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Wisconsin's National Estuarine Research Reserve Nomination: Integrating Multi-state Collaboration, Large-scale Group Processes, and Grassroots Involvement into Extension Programming

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Abstract:

In 2008, Wisconsin nominated the St. Louis River freshwater estuary on Lake Superior for designation as a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR). This presentation will provide an overview of the multi-state and multi-agency collaboration, large-scale group processes, and grassroots involvement that were key components of the site selection and nomination process. The tools used will be presented and discussed as a model for other complex, large-scale group processes that involve diverse partnerships. The presentation will compare and contrast this effort with other similar efforts, share outcomes, and discuss the lessons learned. The presentation will also provide a brief overview of the nominated site.

The NERR System is a nation-wide network of 27 protected coastal estuaries that are designated and supported through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The NERR program integrates research, education, and stewardship activities related to estuary resources, including both marine estuaries and Great lakes freshwater estuaries. NERR sites are managed through a partnership between federal and state governments.

Wisconsin's NERR project has been a long-term effort that began with outreach programming related to Lake Superior's freshwater estuary resources in 2002. Extensive educational programming and capacity building were used to foster and enhance local project ownership. The detailed site selection process for the NERR site began in 2006 and integrated technical aspects of the process with intensive public involvement efforts. The project occurred over an 18-month period, involved four teams comprised of more than 65 individuals, included individuals representing three states, and evaluated 35 candidate sites. It culminated with nomination of a 12,000-acre freshwater estuary on the St. Louis River, which is the largest United States tributary to Lake Superior. A Wisconsin NERR site will represent only the second Great Lakes NERR and create an important regional platform for collaborative freshwater estuary research and education.

Impact Statement:

On May 30th, 2008, Wisconsin's Governor Doyle announced the nomination of the St. Louis River freshwater estuary on Lake Superior for NERR designation. The nomination was widely covered in the press and made national news sources. A Wisconsin NERR designation will result in the St. Louis River joining Old Woman Creek in Ohio (Lake Erie) as only the second Great Lakes freshwater estuary in the NERR System. A second NERR site in the Great Lakes region will create an important platform for collaborative freshwater estuary research and comparative studies.

A nomination document has been sent to NOAA for review and approval. A decision regarding the nomination package is expected by September or October of 2008. Assuming approval of the nomination, the next steps for the NERR project include development of a management plan and Environmental Impact Statement, which is anticipated to take two years to complete.

This effort has been able to leverage significant financial and human resources. Leveraged resources (e.g., staff/volunteer time, meeting space, supplies, etc.) in support of the initiative were provided by many of the 30-plus partnering organizations involved with the project. The success of this project to date underscores the importance of public participation, grassroots leadership, multi-agency partnerships, and multi-state collaboration.

Category: Human Dimensions

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation