

Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE): LIFE – Big Cypress Watershed Program (Collier County)

A Partnership Agreement

Summary

The Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program is a statewide network of environmental-science, field laboratories on existing state lands (e.g., State Parks, Reserves, etc.). These "LIFE sites" are designed to support the science education needs of underserved and/or underrepresented middle schools and improve the quality and continuity of educational programming within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). As classrooms without walls, the LIFE sites provide an opportunity for the exploration of Florida's most unique natural communities and a place to practice and apply science.

Characteristics of the LIFE Program

The LIFE Program represents a systematic effort to combine the unique assets of the DEP (namely, conservation lands and the scientists who protect and study them) with the needs of Florida's students, teachers, and schools – with special emphasis on science. As such, it will be a partnership between individual field sites managed by DEP and/or public conservation lands, and a school district in the area.

Each LIFE site will use the local environment as the entry point for inspiring students through hands-on, field-based activities/labs. Students will spend a minimum of two days per year involved in field-based activities/labs applying, reinforcing, enriching, and integrating content from their existing, standards-based curriculum. The "processes of science" will guide instruction and serve as a method to integrate other subjects into an interdisciplinary program.

The goals of LIFE Program are to improve student achievement, support teacher professional development, increase participation of underrepresented and/or underserved populations in environmental science, and enhance stewardship of the region's unique natural communities and resources. Teachers – together with DEP educators - will play a lead role in designing and implementing field labs to address the priority needs of their students. The LIFE Program will also provide professional development opportunities for teachers in order to establish the necessary local capacity to sustain the LIFE site into the future.

Each LIFE Program will share the core characteristics outlined above; however, each Program will be the unique product of the local teachers, DEP staff, and other resources available at the site.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Department of Environmental Protection, through the Office of Environmental Education, will serve as the project coordinator for the first three years of the project. After year three, day to day operations of the program will be the responsibility of the participating teachers and staff of the primary field sites (Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve) and others.

The District Science Coordinator for Collier County Schools will work with participating teachers and their school administrators to ensure school and district-wide support for the LIFE Program

by providing the following: 1) transportation for students and teachers to and from the field sites; and 2) support for substitute teachers if necessary to allow science and other participating teachers the opportunity to participate in field labs and professional development opportunities. Funding for these costs in the first three years will be provided by the NOAA B-WET Grant as outlined in the Grant Agreement (see attached).

The Office of Environmental Education (OEE) will work with local partners to support efforts to secure funding beyond the first three years. The OEE will continue to compile, analyze and present pre-posttest assessment results. Finally, the OEE will continue to support the program with Teacher professional development support based on needs identified by the teachers.

Other partners – including universities, county extension offices, state and federal agencies, local businesses, local foundations, and local non-profit organizations – may be added to this partnership when their participation is agreed to by the primary partners described above.

This partnership agreement is designed to clarify the shared interests of the primary partners and to guide their good faith efforts to achieve the stated goals of the LIFE Program. It does not commit the partners to any specific financial obligations; however, it encourages each partner to ensure implementation of its roles and responsibilities as described above.

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Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection

Terri Tracy 5-18-10
Office of the Superintendent Date
Collier County School Board

Ben Nottingham 4/23/10
Manager, Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge Date

Jeffery A. Orr 4/23/10
Director, Office of Environmental Education Date

Randy McComick 4-23-10
Manager, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Date

Date

Date

Date