

What does it matter?

Everyone I know who works in the wide array of professions that can be lumped into the “environmental field” is doing the work of three people. We could solve the employment problem by hiring the two extra people that environmentalists need to complete the tasks on their desks and to successfully meet the environmental challenges we face today. Of course this won’t happen. When one assesses why we are working so hard at jobs that offer long hours, great stress, and low pay, we come face to face with a near universal truth, that the people who work in the environmental field do so because they want to have a positive impact on improving environmental conditions and through that, the human condition. Working in the environmental field is really about improving the human condition because all things human depend on a sustainable and healthy environment.

Every six months GBNERR’s Coastal Training Program has to report to NOAA on what was accomplished during that period and document results. This is a lot harder to do than one might think. It is easy for me to list all the workshops and their topics and to record the number of people who attended, but beyond that what did it matter? What resulted from our efforts to bring the best science based information to the board and commission members of the towns in our target area? This is a more interesting question and a much harder one to answer. If funding were available, another staff member could be hired to craft and implement all the necessary surveys and to do the difficult research work to follow up with each training participant. But this won’t happen, so I do my best with the most comprehensive post training evaluations that I think participants will tolerate and I try my best to track

each town’s progress in implementing actions that result in a healthier more sustainable Great Bay.

Another problem is how to determine if the actions a town implemented were the result of your efforts alone or the result of your efforts in combination with all your partners who do similar work? Of course this is nearly impossible to do, so you acknowledge all the efforts made and tip your hat to your partners who shared in the work load and dedicated staff time to the effort.

The efforts of the CTP have resulted in a great deal of positive change for Great Bay and are a big part of the current efforts to create a sustainable Great Bay Ecosystem. The CTP at GBNERR has grown in effectiveness each year and as the network of municipal decision makers whom I work with has grown, I have gained a deeper and more meaningful understanding of all the issues that affect Great Bay and how they are interconnected. The workshops, seminars, conferences, and field trips developed by and implemented by the CTP have resulted first and foremost in a decision making population that has greater awareness of the science based resources available to them. The work has resulted in more decisions being based on what the best science of the day informs regarding a particular issue. A clear example is the goal of better buffers. The science is clear; to protect water quality from Nitrogen rich runoff, the buffers need to be at



Steve Miller gives a presentation at a recent climate change training held in the Hugh Gregg Center.

least 125 feet wide. This information has helped several towns implement better buffers, based on the science. Clearly there is more work that needs to be done on numerous environmental issues and decisions are not based on the science alone.

In general terms the work of the CTP helps towns to deal efficiently with their environmental issues, helps decision makers find the information they need and results in policies and regulations that are based on science and therefore defensible. It also gives decision makers a place to go for answers and someone to assist them in their efforts to solve their local issues while helping them think and act as part of the larger watershed.

It is good work to be doing. It is meaningful, challenging, and has an impact. It is part of the CTP structure and function to evaluate all trainings, reassess strategies, and search for ways to make the CTP as effective and efficient as possible.

Steve J. Miller
CTP Coordinator, GBNERR

A Full Circle Look at Environmental Education

As an environmental educator where my “classroom” is the outdoors, I don’t often get to see the information that I teach go beyond the end of one of my programs. Like most environmental educators, I don’t have students that listen to me every day and then take a test to show what knowledge I passed on to them. I teach what I love and hope that it reaches students in a way that becomes as important to them as being able to add, subtract and spell. Recently I got to see a former “student” of mine return to the Great Bay “classroom” because he felt it was a worthy place to focus his attention and to give back.

I first met Eric Mauer when he was six years old and a participant in some of the original Once Upon an Estuary programs here at the Discovery Center. Always an active and inquisitive participant, he continued to join us for summer Bayventure programs through the age of eleven. In 2003, he braved the cold for the first Winter Overnight Camp-out in our Native American wigwam. Recently, I found a letter from Eric’s Mom in my files telling how much he and his brother Grant enjoyed the camping experience.

Eric aged out of my summer pro-



Eric and Peter Flynn aboard the model gundalow.

grams, but I wasn’t at all surprised when he contacted me to inquire about the possibility of him giving back to the Center by completing his Eagle Scout project on site. I met with Eric and was impressed with what a nice young man he had become. We discussed several potential projects and because of his fond memories of the overnight and other programs he had attended, he settled on renovating the wigwam that is used in our fall educational programs. Eric completed the project on time and above expectations. Our Native American encampment, one of the highlights of our fall field trips for 2000 school children each year, looked better than ever thanks to Eric!

Eric recently contacted me looking for a letter of support for a scholarship application. He received seven scholarships, most notably the Great Bay Stewards Scholarship given to a high school senior from a town that abuts Great Bay and who demonstrates involvement in activities/organizations that contribute to the protection and conservation of the Great Bay Estuarine System. He is now attending the University of Delaware in the fall; majoring in engineering and rowing with their crew team.

Our efforts here at the Discovery Center are not unlike those of nature centers around the world that strive to give the local community pride in their “sense of place”, and visitors appreciation for environments they might not otherwise explore. Environmental education isn’t just a black hole where you pour all of your “feel good” thoughts about nature,



Eric Mauer

Spotlight

From Volunteer to Teacher

Over the years I’ve had many varied opportunities to work with children. While studying at UNH, I volunteered for the Great Bay Kids’ Ecology Club at the Great Bay Discovery Center. There I planned and implemented lessons for at-risk children from the Portsmouth schools. Our learning was experiential and our adventures led to lessons learned and joyful memories. The idea that sticks with me today is all children bring something to contribute to the group’s learning. This knowledge, as well as the idea that my belief in a child’s abilities to succeed is what finally propelled me into a career of teaching.

My class now makes a yearly field trip to the Great Bay Discovery Center for the cultural history program. The experiential lessons regarding the early populations of Great Bay allow my students a first-hand glimpse at how people co-existed with nature and lived off the land’s bounty. Because this idea is foreign to eight year olds, this peek into the past is critical to developing their understanding of Native American culture.

Sarah Plater, Deerfield Community School 3rd grade teacher and former Great Bay Kids’ Ecology Club volunteer

hoping that they don’t just get sucked in to never return. Sometimes you do get real concrete evidence of your impact that makes you say, “This is why I’m here.”

Beth Heckman
Assistant Education Coordinator, GBNERR