



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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The Power of Watershed Education Networks

In the communities of the Pacific Northwest there are numerous organizations providing environmental education to meet their own specific objectives. To prevent duplication of efforts and more effectively educate the region's residents, who are the key to protecting and improving water quality, environmental education networks have been established in some areas. In a 2006 survey of environmental educators conducted by the Puget Sound Action Team, it was found that increased coordination and collaboration between organizations is strongly desired in areas where networks do not currently exist. Washington State University has been a key player in the establishment and support of some of these networks and have found that these networks are successfully increasing the effectiveness of environmental education efforts.



These formalized networks have participation from non-profit organizations, government agencies, school teachers, and businesses. Networks have provided collaboration, coordination, and synergy amongst the diverse groups providing outreach. Goals of these network groups typically include:

- ◆ Preventing duplication
- ◆ Providing consistent messages to the public
- ◆ Fostering collaborative efforts
- ◆ Ensuring that key audiences are reached
- ◆ Educating network participants on specific issues or education strategies
- ◆ Providing meaningful evaluation of programs
- ◆ Increasing responsiveness to emerging issues

Specific examples of projects that networks have established include: localized guides for teachers about the range of local environmental education programs available for their classes; online calendars of programs and activities for the public; teacher training programs and student summits; a weekly newspaper column; a regional newsletter; and a peer reviewed slide show on the water quality issues and homeowner solutions in Hood Canal. In Hood Canal, two exotic species of tunicates were recently discovered and the "Hood Canal Watershed Education Network" took quick action. They organized a training for divers, as well as themselves, to learn how to identify the exotic species of tunicates and what actions should be done to report them. The best educational materials and brochures were ascertained, which were subsequently used by many of the educators to educate people at events they were involved with.

Some of the networks have established an annual planning meeting where participants discuss their organization's planned and potential activities for the coming year. These annual meetings have greatly increased the amount of collaboration and reduced duplication of programs. They have also inspired efforts that



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University Publications:

<http://www.alaska.edu/uaf/ces/publications/>

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Contact Bob Mahler: 208-885-7025

<http://www.uidaho.edu/wq/wqhome.html>

University Publications:

<http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/Catalog/catalog.htm>

Oregon

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University Publications:

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Water Resource Research Institutes

Water and Environmental Research
Center (Alaska)

<http://www.uaf.edu/water/>

Idaho Water Resources
Research Institute

<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and
Watersheds (Oregon)

<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington
Water Research Center

<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10

The Pacific Northwest

<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>

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would not have been possible for one organization to take on, however through partnerships the necessary resources could be garnered. In addition, the networks serve as good venues to discuss grant and funding opportunities to build specialized programs.

Network participants become much better resources for the people they are assisting, since they know what the other organizations can offer to also assist the public. These networks build working relationships, more efficiently use the expertise and resources available in the community, and provide opportunities for peer review of materials that are being developed, such as publications and videos. In addition, they prove to be good venues for providing joint training on specific topics such as emerging issues, effective new ways to educate people, and program evaluation methods. Networks also serve to assist with logistical aspects of programs, such as identifying key speakers and experts on topics, locations to hold events, educational materials to provide for programs, and marketing approaches.

From these efforts the public receives higher quality programs, they get more consistent information about ways they can better protect the environment, tax dollars are more effectively used, and hopefully the environment sees greater improvement.

In summary, networks provide a mutually supportive atmosphere for colleagues from different organizations to work together, improve professionally, and share resources, successes, and lessons learned. Further development of such networks is considered crucial in efforts to best protect and manage our waters.



National Water Quality Program Areas

The four land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest have aligned our water resource Extension and research efforts with eight themes of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

1. Animal Waste Management
2. Drinking Water and Human Health
3. Environmental Restoration
4. Nutrient and Pesticide Management
5. Pollution Assessment and Prevention
6. Watershed Management
7. Water Conservation and Management
8. Water Policy and Economics

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