



Lessons from White Lake - Connecting Students to their Community through Environmental Stewardship

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White Lake and its surrounding community have been negatively affected by shoreline degradation and wildlife habitat loss caused primarily by historical logging practices, and reduced water quality from industrial pollution and storm water runoff. This led to the lake being identified as a Great Lakes Area of Concern by the United States Environmental Protection Agency three decades ago. Local community partners have worked diligently in recent years to reverse habitat loss, and repair damaged ecosystems. The “H₂O White Lake” (Healthy Habitats On White Lake) project has involved over seven hundred middle school students in grades six through eight over the course of the last five years. Students begin by researching the environmental history of the watershed and then they monitor six tributaries of the lake for nutrient pollution and habitat degradation. Students use the field experience as a community inventory to identify stewardship needs, for which they then identify solutions that take into account land usage and community behaviors. Class projects have focused on stream bank restoration, storm water management, eradication of invasive species, shoreline clean-up, and community outreach and education. This year, the project culminated in the first ever White Lake Environmental Film Festival, for which students had the opportunity to create their own short documentary. This multiple year place based education project allows students to apply their classroom studies of surface water and groundwater dynamics to an authentic, real-world situation, conduct themselves as scientists, and feel valuable through connections with community partners.