2011

Watershed Access Lab: Educators Resource Center for Environmental Studies

Kim McCoy

Bridgewater State University, kmccoy@bridgew.edu

Recommended Citation

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
Watershed Access Lab: Educators Resource Center for Environmental Studies

Kim McCoy
Laboratory Coordinator
The Watershed Access Lab originated in the Spring of 1997 through a generous grant from the Raytheon Corporation. The goal of the lab was to use watershed education and stewardship to apply math, science, and technology. In order to promote those studies, we first had to remove the equipment barrier that teachers faced to perform meaningful, hands on watershed studies. Our focus was to use land use, stream discharge, water quality, aquatic communities and GIS to study watersheds and their health. Throughout the years, the WAL has been supported by grants from the Board of Higher Education and NSF, projects from local watershed groups, and Bridgewater State University.
WAL: What is it?

- Open access lab for watershed educators in schools and communities
- Support team for students and teachers conducting watershed studies
- Equipment and material lending lab
- Educators resource center for environmental studies

The Watershed Access Lab is an open access lab for educators in schools and community organizations. We are a support team for teachers and students conducting watershed studies. We provide lending lab equipment and materials in order to remove the equipment barrier faced by local teachers and community groups trying to perform meaningful watershed studies. More recently, the WAL has expanding their offerings to include workshops, trainings and professional development for teachers and students in environmental studies both locally and globally. Thus becoming a resource center for educators promoting environmental studies.
We offer several opportunities for participation in WAL. The first being our graduate level course in watersheds including presentation of results in our annual watershed seminar. Our most recent additions include our professional development workshops aimed to provide local teachers with simple tools and activities to use in their schools to promote hands on environmental education.
NSCI 521: Watersheds: Stream Ecology, Water Quality and Land Use

- Interdisciplinary course involving watershed assessment
- Student/Teacher community projects emphasize hands on training
- Seminar presentations to showcase results of community projects

NSCI 521 is an interdisciplinary course that promotes watershed assessment as a tool in environmental education and watershed stewardship. Educators are trained in the techniques and tools necessary to conduct watershed studies with their students in their own communities. The projects emphasize hands on training techniques in water quality assessment using modern computerized monitoring devices, macro-invertebrates as bio-indicators, and Arcview GIS to determine river health. Following their studies, students are asked to present their projects at a one-day seminar at BSU to showcase their results and knowledge. This seminar is opened to not only the other participants, but also to parents, school administration, community leadership, local environmental groups, and the communities at large.
The workshop will introduce participants to the three parameters of wetlands (vegetation, soils, hydrology), wetland functions and values as well as management options all through fun and engaging activities. WOW! incorporates wetlands into reading, math, social studies, art or physical education lessons. The Wonders of Wetlands guide is an instructional guide for K-12 educators that provides a resourceful and creative collection of wetland activities, information, and ideas. WOW! includes: over 50 hands-on multidisciplinary activities in lesson plan format, extensive background information on wetlands, ideas for student action projects, and a wetlands resource guide. According to the NSTA reviewers, the activities follow the inquiry model in very real-life settings. Students and teachers alike will learn content, develop process skills, and acquire an appreciation for the value of the wetlands. As students develop an awareness of the unique ecological contribution of these environments, they also gain experience in taking action to conserve wetland areas.
Growing Up WILD is a national recognized early childhood initiative that builds literacy skills and environmental appreciation among early learners through participation in engaging wildlife-based educational activities. 

Growing Up WILD features new activities designed to stimulate young children in new and exciting ways while connecting them to nature and many of its wonders. Through a wide range of activities and experiences, Growing Up WILD provides an early foundation for developing positive impressions about the natural world and lifelong social and academic skills.
Project WILD links students and wildlife through its mission to provide wildlife-based conservation and environmental education that fosters responsible actions toward wildlife and related natural resources. Project WILD K-12 Curriculum and Activity Guide focuses on wildlife and habitat. The Project WILD Aquatic K-12 Curriculum and Activity Guide emphasizes aquatic wildlife and aquatic ecosystems. Project WILD's new high school curriculum, Science and Civics: Sustaining Wildlife, is designed to serve as a guide for involving students in environmental action projects aimed at benefitting the local wildlife found in a community. Each activity contains all the information needed to conduct that activity including objectives, method, background information, a list of materials needed, procedures, evaluation suggestions, recommended grade levels, subject areas, duration, group size, setting, and key terms. A glossary is provided, as well as a cross-reference by topics and skills.
The mission of Project WET is to reach children, parents, educators and communities of the world with water education. They have many globally recognized programs including not only WET, but also Discover a Wetland, Healthy Water, Healthy People, and Conserve Water. The Project WET guide contains 91 hands-on, investigative, easy to use, multidisciplinary water-related activities for students in grades K to 12. Activities fulfill objectives and educational standards in the sciences, as well as other disciplines, from fine arts to health. More than 40 countries, in addition to the United States, are using the Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide activities and over 80 countries have inquired about sponsoring Project WET programs.
As of the Spring of 2011, over 80 teachers and 1900 middle school/high school students have participated in NSCI 521. Community watershed projects use applied math, science, and technology to promote stewardship in the students, their parents, and their communities.
NSCI 521 Seminar Teachers
Since Spring, 2009, over 75 teachers have received training in hands-on wetland education. According to a Chinese Proverb:

- I hear and I forget
- I see and I remember
- I do and I understand

Students explore, learn, and understand scientific concepts through hands-on activities.
Through environmental education, we are developing awareness, knowledge, skills and commitment. This results in the making of informed decisions, responsible behavior, and constructive action concerning the environment. Education addresses the need for human beings to develop as responsible citizens of our planet. It is based on the premise that young people and educators have a vital interest in learning about and preserving our natural world.
Impact of WAL Participation

- New perspectives on careers in STEM disciplines:
  - State Agencies
  - Federal Agencies
  - Board of Heath/Conservation Commission
  - Consulting Firms
  - Areas of future educational studies and college preparation
Impact of WAL Participation

- New perspectives on the importance of the environment and its preservation and conservation – STEWARDSHIP