

Event Summary

2007 Governor's High School Conference on the Environment



Event Details

The 16th annual High School Conference on the Environment took place on Wednesday, November 14, 2007 at the Country Springs Hotel Conference & Convention Center in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The conference was hosted by the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education at UW-Stevens Point. The event was coordinated by Sunshine Buchholz: sbuchhol@uwsp.edu or 715-346-2014.

Content

The theme of the conference was *Students Making a Difference: Citizen Science Monitoring*. The goal of this conference was to provide opportunities for students to participate in projects that expand scientific knowledge, to make meaningful contributions, to become more aware of their surroundings, to deepen their sense of place, and to strengthen their connection to the environment.

Presentations by a variety of state and national programs introduced participants to citizen science monitoring opportunities in which students and teachers can become involved. Participants explored other students' environmental research projects and learned about career opportunities in natural resources. Participants left with the information needed to participate in a monitoring program suitable for any area of the state.

Highlights

- **Student Exhibits** - Students who are currently involved in monitoring programs at their schools discussed their research during a poster session. They networked with other students to learn about the types of environmental monitoring done around the state. A student selected "Favorite Exhibit" award was presented to Dundee Crown High School (IL) for their outstanding work. Dundee Crown is our first out-of-state school to participate in the event.
- **Citizenship** - Throughout the conference the idea of citizenship was explored. Conference participants discovered that their research can be more than a school project and that they really are making a difference in their communities and state.
- **Careers Showcase** - For the first time, the conference featured a showcase of career professionals from various environmental fields. Students had the opportunity to ask questions about the environmental monitoring work and discuss potential career opportunities. Representatives from three Wisconsin colleges/universities with environmental programs were also present to answer participant's questions and share information. Students from the UW-Stevens Point Wildlife Society shared information about citizen science research being conducted at the college level.
- **Keynote Speakers** - Keynote speakers at this year's event were Dr. Eric Anderson, professor of wildlife at UW-Stevens Point, and Stan Gruszynski, Director of the GEM Rural Leadership & Community Development Program. Anderson discussed his citizen science work with university students related to cougars in the state and commended participants on their efforts. Gruszynski encouraged students to step up and make a difference in their local communities as the future leaders who will make decisions for our state's resources.

- **Concurrent Sessions** - There were 20 different concurrent sessions presented by high school students and citizen science professionals. Participants had the opportunity to learn about the importance of monitoring and the many programs in which they can become involved. They also learned how to use the data they collect to share information with others and expand their project beyond a classroom assignment.

Participation

This year's event had 302 participants.

- 194 students
- 51 teachers, chaperons, other participants
- 2 keynote speakers
- 29 presenters (there were also over 20 student presenters)
- 11 exhibitors (there were also 10 presenter and 26 student exhibits)
- 15 volunteers

Participant Comments

- "Excellent job on the Environmental Conference. My kids really enjoyed it and they are already talking about next year. We also want to start an environmental club in our school."
- "Very informative and educational, one of the best experiences of my senior year."
- "It's nice to see things happening in our state, not a million miles away, that people here can actually make a difference."

Most Memorable Thing Learned...

- "That anyone can make a difference in their own town and they don't have to be a scientist with a PH.D"
- "Personal responsibility is most important in making change."

Any Behavior Change as a Result of What You Learned?

- "Yes, my general outlook on the natural value of Wisconsin has greatly broadened and therefore, I plan to change my lifestyle accordingly."

Featured Projects

There are many student groups contributing to citizen science research around the state. A few highlights include:

- Grantsburg High School – winners of the 2007 Outstanding Achievements in Youth Monitoring award from the Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Program for their work analyzing mussel communities in northwestern Wisconsin and monitoring dragonfly communities on the St. Croix River and its tributaries
- Seymour Community High School and Oneida Nation High School – partnering to study and map arsenic in the local water supply
- Appleton East High School and West DePere High School – participating in the on-going Lower Fox River Watershed Monitoring Program with three other local high schools
- St. Catherine's High School in Racine – starting a new bat monitoring research program with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

How did the conference help these groups? In their words, "I really liked the student exhibits-it will keep me motivated to keep doing studies knowing that others are making a difference." "I am so happy that I came and am very motivated to go back and continue with our research."

Conference Sponsors

The success of this event is dependent on our generous conference sponsors. Thank you to all the organizations and businesses that made financial, in-kind, and door prize donations.

- **Gold Level** - The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection; The Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education

- **Silver Level** - The Nature Conservancy; Water Action Volunteers; Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Citizen-based Monitoring Program
- **Bronze Level** - Madison Gas & Electric; Herbert H. Kohl Charities
- **In-kind** - Clif Bar; The Stevens Point Area Co-op; Kwik Trip Inc.; Midwest Renewable Energy Association; County Market
- **Door Prizes** – Citizen Lake Monitoring Network; Clean Boats, Clean Waters; International Crane Foundation; LoonWatch; National Institute of Invasive Species Science; National Weather Service; Nature Conservancy; Northland College; UW-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources; Water Action Volunteers; WDNR – Air Management; WDNR – Citizen-based Monitoring Program; Wisconsin K-12 Energy Education Program

Walking the Talk

When putting on the Conference we took steps to reduce our environmental impact. Here are some of our efforts to Walk the Talk environmentally:

- **NatureWise** - We worked with the conference site and our local utility to participate in the NatureWise Program and offset our energy use at the conference site for the day of the event.
- **Recycling** - Recycling containers throughout the conference site were provided by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point student Environmental Council to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills.
- **Carpooling** - Participants were encouraged to carpool to the conference and reduce carbon emissions.
- **Reduced Mailings** - All conference information and materials were available on the conference web site. As often as possible we replaced paper mailings with email and encouraged people to access information via the web. This reduced the amount of paper used, amount of printing needed, and reliance on postal transport.
- **Water Bottles Encouraged** - Participants were encouraged to bring a water bottle for use at the conference. We eliminated the use of plastic cups throughout the day.
- **Reduced Packaging** - We worked with the conference site to offer “boxed” lunches without the boxes. Food items were served with as little packaging as possible. Individual lunch items were set out buffet style so participants could take only the items they preferred rather than getting one of every item in a box.
- **Nametag Recycling** - Nametag holders were collected as participants left the conference. We reuse participant nametag holders year after year.

Conference Web Site

The conference web site features a photo gallery from the conference and a summary of participant action plans created at the close of the event: www.uwsp.edu/wcee/youthconference.