Preparing Students through Experiential Learning in Five SENR Majors
(EEDS: Environment, Economy, Development and Sustainability; EPDM: Environmental Policy and Decision Making; ES: Environmental Science; FFW: Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife; NRM: Natural Resource Management)

Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Alia Dietsch, Matt Hamilton, Greg Hitzhusen, David Hix, Gabe Karns, Chris Tonra, Bill Peterman, Suzanne Gray, Matt Davies, Joseph Campbell

SUMMARY
One of the most dynamic ways SENR prepares students for careers and graduate study is to engage them in experiential learning activities that help students integrate the concepts and skills they have gained in the classroom. Our main venues for experiential learning are capstone courses, internships, and field-based studies, all of which have seen notable success in 2019. These programs simultaneously fulfill the teaching, research, and outreach missions of the School.

SITUATION
A growing body of research demonstrates that hands-on experiences in which students apply theoretical ideas to real world situations is important to their learning process. Employers indicate that they want college graduates to have more practical experience in collaborative, multi-disciplinary teams addressing real-world problems as a way to transition students from their formal studies into successful careers, and research shows that the first job of over 50% of students after graduation is a direct result of an internship. Historically, environment and natural resources curricula have capitalized on opportunities to use outdoor settings to expose students to natural landscapes and systems, and to interact with professional natural resource managers. The complexity of contemporary sustainability challenges also invites integrative, experiential study which benefits from the immersive, real-world experiences provided by capstone courses, internships, and field study courses.
RESPONSE
Each of the five SENR majors includes experiential learning options designed to solidify ideas, concepts and tools learned in the classroom. In 2019 we led several capstone courses where student teams collaborated with community partners. EEDS majors worked with city and staff at Ohio State to evaluate sustainable transportation, energy, and waste campaigns. FFW and NRM students collaborated with Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, City of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, and Ohio State Mansfield. ESS and EPDM students designed restoration proposals to align the Campus landscape with Ohio State’s Sustainability Goals, and EPDM majors partnered with Columbus and Westerville to tackle water quality issues. We also offered a suite of field studies courses with hands-on application of concepts that enhanced experiential learning, including Taxonomy and Behavior of Fishes, Forest Ecosystems, Avian Wildlife Biology and Management, Wildlife Ecology Methods, and Ecosystem Restoration.

IMPACT
Capstone student projects contributed directly to improved ecosystem management by empowering local residents and informing local decision-makers. Specifically, our EEDS capstone projects continued to help local people, businesses, and public officials navigate a range of complex sustainability challenges. Our FFW/NRM capstone projects facilitated bioblitz and water quality events at Whetstone Park of Roses for Earth Day; assessed avian and aquatic diversity, invasive species management, and forest restoration efforts at Scioto Grove Metro Park; assisted other Columbus park properties with habitat management and restoration plans; collected data on silvicultural demonstration areas; and partnered to implement a maple syrup forest stand at Ohio State Mansfield. Our EPDM capstone students designed lesson plans, outreach programs, and stakeholder engagement strategies to improve collaboration and environmental problem-solving, in partnership with the City of Columbus Department of Utilities and the City of Westerville. Additionally, our Practical Skills for Terrestrial Ecosystem Restoration course provided 50 students with Ohio Department of Agriculture pesticide licensing and Ohio Forestry Association chainsaw qualifications; they also contributed to restoration of 5+ acres of the Ohio State campus through removal of invasive species, woodland creation and prairie restoration. Our capstone courses, internships, and field-based studies facilitated student career success, as evidenced by an 88% job placement rate for recent SENR graduates.

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Preparing the Next Generation of Scientists: Expanded Opportunities for Undergraduate Research

Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Lauren Pintor, Brian Lower, Renee Johnston, Nicole Jackson, Bill Peterman and the staff and students of the School of Environment & Natural Resources (SENR)

SUMMARY
The School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) Honors and Undergraduate Research Programs provide support for undergraduates to conduct mentored research. Our focus on hands-on, student-centered learning has led to gains in students’ understanding of the research process and ability to conduct research and work independently. Our students regularly present research at conferences, coauthor journal articles, and have been competitive for jobs, scholarship and fellowships, and graduate school applications in STEM disciplines.

