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Supporting Volunteer Monitoring Efforts Across the Country

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Abstract Text:

The Volunteer Water Quality National Facilitation project began in 2000. Our goal was to create a comprehensive support system for Extension volunteer water quality monitoring efforts across the country, both to expand and strengthen the capacity of existing programs and support development of new ones, with the result of enhanced integration of volunteer monitoring in research, education, and extension activities. This presentation summarizes the outputs and outcomes of our project to date. With staff in RI and WI and programs scattered across the country, the internet and conference workshops at many venues have played a central role in our program delivery. We created our flagship website www.usawaterquality.org/volunteer, as the virtual hub of our program. The website contains all the outputs of this project, and provides a portal to and from all Extension affiliated volunteer monitoring programs. We used a multi-tiered inquiry to learn as much as possible about them and used the results to guide our efforts. The centerpiece has been the "Guide for Growing CSREES Volunteer Monitoring Programs". It provides succinct, comprehensive and timely information distilled from successful programs across the country, packaged as a suite of factsheet learning modules. Our CSREESVolMon@lists.uwex.edu listserv fosters the exchange of information and promotion of events throughout the network. An archive of online discussions arranged topically (currently more than 60) on our website retains that useful information, reducing redundancy. We have held workshops in many venues, with agendas and presentations also archived on the website. The volunteer monitoring community is diverse, decentralized, vibrant, resourceful and effective. It has been at times a challenge, oftentimes humbling, and ultimately a true pleasure to provide useful information & advice to watershed stewards across the country.

Impact Statement:

We have assumed a leadership role as a national service provider for volunteer water quality monitoring. Impacts include better communication, information sharing, and coordination among Extension volunteer monitoring programs, researchers, and partners within states, across regions, and nationally, leading to stronger and more strategic partnerships within and external to Extension. Increased numbers and longevity of Extension volunteer monitoring programs will lead to increased ability of local decision-makers to understand how to assess, interpret and use monitoring data, and thus increased capacity for watershed management and public policy development.