

Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education
Environmental Education: Teaching Our Children to Preserve Our Future
April 22, 2008

Testimony of Sean Davidson

Thank you Chairman for allowing me to attend this hearing to tell my story of how environmental education impacted what I have done to date.

I'd like to briefly introduce myself. My name is Sean Davidson and I am 22 years old. I grew up in suburban Columbia, MD where I currently live. I work for a company called Greenlight Biofuels who operates a 4 million gallon per year biodiesel production facility in Princess Anne, Maryland. I and a team of two other people co-founded the \$6 million facility.

Biodiesel which is an alternative fuel for diesel engines is clean burning, locally produced, and made from alternative sources such as vegetable oils and animal fats. Compared to regular diesel when burned biodiesel has as much as 78% less carbon and other emissions. It is part of a sustainable environmentally sound solution to our nations energy needs. I am here to tell the story of how I reached this accomplishment and the role that my environmental education experiences played in it.

Up until middle school I had very little exposure to environmental education. In late middle school I and 19 other students won the opportunity to go on a school sponsored trip to a farm where we camped and learned about the outdoors. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I looked for more like it and came across the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's two week trip for gifted and talented students. A camping trip that took me in and around the bay via foot, skipjack, canoe, and van. I learned the roots of what I would later categorize as three pillars of environmental education.

1. Appreciation and respect for outdoor beauty and enjoyment
2. An understanding of ecology and the interaction of people with it
3. The utility and value of the resources around us

At the end of the course they gave us the challenge to do an environmental project in our community. I went on to organize friends to raise for release into the bay oyster spat and under water grasses which are two keystone species in the bay ecosystem. I also did several trash cleanups. The lesson I learned was that a person can make a difference in their own sphere of influence even if it is small. However, I was frustrated with the limitations of not enough money and the difficulty of motivating others to get involved to make a significant impact.

Continuing through high school I never forgot the importance of the environment and the idea that I can make change in my sphere of influence. I began thinking about what careers would allow me to spend my time making positive environmental impacts. My best ideas were to become an educator or a scientist as the ways to have the largest

impact within my sphere of influence. While considering my career options and their impact I began to realize I had a knack for understanding business.

When college rolled around I began studying business. It wasn't long before this led me to see I could have a profitable business that practiced environmental stewardship. Even better would be a business that made money specifically doing something environmentally friendly. In this way I could have the largest possible positive impact. When I and a partner discovered the market trend that allowed a biodiesel manufacturing business to be economical we tackled it with conviction and perseverance. It was a marriage of business and environment that just made sense and so here I am today.

So I sit before you having learned a great deal more about those three pillars of an environmental education. Appreciation and respect, ecology and our interaction with it, and resources and our dependence on them. And I am astounded at how many people around me and people going through school know so little in those areas.

Not only have I seen first hand the lack of environmental education around me I've read reports and articles speaking to how our culture and educational system is moving away from teaching these things. Video games, iPods, laptops, and the internet often are cited as contributing culprits but, are no excuse for the lack of a system that gives opportunity for outdoor learning to take place.

It may be my opinion, but my opinion through experience that not only is environmental education needed in our schools today but, that it can be successful in its desired goals. Please consider this insight when you consider your support for the No Child Left Inside Act.

Thank You.