SITUATION
The 21st century economy demands higher levels of technical and scientific training and employers and graduate schools increasingly expect undergraduates to have hands-on experience designing, conducting, and synthesizing research. This is particularly true in environmental and natural resource management, where expertise from multiple disciplines is required to provide science-based solutions to complex problems. The applied and interdisciplinary research focus of SENR faculty and staff provide unique opportunities to engage undergraduates in a wide range of applied research experiences on topics including community development, ecosystem restoration, environmental policy, environmental law, environmental science, fisheries, forestry, natural resource management, parks and recreation, soil science, sustainable agriculture, sustainable business management, water science and wildlife.

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RESPONSE
To help prepare our students for future careers, SENR has aggressively developed and promoted research opportunities for undergraduates. Currently, there are 49 students engaging in undergraduate research through SENR’s honors program, 10 students earning research distinction, and 27 students earning undergraduate research credit, and multiple STEP scholars. These programs help our students develop practical research skills, encourage global awareness, enrich their academic experience, develop leadership skills and instill a commitment to community service. Students acquire training in a wide range of research methods, and learn to communicate their results orally and in writing by presenting papers or posters at scientific meetings and by serving as coauthors on the published papers. These efforts encourage our students to gradually transition into independent scientists who are able to actively participate in research that is highly interdisciplinary in nature.

IMPACT
Our undergraduate student research programs have helped a large number of students achieve their goals of working as professional scientists. They have presented their work at scientific meetings, published in peer-reviewed journals, participated in summer fellowship and internship programs and won awards and scholarships for their work. Nine undergraduate students presented their research at the 2019 CFAES Undergraduate Research Forum. Two of these students won awards for their work. Several students presented at the 2019 Denman Forum and one student won awards for their work. Four students were awarded $3,300 from the OARDC Undergraduate Seeds Grant Program. One student was awarded $4,500 from Ohio State’s Undergraduate Research Apprentice Program. One student was awarded the prestigious Udall Undergraduate Scholarship ($7,000) and one student was awarded a Fulbright Award. Two students published research with their faculty mentors in peer-reviewed journals.
Promoting Positive Relationships between Human and Wildlife Communities through Partnerships, Stakeholder Engagement, and Science

Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Robert Gates, Marne Titchenell, Jeremy Bruskotter, Stanley Gehrt, Stephen Matthews, Christopher Tonra, William Peterman, Alia Dietsch and Gabriel Karns

SUMMARY
Over 5.1 million people engage in wildlife-based recreation in Ohio, contributing $3.3 billion to the economy. Wildlife promote physical and spiritual well-being and are sensitive indicators of environmental quality and ecosystem health. As wildlife conservation increases in scope and complexity, SENR faculty and staff provide research and facilitate collaborations that help ensure sustainable wildlife populations and habitats are valued and conserved now and in the future.

SITUATION
Human-wildlife relationships arise from interactions of natural and social systems. Problems develop as natural and cultural environments change. Government agencies and NGOs are challenged by competing interests of stakeholders, and scientific uncertainties about the systems they manage. Biodiversity loss, invasive species, species endangerment, a changing climate, sustainable use of wildlife resources, human-wildlife conflicts, and changes in public demand for wildlife-based recreation are among the most pressing concerns faced by wildlife managers. Fulfilling the land grant mission of The Ohio State University requires science-based research and training for current and future wildlife professionals, community leaders, and private landowners, and strong collaborations and partnerships between researchers, management agencies, and stakeholders.
RESPONSE

