce with applied STEM skills that can be applied to many fields, including biological systems. In addition, building STEM skills in young people through experiential education strengthens the U.S. economy by supplying employees that can continue the tradition of innovation that has fueled our nation’s global technological competitiveness.

B-WET has been administered by NOAA since 2002 and offers competitive grants to support existing environmental education programs, foster the growth of new programs, and encourage the development of partnerships within select watershed systems. Hundreds of thousands of students and thousands of teachers have received a firsthand environmental education experience in one of the seven B-WET regional program areas of New England, Chesapeake Bay, Gulf Coast, California, Pacific Northwest, Hawaii, and the Great Lakes.

Since 2005, the Environmental Literacy Program (ELP) program has provided funding for informal and K-12 environmental literacy projects. This program enables NOAA, as the nation’s leading expert on weather, climate and ocean information, to enhance informal education programs in science centers, universities and museums across the country.

We consider investments in the B-WET and ELP programs to be priority investments in our nation’s future, and respectfully request that you include funding for B-WET and ELP at FY 2018 enacted levels as well as separate funding for the Education Office base account in FY 2019.

Sincerely,