



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

National Wildlife Federation

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**University of Minnesota
Wetlands Restoration
Twin Cities, Minnesota
(status of project, Spring 2001)**

Campus Profile

The University of Minnesota (UMN), Twin Cities is one of the largest universities in the United States. Over 80,000 faculty, staff and visitors, including 45,000 students, frequent campus on a daily basis. UMN's Twin Cities location is comprised of three campuses: West Bank, East Bank, and St. Paul. The East and West Bank campuses straddle the Mississippi River near downtown Minneapolis. The St. Paul campus, originally the agriculture campus, is nearby in a residential area of St. Paul.

Project Goals and Summary

In 2000, a small group of faculty, staff, and students started the Sustainable Campus Initiative Committee, an adhoc committee with a mission to use the campus and its physical facilities as a tool for environmental learning. We are currently working on two pilot projects, which will continue through 2001-2002: the Sarita wetland restoration and an ecological footprint of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus. The wetland restoration began with a clean-up in September and is currently in the planning stages. Implementation will begin in the spring and continue through the next few years. By involving students in hands-on projects, we hope to engage participants as active citizens of the University. At the same time, we will increase teaching opportunities and achieve a more environmentally sustainable campus.

Accomplishments

The wetland restoration project is well on its way. The project will take approximately two years to complete. We have set up a committee to oversee the planning effort, hosted two campus events about the wetland, six classes have used the restoration in classwork, and three students are using the restoration in independent research projects.

The committee that is overseeing the wetland restoration includes faculty, staff, and students, as well as a representative from the local watershed district. This is the first time that the academic and the operational elements of the University have collaborated to this degree on this type of project.

In 2000-2001 the Sustainable Campus Initiative hosted two events about the wetland. The restoration kickoff began in September 2000, when over 80 students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members picked up garbage and started building a woodchip trail as part of Beautiful U Day. Beautiful U Day is an event where the University community undertakes projects to improve campus aesthetics, such as cleaning up areas and planting trees. As part of Earth Week in April 2001 we hosted Sarita Day at the St. Paul Student Center. Student projects were on display all day; volunteers staffed an information table and over 50 people met for a community lunch meeting about the restoration plans.

Students have also been active in the restoration project. Students in a Water Quality class researched potential community involvement in the restoration and water quality monitoring options. Using Sarita as a teaching tool, students evaluated the impacts of road salt, landscape design, how to reduce floatables from the State Fair, raingardens, the impact of campus feedlots, and urban best management practices. A Wildlife class researched planning for different species. An Environmental Education class worked on trail and signage planning. A Landscape Architecture class created models of what could be completed in the wetland. A freshman English class started to develop a website for the project.

Three individual student research projects are currently in process. One student is surveying amphibians in the wetland and another is recommending plants for the area. One student is using the sustainable campus initiative, including the wetland restoration, in a Ph.D. dissertation on urban ecology.

The Water Resources Students in Action group committed to monitoring water quality in the wetland before, during, and after the restoration and secured funding for monitoring equipment. The Fisheries and Wildlife Student Association has also continued picking up trash in the area.

These projects are providing the students with hands-on experience. Additionally, the information collected by the students is building a base for the Environmental Protection Agency Phase II Storm Water Management plan that the University is required to submit.

Strategies and Steps Taken

We set up an advisory committee. It is crucial that faculty, staff and students all work collaboratively. The strength of our project is the fact that we have the staff working together with students and faculty on the projects.

We also found consistent funding for coordination. This project is part of a larger initiative that is partially funded for four more years. Partial funding for the coordinator (currently Suzanne Savanick, the NWF Campus Ecology Fellow) was obtained from Facilities Management. She received enough grants to consistently fund coordinating the effort until December, 2002. Suzanne is also currently searching for implementation funding.

Challenges and Responses

Sheer size: Changes at a university the size of the University of Minnesota take more time than we originally anticipated. The restoration plan timeline has been revised several times to more accurately reflect the potential dates. Because U of M is so large, many faculty, staff, and students do not know each other and don't know that plans can happen without our knowledge. After our plans had been talked about for a year, we realized that the area next to the wetland was a potential site for a new building. We realized that we need a staff member from planning involved in our committee. The challenge is to keep the committee small enough to come to a consensus, while still having all of the people we need in the room.

Funding: The coordinator spent a lot of time during the first semester fundraising. The early seed money, like the NWF fellowship, helped pave the way for more funding from both inside and outside the University.

