



USDA-CSREES 2005 National Water Quality Conference

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring: New England Extension Programs

Abstract:

Situation: NE Volunteer water quality monitoring programs often serve as the critical first link that engages the public in watershed stewardship. Volunteer monitoring programs improve understanding of local water resources, encourage individual and community involvement in water quality protection and restoration efforts, helping communities make informed decisions that improve water quality.

Objectives: To extend the strengths of state programs to identify, develop, refine, and disseminate volunteer monitoring tools and techniques throughout New England.

Methods: We will co-host the New England Citizen Monitoring Summit: Shared Waters Common Goals – Ten Years Later, an invitational gathering of federal, state and local officials, citizen monitoring groups, technical assistance providers and others interested in New England's water resources, to identify opportunities for collaboration that enhance the ability of watershed-based citizen monitoring programs to collect, utilize and share scientifically-credible information. We will develop a Volunteer Monitoring White Paper covering successes, constraints, and opportunities to improve the applications of volunteer monitoring data for watershed assessment and management. We will hold workshops and in-service trainings at NE NEMO conferences and other regional venues.

Partnerships: Partners outside of Extension include NE Regional Monitoring Collaborative, Sea Grant, EPA-New England, US Geologic Survey, NE Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission, and River Network, state environmental agencies, NE chapter North American Lake Management Society, Native American communities, watershed associations.

Integration of Research, Teaching, and Extension: Research enhances volunteer methods and data credibility. This enables volunteer monitoring programs and watershed organizations to improve the understanding of local water resources and educate communities to make informed decisions that improve water quality.

Results: Organizational: Improved regional coordination, program coordinators trained in regionally-approved monitoring techniques and protocols; increased coordination with agencies. Educational: Increased ability of volunteer groups to apply their findings and data to improve community water management strategies; local decision-makers who understand how to assess and interpret monitoring data; long-term data sets on waters of significant concern; increased information on the overall condition of local water resources. Environmental: Anticipated long-term outcomes are improvement of water quality and a reduction in non point source pollution.

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