

EPA

Moderator: Karen Scott
June 20, 2012
4:00 p.m. ET

Operator: Good afternoon. My name is (Rashida), and I will be your conference operator today. At this time, I would like to welcome everyone to the Environmental Education Webinar Call. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. After the speakers' remarks, there will be a question-and-answer session. If you would like to ask a question during this time, simply press star, then the number one on your telephone keypad. If you would like to withdraw your question, press the pound key. Thank you. Ms. Scott, you may begin your conference.

Karen Scott: Thank you. This is Karen Scott with EPA's Office of Environmental Education. This webinar that we're presenting today is part of a series of webinars that we've been doing under the heading of environmental education in action. If you'd like to see the former presentations that have been done in this webinar series, you can go to our website which is epa.gov/education. And there is a button on the front page where you can click into Environmental Education in Action page.

Today's presentation is called, "The Great Outdoors as Classroom, Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures." We're presenting this today because the month of June is Great Outdoors Month. And our presenter today will be Sarah Milligan-Toffler, who is the Associate Executive Director of Wilderness Inquiry in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Wilderness Inquiry got a grant from us a coupe of years ago to do a great project and at least part of what Sarah will be presenting today was, I think, due to – due to our funding.

And I hope you all enjoy hearing about it, it's a great program. Sarah, just go ahead and take over.

Female: Sarah, we can see your PowerPoint, so you are all set to go.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Wonderful. Well, thank you, Karen, and let me just start off by saying, you know, a great thanks to the EPA for being an early funder of this project and helping to get it off the ground. I – as Karen mentioned, I am the Executive Director – Associate executive Director with Wilderness Inquiry, where I've had a great pleasure working for the past 22 years, and I have to say in my past 22 years, this is one of the most exciting projects I've worked on.

So, there's a lot to the program, but I'm going to try to get through it here fairly quickly, and I'll start with a high-level overview. I'll state, first of all, that the goal of the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program, or we call it the UWCA, is to improve student academic performance, and we do that through innovative classroom and field work curricula that is developed in partnership with the National Park Service, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area here in the Twin Cities, and we use environmental education experiences to teach Science and Language Arts.

The UWCA is currently serving over 10,000 youth and families annually and we do that on day-long canoe trips on the Mississippi River. We also do overnight and multi-day camping trips, and really provide opportunities to connect youth to outdoor jobs. And on these activities, we're providing hands-on environmental learning opportunities. We provide an integrated classroom curricula in schools, and we do all this really as a way to spark an interest in the outdoors, that we hope leads to a lifetime engagement in the outdoors.

So, why is the UWCA important? We all know that kids aren't getting outdoors enough, they're spending too much time connected to one screen or another like the kids in this photograph. And it's kind of that combination of video games, organized sports, overscheduled families and kind of converged here to create a disconnect with this generation from the natural world. And

we believe that more research is really needed to fully understand the ramifications of this disconnect, but research does seem to indicate that youth who are not connecting to nature or having a more difficult time in school lack creativity and problem-solving skills and maybe more inclined to be sedentary.

So, we really developed the UWCA in response to this kind of the call to say, we've got an epidemic growing in this country. We've got to make sure that the next generation is getting connected to the outdoors. And we're trying to do that on a scale that really can make a big difference.

So, who is served in the UWCA? We're working in partnership with local school districts and youth organizations to serve these 10,000 youth on an annual basis. We're targeting kids in 5th through 12th grade. The majority of the youth who are being served are youth of color, many are recent immigrants. We know that they're highly mobile. We know that many of them are underperforming in school. Most come from low-income backgrounds and the vast majority are really inexperienced with the outdoors.

So, in essence, we're really reaching kids who are not being served by other outdoor organizations. And I would just say that our partnership with the schools has been key in our success in that endeavor. If the kid shows up at school, they're participating in this program, so that's how we're able to reach those kids that might not sign up on their own. And really, through this program I think we're providing that all-important first contact with nature for many, many kids.