Through the Terrestrial Wildlife Ecology Lab, Ohio Biodiversity Conservation Partnership, and OSU Extension, we focus on public access to private lands, human-wildlife conflicts, and conservation of wildlife diversity on public and private lands within Ohio and across the United States. We worked with the Ohio Division of Wildlife to **improve the state’s private lands recreational access program**, and to **develop a socially and ecologically sustainable plan for deer harvest management**. Our research on river otters, a former extirpated species, was used to **set sustainable harvest levels**. We identified more **ecologically sustainable approaches to forest management** that use fire, and studied tree harvest to **restore habitat** for rattlesnakes, amphibians, and woodland birds. We also **informed managers** of 35 national wildlife refuges administered by the U.S. government. We **disseminated information** through extension programs, websites and multimedia, workshops and conferences, and other publications.

**IMPACT**

The recreational access program opens 250,000 acres to Ohio users, and we are evaluating policies to retain critical habitat and increase public access. Our research assists managers in **striking a balance** between ~500,000 deer hunters that contribute >$800 million to the Ohio economy, and farmers who are losing crops to deer depredation. Our river otter research balances population and harvest goals while **minimizing human-wildlife conflicts** in almost half of Ohio’s counties. Our studies of impacts of forest restoration on rattlesnakes and other wildlife has **informed forest management** on ~3.3 million acres of public land in southeast Ohio. We led a nationwide study of federal public lands in the National Wildlife Refuge System to inform managers about the **recreational preferences and economic impact** to local communities of over 6,000 people who visited 35 national wildlife refuges during 2019 (see [go.osu.edu/NVSresults](http://go.osu.edu/NVSresults)). The impact of our research was amplified by disseminating findings through OSU Extension and other outreach efforts. The Wildlife Extension team delivered 48 presentations on human-wildlife conflicts to 4,100 professionals, volunteers, and homeowners. Multimedia pertaining to rattlesnakes and coyotes received >250,000 views. The Ohio Community Wildlife Cooperative **facilitates networking** and **communicates science-based knowledge** through an annual conference attended by community leaders, city planners, and resource managers from 103 Ohio municipalities and park districts.

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Managing Ohio’s Forest Resources
Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Matt Davies, Bob Gates, David Hix, Stephen Matthews, Sayeed Mehmood, Kathy Smith, Roger Williams

SUMMARY
Ohio’s forests are transforming due to changes in natural disturbance regimes, including introduction of invasive species and absence of disturbance such as fire. Young forest habitat is disappearing as forests age. Re-introducing natural disturbance and reducing forest canopies along agricultural fields have been used to mitigate these problems. The Woodland Stewards program offers a variety of programs and publications to help private landowners, agencies and NGOs manage their forestlands.

SITUATION
Ohio has approximately 8 million acres of forest land, of which 85% is in private ownership and the remaining 15% in state and federal ownership. Healthy forests are critical for sustaining biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and support over 120,000 jobs in Ohio’s $10 billion forest products industry. Over the last century, invasion of non-native insects, diseases and plants, land use change, and the absence of natural fires have caused major changes in the species composition and structure of Ohio’s forests. Long-term studies have found that oak forests are changing to forests dominated by species that are uncharacteristic of historic Ohio forests. Ohio’s forests overall are also getting older, causing loss of young trees that many wildlife species depend on. The future of Ohio’s forests depends on improving our understanding of these changes and successful development and implementation of management strategies to reverse them.
RESPONSE
SENR faculty have pioneered new approaches including managing some forests in an early successional state; developing “soft” habitat edges along maturing woodlots for wildlife; and educating private landowners on how to manage forests under changing climate conditions. Further, as Ohio’s population becomes more urban, our faculty have provided research and teaching to expand our understanding of the importance of urban forests as part of larger ecosystems. We also conduct economic and human dimensions research to better understand drivers of forest management decisions and to quantify the value of forests for timber and non-timber purposes. Our Ohio Woodland Stewards Program provides workshops and materials to meet the educational needs of Ohio’s private woodland owners, as well as public agency and NGO forest managers.

