Youth Environmental Programs
Impact Statement

INVESTIGATORS
Suzanne Gray, Greg Hitzhusen, Kristi Lekies, Brent Macolley, Trish Raridan-Preston, Marne Titchenell, Christopher Tonra

SUMMARY
The School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) offers educational and experiential learning opportunities for youth and teachers across Ohio and internationally. These activities are designed to increase awareness and knowledge of natural resources and environmental issues, promote learning of science, and engage youth in sustainability behaviors. Methods include presentations, programs, camps, field trips, teacher workshops, peer teaching, community media, and consultation. Over 1,100 youth were served in 2017.

SITUATION
The natural environment provides opportunities for education, recreation, physical and emotional well-being, a sense of wonder, and valuable ecosystem services. However, climate change and environmental degradation present challenges that are expected to increase in severity in the years ahead. Engaging children and youth in environmental education and experiential activities can help to foster lifelong appreciation of the natural world and increase knowledge of natural resources and environmental concerns in Ohio, the United States, and the world. Schools and community organizations express interest in collaboration with SENR to reach youth, share and obtain expertise, and make connections locally and globally.
RESPONSE
Collaborations with schools and organizations across Ohio and internationally enable SENR to reach diverse groups of teachers and youth. Outreach through media promotes education on environmental topics to the larger community. Activities include:

- Presentations on bats, avian ecology, and camping to over 400 youth at Central Ohio elementary and high schools
- 23 programs on wildlife and forestry for 475 youth, including Camp Canopy, a week-long summer camp for high school students
- School field trips for 150 students at the Wilma H. Schiermeier Olentangy River Research Wetland Research Park
- Water Across the World project to enhance over 100 students’ understanding of water quality in Ohio and Uganda, promote science learning, and develop training activities and materials for teachers
- Youth Beat Radio program aired weekly on two Columbus Community Radio stations
- Consultation on outdoor programming and evaluation to ten schools and organizations

IMPACT
Over 1,100 youth had opportunities to learn about natural resources and environmental issues, participate in hands-on exploration, apply knowledge to real world situations, learn new skills, and engage in sustainability efforts in 2017. SENR education activities serve youth from elementary through high school age, from rural and urban areas, and those with special needs. For some youth, the activities provide first-time experiences with wetlands, wildlife, using scientific methods, and interacting with SENR faculty and Extension specialists. The Water Across the World project creates an opportunity for rural Ohio youth to engage in peer teaching, learning, and cultural exchange with youth in Uganda on water quality issues through video and online communications. Workshops and materials developed for teachers extend knowledge to additional students. Learning opportunities also exist for SENR undergraduate and graduate students who plan and lead Water Across the World and other youth education activities. SENR youth education creates and strengthens collaborations with community partners including the Muskingum Soil and Water Conservation District, schools, and local organizations. Youth Beat Radio, which involves SENR alumni, SENR students, and high school students in production, broadcasts information on environmental issues to community audiences. Consultation activity is beneficial for schools and organizations in planning programs, sharing resources, and evaluation.