So, what are students doing and what are they – what are they learning? As I mentioned, we're providing day and overnight trips. Our strategy is to meet youth where they are in – right here in the local community, connecting them to the resources that are in their backyards. So, the Mississippi River runs right through, it connects our Twin Cities here. I would say the vast majority of the general population has never been on that river and certainly, a lot of these kids have never been out there.

They're paddling our 24th Voyager canoes, and our great park service rangers, our partners, are teaching them about wildlife, natural and cultural history. They're providing water quality and stewardship lessons. We're talking a lot now here in the Twin Cities about the advancement of Asian Carp up the river, and so we're really involving the kids in those conversations, and the kids are also learning about water safety. Many of the kids who are served through this program cannot swim. And so, we're teaching them how to be safe on and near the water.

We're also teaching them, which we think is very important just how to have fun in the outdoors and how to be comfortable. Many of the kids we're serving are afraid of leaves and bugs and things like that, and so getting them comfortable in that outdoor environment so that they can be out there is a huge piece of that.

And of course, we're also teaching kids about careers in the outdoors and what opportunities are out there. We know that one in 20 jobs in America is in the outdoor industry, but most kids, outdoor jobs are really not on their radar screens. So, we're providing that introduction as well.

So, I would like to show you a short video that really shows this program in action. This is a little bit of an experiment. I'm going to give it a shot here and see how it goes, and if it doesn't work I'll give you all a link so you can watch it on your own.

Is this working?

Karen Scott: We can see it, but not hear it.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Not hear it? OK. Then, I will stop it here and we will just continue with the presentation. Hold on. All right. Let's get back to the PowerPoint. OK. All right. Then, what I'll do is at the end of this presentation I'll make sure that everyone gets a link where they can go and watch that video and some other videos that we have at the program that I think are really helpful to visualize what we're doing.

But, what I'll do now is just move into describing our program model for the UWCA. It's really designed as a stepwise program to engage youth in the outdoors. We call it "The Pyramid of Engagement." And the goal is really to move youth through a series of program activities and provide opportunities for deeper and deeper engagement in the outdoors as their interest, you know, kind of guides them. And again, ultimately our goal is to help young people become engaged in the outdoors for life.

So, at the base of the pyramid, we're serving 10,000 youth per year. And these are really on these introductory experiences right in the city where the – near where kids live. Most of the activities are four to six hours in length, and again, our park service rangers and Wilderness Inquiry staff are on these experiences, helping to provide hands-on environmental learning experiences as they enjoy the outdoor environment. This is kind of a picture of some kids getting ready to launch on one of our day events. Again, these activities are part of district-wide school programming. Kids are paddling these great canoes and our park rangers are providing interpretation. The activities that they're doing do tie into graduation standards and we are providing curricula for teachers that are kind of a wraparound to the things that happen right on the river that day, so pre and post kinds of activities, and we do provide a training for teachers on how to implement those classroom activities.

From there, 1,000 kids on an annual basis would have the opportunity to participate in an overnight trip. Again, these activities are taking place within post driving or bus visits for kids. This is at Fort Snelling State Park here in the Twin Cities which is right by the airport. We're doing camping, hiking, in-depth science lessons and again, teaching kids how to have fun and be comfortable in the outdoor environment.

The next step in the pyramid is the opportunity to participate in a multi-day experience in places such as the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, Glacier National Park like the kids in this photograph. Most of these trips include a college visit at an environmental college and conversations with National Park Service and Forest Service rangers about, you know, what the career opportunities might be in those land management agencies.

Then kids are going on to the opportunity to have an internship in the outdoors. And here are some kids that were interning with Wilderness Inquiry last winter, helping to get a fire started. And then, kind of at the top of the pyramid is those kids that really have an interest in pursuing a career opportunity in the outdoors. And our goal there is to really be serving – getting 100 kids per year coming through this program that are being placed in the outdoor industry.

