

# SEEA Landscape Analysis

## *State Findings and Recommendations* *Alabama*



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## Background Information

This analysis was designed to take a comprehensive look at the environmental education already happening on the ground, identify gaps and barriers to access that prevent successful implementation, and provide recommendations and next steps for increasing environmental literacy efforts in the southeast. This analysis will equip the organizations conducting environmental and conservation-related work in the region with the resources they need to address gaps, allocate resources more effectively, and ultimately meet the goal of increasing environmental literacy levels and stewardship behaviors. In addition, the analysis will serve as a guide for future strategic planning efforts in individual states, as well as the regional SEEA collaborative. As a tool, it will help ensure that in the future we continue to focus our limited time and resources in areas where we will have the biggest impact.

## Findings

In 2021, SEEA surveyed 60 environmental education providers in Alabama. The findings from that survey are summarized below.

### Mapping

The number of EE programs in each state ranges from 25 (4%; Tennessee) to 133 (23%; North Carolina), with an average of 80 programs per state. Based on this data, Alabama was below the regional average number of providers. In reviewing our findings, we found gaps in southern counties of Alabama (2nd Nature TREC, 2022), particularly in the areas with the lowest income and lowest population. Because our data only shows us the headquarters of the providers, we cannot be certain that these areas are underserved, but given that most of the environmental education takes place as field trips or direct teaching, we can make an assumption that many of these areas go unsupported due to the distance it would take to serve them.

### Field Trends Dashboard

The dashboard has a wealth of information available for educators and stakeholders. The following serves to highlight some of the state findings, with the understanding that the data can be sorted by any number of and combination of factors such as sector, themes, audience served, and so on. For more details on how to use this tool to dig deeper into the data, please see the [dashboard tutorial](#).

Alabama environmental education providers reported serving a collective 1069 schools; 254,960 youth; 3405 educators and administrators; and 259,407 other audiences.

The predominant program themes in Alabama are, respectively: Conservation, Outdoor Learning, Biodiversity, Water and STEM. The primary term being used in Alabama was overwhelmingly “environmental education,” followed by “outdoor education,” “nature-based learning”, and “conservation education.”

The primary offerings being provided across the state were direct teaching and field trips, followed by instructional materials. The primary audience served across the region tends to be 6-8th grade students, followed by K-5 and 9-12th grade students. This demonstrates the need to increase opportunities for engagement at the early childhood level in order for students to receive the same level of engagement in environmental education throughout K-12th grade.

From our initial review, we have gleaned that environmental education providers are doing limited evaluation of their programs. There is a need for more support and training around the importance of program evaluation, as well as tools that can help providers do this in a meaningful way that will help them strengthen their programs.

If we adjust for non-responses, our data shows us that 9% of environmental education staff identify as Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color (BIPOC), which is significantly lower than the state average of 31% per 2020 US Census Data. We found senior staff to be 5%. This has identified a need for more BIPOC staff and leadership in environmental education organizations. Data showed that 12% of board members for environmental education organizations identified as BIPOC (2nd Nature TREC, 2022).

Out of 60 respondents, only 21 tracked the demographics of the audience served. Of those, the average percentage of BIPOC students served is 34% and educators served is 20%. However, we expect this data is skewed significantly due to the low response rate. There is a need for additional support and training around the importance of collecting demographic information and how it can be used to strengthen programs and opportunities for broader engagement.

In a comparison of starting salaries for similar fields, environmental education was found to be lower than all three comparison fields. The average starting salary for environmental education reported in our survey was \$29,515 for a full-time position compared to \$34,900 for education, \$39,100 for forestry, and \$37,800 for hospitality and tourism.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings, we provide the following recommendations for Alabama:

- Increase diversity of environmental education staff and leadership to better reflect demographics of the state.
- Address inequities in pay and benefits for environmental education.
- Increase the entry level salary for environmental educators to be more comparable to other fields.
- Increase opportunities for engagement at the early childhood level in order for students to receive the same level of engagement in environmental education from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- Provide guidance and training around the importance of evaluating programs and better tools to help providers do this in a meaningful way that allows them to strengthen their programs.
- Address gaps in services found in southern counties, particularly in areas with the lowest income and lowest population.
- Provide guidance and training around the importance of collecting demographic information and how it can be used to strengthen programs and opportunities for broader engagement.