

June 24, 2005

GEM awarded \$500,000 grant to fund partnership with Mexican communities, universities

The Global Environmental Management Education Center (GEM) at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point has received a \$500,000 grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to help rural communities in Mexico manage their watersheds in healthy, sustainable ways.

GEM Director Victor Phillips, the principal investigator on the grant, explained that the program will formally train 10 Mexican students, two of whom will receive master's degrees in watershed management from UWSP. With the help of GEM staff, students, and partners, an additional 100-150 local residents will be trained through a series of interactive workshops, field days, and practical learning experiences in Oaxaca, Mexico.

GEM, a center within the College of Natural Resources at the UWSP, will work with partners in Mexico including Estudios Rurales y Asesoría Campesina (ERA), Oaxaca; Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey – Campus Monterrey (ITESM, or Monterrey Tech); and Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo (UACH), Texcoco, Mexico.

The partnership will focus on non-consumptive forest uses in several rural communities of the Rio Grande watershed in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte region. Using watershed management and agroforestry techniques the project will help to provide clean water, protect biodiversity and sequester carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas.

"The goal of the grant project is to educate as many Oaxacans as possible in the areas of sustainable development through effective watershed resource management, so that the positive outcomes will long outlive the three-year project," said Brian Kermath, GEM research associate.

Kermath, who will help Phillips manage the grant, returned last week from Mexico where he met with non-government organizations and educational leaders on other GEM initiatives, including the GEM Student Ambassadors Program.

"These international links are important to building a sustainable future here in Wisconsin and around the world," Phillips said. "People have the same needs everywhere for clean water, adequate food and shelter, means of livelihood, peace and security. By working together and learning from each other, people will be better able to achieve these goals for their families and communities."

GEM, launched in 2000, serves to pioneer and apply practical learning methods and technology to solve natural resource problems. The center does this by linking faculty, students, and citizens worldwide. GEM has attracted nearly \$10 million in funding to date. Major grants include awards from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Agency for International Development.

GEM has developed ongoing partnerships in China, Kenya, South Africa, Mexico and other countries. Its International Seminar on Watershed Management, held annually in Wisconsin, has drawn participants from 30 countries. GEM also sponsors “Critical Issues,” a free international seminar series held on the UWSP campus.

“The latest grant will help GEM staff, students and collaborators continue international work and add to UWSP’s long tradition of leading-edge conservation education,” Phillips said.

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Additional information about GEM is available at the following Web site:
<http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/GEM/gemintro.htm>