And, this is Josh Garubanda, our wonderful staff member whose story really embodies this whole pyramid of engagement. He first participated through his high school in St. Paul in one of our day trips and then he started participating in overnight trips. After about a year or two, he started working as an intern and then became a trail guide for Wilderness Inquiry and he now works full-time in our office. And he is actually one of our – he's our program coordinator for this Urban Wilderness Canoe Program and he is super excited about sharing the outdoors with kids that otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity.

So, I'd like to spend a minute now talking about the evaluation that we're doing for this program and share some of the highlights. We are working with the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota – the acronym is CAREI – to conduct research, and they do a lot of research on, well, innovative programs that are trying to make a difference in education in a kind of alternative way.

So, just kind of a quick overview of the evaluation methods that we're using. We're doing pre and post trip surveys with students, we're looking at student records and we're doing teacher surveys. This year, we're actually adding a component where evaluators will be going out on some of these programs and doing observational kinds of evaluation pieces as well, which we think will be very helpful.

You can see here that we have a fairly high rate of return which we're pleased about, and what we're doing, the questions that we're trying to get at through the evaluation, are levels of student engagement, their attitudes specifically about the Mississippi River and then about science and the environment in

general and the impact this has – that the Urban Wilderness Canoe Program has on their attitudes. We're looking at school attendance patterns, whether this program has any indicators for pursuit of future outdoor activities, we're looking at teacher attitudes and then whether or not this program is helping their more general learning objectives in school.

So, some interesting findings and things that I think are worth sharing is that we are seeing that this program does seem to increase interest in science and the environment by students who participate. A little more than half of the students, 55 percent, said they were more interested – more interested in the environment because of the UWCA at 22 percent, so they were much more interested. So, it's only 77 percent of kids indicated that they, you know, because of this program are more interested in the environment and science.

Let's see here. Over half of the teachers agreed with this statement. "I think my students will be more interested in science because of the UWCA, and even larger numbers believe that their students had a greater interest in the environment. More than 70 percent of teachers agreed with the statement, "I believe the UWCA positively affected students' attitudes about the environment in general." So, we think those are very promising findings.

So, what we're seeing is that kind of this movement from exposure to engagement in the outdoors, and 60 percent of the students said that their UWCA day trips changed the way they felt about the Mississippi River. And there were some kind of fun comments that students made like, you know, "I'd never gotten this far on the river before and I loved it. I thought it was really scary at first, but when I went on it, I wasn't scared anymore. I saw trash in there and it made me think twice before I litter. I learned that I get my drinking water from the river so I felt like I should do something to get the river cleaner than ever." The students indicated that they saw lots of wildlife, and according to teachers, they were very highly engaged in the whole process.

One piece, at least in these initial evaluation reports, it didn't – their participation didn't seem to move the dial on attendance, we feel like it's a little too early to say that this program doesn't do that. We're just continuing

to look at it – look at it as we – as we continue to evaluate the program. And students did cite the UWCA as one of the best experiences that they're having in school. When asked an open-ended question about what was the best part of summer school, 36 percent of the participants who responded named the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program by name over all other experiences they had had in school. So, we view that as a really – a great sign.

So, some of the conclusions that we can draw are that we are reaching clearly and underserved population. We're fostering a greater interest in the Mississippi River specifically, and science and the environment in general, that outdoor-based teaching seems to heighten interest and encourage participation in school. The environmental stewardship seems to be impacted by kids who participate in the program that our collaboration with the National Park Service, with the Mississippi River Fund and other – our school partners and other partners really seems to amplify the impact. And that the program does have some replicability possibilities.

