Building Capacity Among Environmental and Natural Resources Professionals and Volunteers

Impact Statement

INVESTIGATORS
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SUMMARY
The School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) is a leader in training students in environmental and natural resource management. As these graduates assume positions in public and private organizations, access to professional practice graduate education, continuing education programs and opportunities to network with other professionals is important to their ability to work effectively. SENR provides a broad range of capacity building programs/services to support this growing community of environmental professionals and volunteers.

SITUATION
Every sector of society is affected by environmental and natural resource management issues. Those who choose an environmental career or who choose to volunteer their services to address these issues in their communities look to land-grant institutions for unbiased, research-based information and educational programs to enhance their knowledge, skills and to grow and diversify their professional networks. Given the diverse disciplinary and applied scientific experience of our faculty and staff, SENR is well positioned to be a leader at the state and national levels to help in building capacity among professionals and volunteers working to address complex environmental and natural resource issues. Like all academic units, the challenge for SENR is to leverage our scientific expertise to provide high value applied programs and services that will have real, measurable impacts on these individuals and in the communities and organizations in which they live and work.
RESPONSE
SENR has six core programs to support the state’s environmental and natural resources (ENR) community: Environmental Professionals Network (EPN) maintains an on-line community, networking breakfasts and larger signature events with respected presenters. Master of Environment and Natural Resources (MENR) is a professional practice graduate degree program serving in-career and career-transition professionals and recent graduates. Ohio Environmental Leaders Institute (OELI) provides educational programs for ENR professionals on leadership, collaboration, and communication. Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist (OCVN) is a NR outreach and service program, offering a quarterly webinar series and conference. Ohio Woodland, Water, and Wildlife Conference (OWWWC) is a forum for professionals to gain knowledge on natural resource management and research. Environmental Education (EE) lunch and learn series is a professional experience for students, focused on building students’ capacity to educate, lead, and manage park volunteers.

IMPACT
EPN has approximately 2000 online participants and monthly programs average over 130 attendees from diverse employment sectors and students. Feedback shows collaborations and partnerships have been created, grants, internships, and jobs gained, and projects are initiated and sustained. MENR graduates have worked with a wide range of entities, such as federal, state, and local governmental, NGOs and private sector companies. The program serves 18 graduate students per year, who seek to increase their scientific understanding of environmental issues. OELI had three sessions in 2017 attended by 27 participants and offered a “Big Table” community dialogue for 30 participants, who reported increased knowledge and confidence in communicating science, collaboration, and professional leadership skills. OCVN had 495 certified naturalists contribute 29,017 hours of service totaling more than $696,000. 160 new participants took the OCVN course and 28 participated in webinar series. Certified naturalists reported knowledge gains in wildlife identification and skills needed for participation in an upcoming survey. OWWWC had more than 350 natural resources professionals, responsible for management of almost 66,000 acres across the state, attend the OWWWC Tree Diagnostic Workshop. These programs offer CE credits through the SAF, ISA and ODA pesticide credits. EE lunch and learn series had 24 student participants attended. Participants reported significant knowledge gains at all three sessions in their key volunteer management content areas.

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