IMPACT
Our work is regularly used to support local, state and federal initiatives to manage forests and wildlife resources. In southwestern Ohio as part of the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative our research was used to develop wildlife habitat incentives for private-woodland owners. We also collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service and others to help recover and sustain our state’s critical oak forests. Information about understory plants and guidance about the appropriate timing, frequency and severity of planned disturbances, has allowed forest managers to better identify and anticipate changes in forest composition and non-native invasive species encroachment pattern, and take steps that lead to more successful oak forest regeneration. Our work with urban forest managers has helped improve efforts to restore riparian forests. In collaboration with colleagues in neighboring states, our Woodland Stewards workshops on non-native invasive species has trained 1891 natural resource professionals and over 9300 landowners, while our smart phone app designed to help identify and report invasive species has been downloaded more than 9892 times and generates hundreds of reports each year. Finally, our work has documented the contribution forests make to the state’s economy, leading to greater public and private support for this important sector. Every year, a wide spectrum of stakeholders relies on our Ohio Timber Price Report to make critical decisions about forest harvests.

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SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Youth Environmental Programs
Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Eugene Braig, Suzanne Gray, Greg Hitzhusen, Kristi Lekies, Marne Titchenell

SUMMARY
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 1,500 youth were served in 2019.

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.
In 2019, our faculty and staff engaged in a wide range of media outreach projects and built collaborations with schools and organizations to reach diverse groups of Ohio youth. SENR’s Youth Beat Radio program aired weekly on two Columbus community radio stations and involved 70 youth. Our aquatic science team hosted 150 students on field trips at the Schiermeier Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, including one led by SENR Senior Capstone students. At the state science fair we judged 16 science projects and offered programs to 200 students interested in aquatic sciences. Our Water Across the World project engaged >150 students in discussions of water quality in Ohio and Uganda. Our wildlife and forestry faculty offered 11 programs for 252 youth, including Camp Canopy, a summer camp for high school students. We worked with 21 educators to develop lesson plans on “Attacking Aquatic Invader” and with 15 teachers to incorporate bird feeding and bluebird nest box monitoring into their curriculum.

In 2019, over 1,500 youth learned about natural resources and environmental issues, participated in hands-on exploration, applied knowledge to real world situations, learned new skills, and engaged in sustainability efforts. SENR education activities serve youth from elementary through high school, from rural and urban areas, and those with special needs. For some youth, the activities provided their first experiences with wetlands, wildlife, scientific methods, hands-on nature exploration, and interacting with faculty and Extension specialists. The Water Across the World project created 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 extended knowledge to additional students. We also provided learning opportunities for SENR undergraduate and graduate students who plan and lead Water Across the World and other education activities. SENR youth education creates and strengthens collaborations with community partners including the Urban Park Development LLC, Columbus and Hilliard City schools, and local organizations. Youth Beat Radio, which is produced by SENR alumni, SENR students, and high school students, broadcast information on environmental issues to community audiences. Consultation activity benefited schools and organizations in planning programs, sharing resources, and evaluation.

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Supporting Sustainable Energy Transitions:
Understanding the Links between Energy and Society
Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Ramiro Berardo, Stacey Fineran, Jeffrey Jacquet, Nicole Sintov, Robyn Wilson

SUMMARY
Energy and people are connected across numerous scales. Human behaviors both impact and are impacted by transitions in energy systems, particularly in the face of climate change and new technologies. SENR faculty are national leaders in research on energy production, distribution and consumption to understand the relationships between society and energy systems. We also develop teaching and outreach programs to enhance energy literacy and increase social well-being amid energy transitions.