Awareness: Most people had no idea that there was a wetland on campus because it is hidden behind a tall barbed wire fence behind buildings. The video proved to be a great asset for us as we could bring it to classes before they started student projects.

Logistics: We did not have an accurate topographic map of the area. Facilities Management will be creating one this year, but last year we had to rely on inaccurate maps of the area. Also, many previous student projects had been lost because there was no way to archive them. We now have previous student papers on reserve in the forestry library and we will have some of the papers on the website.

Campus Ecology

The Campus Ecology Fellowship gave us seed money for our project. When we started we only had partial funding for the student coordinator's position. With the fellowship, we were able to leverage even more funding. Campus Ecology staff were also able to connect us with other campuses that were working in a similar area as we were. Examples of other student projects assist us in working with the administration on our own campus.

Funding Sources

The NWF funding was used to partially match an Office of Environmental Assistance Grant. We also obtained funding from Facilities Management, Environmental Health and Safety, University of Minnesota Civic Engagement Project, Beautiful U Day, Wildlife Forever, Capitol Region Watershed District, and Ramsey Soil and Water Conservation District/Board of Soil and Water Resources

Publicity and Media

- Beautiful U Day was filmed for an E connection video broadcast on cable television
- *The St. Paul Pioneer Press* ran a story on Beautiful U Day
- *The Minnesota Daily* (campus paper) ran a story on Beautiful U Day
- *The Minnesota Daily* plans to write a story on the Sustainable Campus Initiative this summer

Documentation

- A website is forthcoming, summer 2001
- A paper will be presented at Ball State's Greening of the Campus Conference, fall 2001
- The NWF spring 2001 newsletter included a piece on campus wetlands, where the University of Minnesota's project is highlighted
- We developed a fact sheet on the restoration project, and will likely have a brochure in the near future
- We have signage at the wetland site and planned for the transitway fence near the wetland

Key Groups/Allies

- Jim Perry, faculty, original promoter of idea
- Suzanne Savanick, coordinator, Ph.D. student
- Les Potts, head of U of M landcare
- Bill Chose, Facilities Management, St. Paul campus
- Jim Bossert, Facilities Management, St. Paul campus
- Greg Archer, Environmental Health and Safety, (stormwater)
- Terry Noonan, Capitol Region Watershed District
- Tom Peterson, Capitol Region Watershed District/Ramsey Soil and Water Conservation District
- John Koepke and Peter MacDonagh, Landscape Architecture faculty
- Tara Carson, student
- Peter Jorden, Fisheries and Wildlife faculty
- Dan Hambrook, VP, Facilities Management
- Gregg Thompson, Metro Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- St. Anthony Park Community Council, Environmental Committee
- Commonwealth Terrace Resident's Council

Next Year's Plans

This fall we expect to build campus raingardens to slow down and clean the water entering the wetland. We also expect to make more connections with our subwatershed neighbors, including the state fair and St. Anthony Park Community Council. We also hope to start plans for a forebay in front of the wetland to take some of the stormwater bounce and finish a trail and educational signage. In the fall of 2002 we hope to plant native plants in the wetland area.

Quote or Helpful Hint

We have been amazed at the support for our project. Funding, faculty, and student projects are now seeking us out. From our experience, we offer these tips:

- Form a committee with staff, faculty, and student representatives. Student projects and enthusiasm are crucial to get projects going, but there needs to be the consistency of faculty and staff involvement.
- Start with a pilot project. Our project has an overall vision of improving the environment and increasing teaching opportunities on campus, but we are only working on two pilot projects.
- Hire a coordinator. This project funds a Ph.D. student. Ideally this would be a permanent staff position, but we are still at the pilot stage. We need some success before we could get a permanent position. It is necessary to have someone organize the effort that is paid to do that, even if it is an intern or student.
- Make sure that you have strong staff and faculty allies. Although a student coordinates our project, Jim Perry, a faculty member, started the discussion at the University. The support of Prof. Perry, as well as from the staff involved, is crucial to the success of this project.
- Find seed money. Even small amounts of outside funding can get the attention of the administration. It is also much easier to find the second half of the funding.

- Look for partners. We have had success by partnering with the local water organizations and community partners.

Contact

Suzanne Savanick
Sustainable Campus Initiative Coordinator
ISSES
186 McNeal Hall
1985 Buford Ave
St. Paul, MN 55108
sava0054@tc.umn.edu
612-624-7723