



EXTENSION IMPACT

Rivers2Lake Helps Teachers Go Virtual

Lake Superior contains 10% of Earth's freshwater and is the cleanest of the Great Lakes. Protecting this resource is essential for Northern Wisconsin communities. To help prepare the next generation of Great Lakes stewards, the Rivers2Lake education program at Extension's Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve uses the Lake Superior watershed and the St. Louis River as a foundation for educator and student learning, increased Great Lakes literacy, and engagement.

Each year the Rivers2Lake Education program works with a cohort of teachers, helping them to integrate the Lake Superior watershed and the St. Louis River into their curriculum. The program provides extended training, mentoring, and resources to teachers to support them in creating inquiry-based and outdoor experiences for students. The Rivers2Lake program serves PK-12 teachers and students in schools and districts in Wisconsin's Lake Superior Watershed and the St. Louis River Watershed, which straddles Wisconsin and Minnesota, including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe (Chippewa) Reservation.

In 2019 and 2020, Extension staff in Minnesota and Wisconsin collaborated to assess the impact of the Rivers2Lake Program by surveying elementary teachers in the Superior School District in order to better support Superior School District teachers. The teachers expressed that using outdoor and inquiry-based learning is beneficial to students and supports their social and emotional learning, but they identified a lack of time, materials and resources to provide these experiences. Following participation, evaluation demonstrated

that Rivers2Lake helped reduce these obstacles and others, including lack of outdoor access, lack of ideas for what to do or how to do it, and lack of comfort bringing students outside.

Extension's River2Lakes program helps teachers offer inquiry-based learning to more students.

When COVID-19 hit, Rivers2Lake teachers and education staff at the Lake Superior Reserve needed a new way to support teachers and their students. In response, Extension quickly pivoted to producing videos and online curriculum in a series called Nature Nibbles. The Nature Nibbles series was developed to reach elementary children, a high percentage of which are considered economically disadvantaged, 47.7% according to Wisconsin DPI. The Superior School District, struggling to include adequate science instruction in virtual learning, shifted all elementary students to Nature Nibbles as the formal district science curriculum. The program also showed teachers how to safely use the outdoors spaces they have on site, such as play spaces and fields, to their advantage. The events and field trips hosted by Rivers2Lake helped show teachers the opportunities for outdoor education that are throughout their local community. Program evaluation of this effort in response to COVID indicated an increase in teachers' comfort when bringing students outside, as well as an increase in ideas for what to do for outdoor and inquiry-based teaching.

in 2020



2,365

elementary students reached through Extension's curriculum



14

teachers partnering with Extension to design and distribute the curriculum



The Rivers2Lake program is part of Extension's Natural Resources Institute. Learn more by visiting rivers2lake.org.



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