SITUATION
Ohio has historically been a leader of the production and use of energy. Ohio’s coal industry fueled the industrial revolution while our coal and nuclear energy continue to power the region’s largest population and industrial centers. More recently, Ohio has hosted shale development via hydraulic fracturing, large wind farm development, and large-scale solar arrays. These energy transitions affect all residents, landowners, and consumers, though the distribution of costs and benefits from production and consumption of energy is spread unevenly across the state. Research is needed to guide public policy to maximize social, economic, and environmental outcomes. Despite its importance, many residents have little understanding of the state’s energy systems. Research, teaching, and outreach programs are required to mitigate problems associated with the production of energy and to increase energy literacy to allow consumers to make informed decisions about their own behavior.
RESPONSE
SENR faculty and students bring diverse scientific research and outreach skills to unpack the linkages between people and the production and consumption of energy.

Our faculty and students are leading research projects to understand:
• how states legislate and regulate energy production
• how landowners respond to opportunities to host new types of energy production
• how different forms of energy development and distribution impact local residents and communities
• variation in attitudes towards energy development, distribution and use
• drivers of consumer behaviors and energy usage patterns

Our courses use energy issues to explore the complicated linkages between policy and the social, economic and environmental outcomes of energy transitions. Students gain increased levels of energy literacy, knowledge of the social-political, environmental and economic aspects of energy, and learn how to apply this knowledge to real world problems and case-studies.

IMPACT
Supported by competitive external grants, in 2019 our faculty continued to grow a nationally-recognized research agenda on social aspects of energy transitions. Two of our faculty helped write a successful 5-year NSF National Research Traineeship grant, which is being used to launch an interdisciplinary graduate specialization in sustainable energy. In another project, we conducted extensive text analysis of media stories to examine the drivers of conflict over hydraulic fracturing for oil and gas production across 15 different states. As part of an NSF INFEWS project, we distributed almost 5,000 surveys in 2019 to assess how farm operators and non-operating landowners in the Great Lakes region are likely to respond to economic pressures and incentives associated with sustainable energy policies. Findings showed that support for wind energy development was stronger among operators than non-operators, and farmers with larger operations were more likely to allocate land to wind energy. Finally, we conducted a study to evaluate the impact of sustainability-focused discussions on building energy use among roommate pairs in a dormitory at Oberlin College. In addition to our research, our work in the classroom continued to raise the energy literacy of hundreds of Ohio State undergraduate and graduate students by engaging them in hands on applications of academic theory and research to tackle real world energy issues.

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Bringing Back the Fire: Pioneering new approaches to using prescriptive fires to restore Ohio’s native landscapes.

Impact Statement 2019

INVESTIGATORS
Matt Davies, Matt Hamilton, Steve Matthews, Eric Toman, Roger Williams, Robyn Wilson

SUMMARY
Ohio’s native oak-hickory forests, prairies and peatland depend on fire to maintain their health and presence on the landscape. The absence of fire has led to the near disappearance of many of these ecosystems. SENR faculty are working to better understand how fire can be used as part of broader ecosystem management and restoration programs. While fire enhances biodiversity and reduces invasive species, use of fire will require addressing public perceptions about the risks and benefits of fire.

SITUATION
Prior to European settlement, forests, prairies and peatlands occupied over 28 million acres in Ohio. Land development and historical fire suppression have diminished these ecosystems by 71%, 90% and 98%, respectively. These ecosystem losses have had negative effects on forest industries and wildlife. The lack of fire and associated encroachment of non-native plants continue to threaten these valuable ecosystems. While the managed use of fire can contribute to restoration, understanding fire behavior and the risks prescribed fire poses to human communities is critical. Despite these risks, residents have indicated cautious acceptance of prescribed fire when they understand the rationale for its use and know that it will be implemented safely and effectively. Fire managers have many decision support tools available to help them balance risks and benefits of fire. The information theses tools provide can help guide tactical decisions such as the placement of particular fire resources.
RESPONSE
SENR faculty are leaders in research and innovation, combining expertise in ecology and human dimensions to determine how fire can be used to protect and restore Ohio’s native ecosystems, focusing on how:
(a) prescribed burning can be used as an ecosystem restoration tool in grasslands and forests
(b) variation in fire regimes influences the structure and function of prairie and oak forest ecosystems
(c) fire shapes the balance between invasive and native species
(d) artificial intelligence can provide fire managers with real-time fire behavior data

