

Woodland Dunes Nature Center and Preserve

Final Report: RP-134-07

Project Goal:

Organize, educate and sustain a stewardship group for the East and West Twin River watersheds and set up a program based on Wisconsin's Water Action volunteer stream monitoring program.

The results of our efforts are described below:

Project products and deliverables:

Woodland Dunes Nature Center offered a series of educational programs and workshops to generate interest in the health of the Twin Rivers and to recruit members for a monitoring group. Multiple trainings were held on the Water Action Volunteer (WAV) program and Woodland Dunes purchased equipment for 12 complete monitoring kits to be used by the individuals monitoring the rivers.

Information about the health of the Twin rivers was introduced through a variety of methods: educational programs, news releases, radio appearances, direct mailings, informative articles and posted flyers. Individuals who attended events and actively monitored also received a series of newsletters highlighting information about the rivers and upcoming events.

8/30/2006: "Understanding our Rivers" Our initial meeting drew 15 people from the community who were interested in learning more about the East and West Twin Rivers. During the meeting we introduced some of the threats to the rivers and Kris Stepenuck the statewide coordinator for the WAV program introduced the monitoring project. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire indicating what water related topics they would like to learn more about and their interest in monitoring. Invasive species, the health of Lake Michigan and general river ecology were on the top of the list.

9/23/2006 "WAV Training" Volunteers learned how to test the rivers and about the significance of the parameters tested for. This meeting was attended by 6 people from the initial meeting who were interested in testing. A good majority of the people who attended the first meeting were elderly and nervous about participating in the actual testing, however we continued to keep them involved in the project through educational programs offered about the rivers.

1/11/2007: "Wisconsin's Aquatic Invasives" Richard Sachs, Aquatic Invasive Species coordinator for the DNR presented information on the threat to aquatic systems from invasive species. This program was attended by 14 people.

7/10/2007: "WAV meeting and River Ecology Program" Steve Hogeler, Wisconsin DNR fish biologist presented information on river ecology of the East and West Twin rivers and the fish living in the rivers. He was involved in an extensive study on the rivers in 2001 which he presented to the group. Following the meeting we compared notes on what we have been finding with our own data. The program was attended by 11 people.

4/11/2008: "The Changing Ecology of Lake Michigan" Dr. Art Brooks from the University of Milwaukee discussed changes in the ecology of Lake Michigan from glacial times to the present. He talked about the problems of pollution and the possible influence of changing climate on the lake. Following the program we highlighted the influence the rivers in our area have on Lake Michigan and promoted the water monitoring program for the East and West Twin River. This program was attended by 70 people.

4/26/2008: "WAV Level 1 and 2 Training" Kris Stepenuck from DNR and Chris Clayton from River Alliance of Wisconsin led two separate workshops on level 1 and level 2 monitoring. This program drew people from around the county but also some people interested in monitoring elsewhere. Four individuals from our core group of volunteers took part in the level 2 training and 2 new people took part in the level 1 training for the East and West Twin Group.

5/14/2008 “Where to go from Here” We had a dinner and meeting for current and potential WAV monitors. A representative of the Friends of the Branch river did a presentation on the achievements made by the Friends of the Branch River group and gave us some insight into where we can take our group. Seven of our volunteers attended the meeting. We discussed potential projects the group might like to see happen in the community. Litter pick-ups and river related educational programs were discussed.

5/17/2009 “Wetlands and Birds” This program was an introduction to wetland ecology – wetland filtration and storage of water was discussed as well as the birds you find in marshes, swamps and rivers.

4/15/2009 “WAV training” This WAV training served as a refresher for current volunteers as well as a chance for them to teach new people about the program. This event was only attended by 1 new individual.

4/26/2009 “River Celebration” To try and gain more press and momentum for the river group, we had a River celebration. David Stokes, naturalist, humorist and educator did a program about rivers and the critters that live in them. Following the program a litter pick-up in the parks along the rivers in the city of Two Rivers was planned, as well as a cook out and amphibian hike following the litter pick-up.

The weather did not cooperate. About 40 people showed up for the river program but down pours started half way through the program and lasted through-out the day and evening. After the river program we talked about how they could help the rivers in our area by joining one of the monitoring groups in our area – the litter pick-up was rescheduled for a later date.

School Involvement

Students from Denmark Empowerment Charter School and Denmark High School’s Eco Club were trained and took part in monitoring. The Eco Club was able to continue testing through the fall of 2009 and have initiated an expanded water testing project (WAV plus some nutrient testing) using three sites along the upper tributaries to the river to assess human impacts to the system. They presented their project at an environmental workshop for high schools at UW-Stevens Point, and plan to continue testing in 2010.

To raise more awareness about water and water quality issues a school based program for 5th and 6th grade students was developed. During the program students learn about WAV tests and practice their skills on two ponds on Woodland Dunes property. This school program has introduced the river monitoring program to a larger audience of teachers and students, in the two years the program has run 695 students have been introduced to water monitoring and how they can help keep our rivers and lakes healthy.

Scouts

The river monitoring program was advertised to scout groups in the area. A group of boy scouts helped in a litter clean-up and a girl scout group helped with storm drain marking in the city of Two Rivers. Woodland Dunes also became an explorer post for High School age students during the grant period. An evening was spent teaching 8 explorers about river monitoring and the work that we are doing with the rivers.

Art Contest

Through a partnership with Debbie Beyer, UW-Extension basin educator, The Rahr West Art Museum and the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, a Sheboygan-Manitowoc County art contest was held inviting students to draw pictures showing how to take care of their local watersheds. Nearly 40 entries were received and the winning artwork was made into bookmarks that are being distributed throughout Manitowoc and Sheboygan Counties. This opportunity allowed for greater exposure of the rivers and why they are an important part of our communities. During the awards ceremony a program about river life and quality was given, information about how to keep our rivers clean was printed on the bookmarks.

Two Rivers Stormwater Task Force

As a result of our involvement in river monitoring, Woodland Dunes was invited to participate as an advisor to the Two Rivers Stormwater Task Force, which was charged with assisting the City Council in how to bring the City into compliance with State stormwater requirements (NR 216). Our staff participated in task force meetings designed to examine options for stormwater treatment, and to educate the public about the effects of nutrient loading and other issues associated with stormwater. After the initial activity in 2007, the task force has become less active. Grants were applied for and a number of detention ponds are being constructed, but the city has elected to work with their engineering consultant to implement an education program that meets State requirements. Our staff participation in the task force has diminished as a result.

Monitoring Group

We currently have 12 monitoring sites set up along the East and West Twin River, currently seven of the sites are being monitored. A couple of our monitors had to stop because of health and relocation reasons, but we will continue to fit people into those sites as volunteers are found. The testing results can be found in the WAV Citizen Stream Monitoring database <http://www.uwex.edu/erc/wavdb/>.

Summary

The group of volunteers created through this grant have enjoyed being a part of the movement to help clean up the water resources in our community. A number of the present volunteers have indicated a willingness to continue monitoring. Woodland Dunes will continue to participate in monitoring on the West Twin, and lend support and training to people interested in joining the monitoring group.

Development of educational programs and disseminating educational materials has been continued thanks to the support of the DNR. Our momentum and success from this grant can be seen in the attendance we received through the new River Protection and Planning Grant. From here I only anticipate the involvement in the monitoring group and knowledge about our rivers will continue to grow thanks to funding and support of the River Protection and Planning grants.