In examining the human response, SENR faculty are:
(a) developing effective public programs and strategies for fire preparedness on private property
(b) studying factors that shape community wildfire protection planning processes and management decision-making, and the dynamics of incident management teams that affect decision-making
(c) examining how and when decision support tools are used by fire managers

IMPACT
Our work has provided state resource managers vital information to guide their use of prescribed fire to restore oak-hickory, prairie and peatland ecosystems. We have also included expanded information about the use of fire in our courses, where the next generation of resource managers received information and certification that meet Federal ICS-100, S-110, S-130 and S-190 requirements for wildland firefighter (red card) certification. Students who completed our program have taken seasonal and permanent positions in fire crews and are regularly employed by organizations that use prescribed fire as part of their ecosystem management. Our collaborations with the College of Engineering have also produced a mission planning platform that uses drones for monitoring and predicting fire behavior in real-time. SENR faculty have also provided critical leadership and guidance to the Lake States Fire Science Consortium, which coordinates fire planning efforts in the region, by producing factsheets, courses for academic credit, workshops, and field tours and hosted a webinar series. Our research on trade-offs among management objectives in fire-prone forests discovered opportunities to increase the scale and effectiveness of prescribed fire. Our research has led to recommendations to facilitate the use of risk-based decision support tools by assessing their reliability under climate change and encouraging familiarity and trust between members of the incident management team.
SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Environmental Professionals Network
Annual Report 2019-2020

COORDINATORS
Joe Campbell, Nicole Jackson

SUMMARY
The Environmental Professionals Network (EPN) connects Ohio’s environmental professionals and others passionate about our natural resources through in-person and online activities. EPN hosts monthly breakfast programs and virtual events focused on innovative and pressing environmental topics, such as: bipartisan approaches for wildlife conservation, inclusive strategies for land management, and collaborative approaches to solving emerging water pollution issues. The EPN aligns inspirational speakers with compelling topics aimed to help participants build their network and grow professionally.

Through this network, participants also have free access to many online networking capabilities, such as marketing, querying, information sharing, and more. Participants are also encouraged to create and share content such as job postings, reports, and event announcements. In its eight-year history, over 3,000 unique individuals have participated in an EPN breakfast program and this year the EPN surpassed 2,200 online participants.

2019-2020 EVENT ATTENDANCE

- 1,309 unique attendees, including 365 current Ohio State students (from 61 different majors) and 137 Ohio State Alumni participants
- 145 participant average at monthly, in-person breakfast events
- 211 participant average at monthly, online virtual events
MOVEMENT TO VIRTUAL EVENTS
Since September 2012, the EPN has consistently held monthly face-to-face, in-person events featuring breakfast and conversation alongside our educational speakers. In March 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the EPN transitioned from its traditional event format to online-only programming. This transition, which will be in place for the remainder of 2020, has fundamentally shifted the nature in which we interact with one another, share information and build relationships. While our global community seeks to address this virus, our challenge and opportunity as environmental professionals and enthusiasts to improve ecological systems as well as social and economic conditions remain. Here in Ohio, nationally and globally it can be challenging to get different views together to work out real solutions, however the EPN recognizes these challenges and are very committed to working diligently to help achieve a broadly healthy and regenerative society and planet. As we move into the 2020-2021 Academic Year let us stay connected, be inspired, and grow professionally, together.

Co-sponsored events this year included partnerships with various local, state, regional, and national organizations. Thank you to the following organizations that served as event sponsors and to the individuals who chose to help sponsor a student during their registration.

If you are reviewing this document in digital form, click here to view our Annual Report Highlight video!

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