So, what are the elements that really make this program successful? One is clearly the partnerships, and certainly, our key partners, the National Park Service, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and their friends, the Mississippi River Fund, and the Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools are huge. But we also feel that many of our other cross-sector partners make this program the success that it has been. We're partnering with the Department of Natural Resources, the Minneapolis and St. Paul Public Parks and mayors of both cities are very engaged in this program. Private industry, such as Aggregate Industries which run the barges up and down the river is a huge supporter. The Forest Service Army Corpse, Fish and Wildlife, the State of Minnesota, I could go on and on with the (inaudible) partners, but I think that what we have found here is that there is this common goal around the need to connect kids to the outdoors, and all of these agencies that I've just listed are concerned about that and trying to figure out how to do that. And we are finding ways to work together through this program to really make that vision a reality.

So, the other pieces of success, you know, having an innovative educational experience that's easily integrated into the classroom. It's been critical to have those educational activities tied directly into district graduation standards. It would be much harder for schools and teachers to embrace this program if it didn't tie in to the things that they have to do to prepare kids to graduate. So, that is a real key to success.

The ability to serve large numbers of youth and really impact this community in a large way, that scale seems to make a big difference in attracting the partners that we have at the table, and I think it's important to mention that these 24-foot Voyager canoes as you can see in this photograph, really allow us to serve large numbers of youth safely. And so, that has been real key to our success.

Having a long-term funding strategy is a key to success and this is just a quick view of our revenue model for the program. And as you can see, there is no one source of funding that is the primary source which is intentional and something that we're continuing to work on but that is a real key as if when your corporate and foundation support is down or something like that, hopefully we can raise more with special events or individual donations and the whole program isn't wobbling because of that.

We've been working really hard on developing some ongoing sources of support and notably, this last year we launched a fund-raising event on the river that we're calling The Great River Raise and it's a corporate canoe challenge. And on our first year we raised over \$50,000 to support the program which we're just super excited about. Plus, it's engaging corporate employees in the program in a hands-on way. And so, we hope to build that over time here as well as – as well as other sources of support.

Obviously, delivering measurable results is huge for our success and that's going to become something as the program moves on and as we continue to try and really identify those ongoing sources of support being able to sow those measurable results will continue to be very important. And one piece that I would just like to share too with folks, anyone who's thinking about stating something like this in your own community, one of the things that we

did is we didn't worry about figuring out all the details upfront. We've set an on-basis goal of serving 10,000 kids a year and we started doing it.

And it wasn't until after the third year of the program which was just this last year, we sat down and started doing a strategic planning process with our – with our key partners to iron out some of those details that I really think that if we had tried to do that on the upfront side before we had some success under our belt, this program might never have gotten off the ground. Just say, "Go do it."

Some unexpected challenges. The weather has been a big challenge for us and maybe it's not something we can control, but with global warming and some of the changing weather patterns, we've had flooding and heat and drought and all of these kinds of things, so it's been interesting programmatically to figure out how to continue to offer the program in the face of some of these weather challenges.

While the schools are a major asset and a big part of the success of the program, there are challenges in working with the schools and, you know, trying to work at a district-wide level, it's a large bureaucracy in these large urban districts. So, I just say that, you know, maybe initially we underestimated the amount of time and effort it was going to take to manage those relationships. So, that's something to think about.

Sometimes there are barriers from land management agencies, rules and regulations and things that make it a little difficult to serve some of the populations that we're serving. We've been having to work with them to educate them about how their – some of their policies inadvertently create barriers to access. This is something that's taken us a little bit more time than we had originally envisioned. Most of them are very – they're committed to the same goal of getting kids out there. They just don't know how their own policy sometimes prevent that.

And of course, funding and maybe that is an unexpected challenge but while we've had success in funding, to reach these kind of populations it's always –

it does require a broad base of support and that does take a lot of time and effort to make sure that that funding is in play.

I think I'll end here with a quick impact story about a group of kids that were serving at Washburn High School here in Minneapolis. And they have been – a bunch of kids have been participating for a number of years in all of the different levels of the program from the day trips to the overnights to the multi-day trips and some of them moving into some career pieces. But I wanted to share a story about a group of students, eight students that participated in an overnight winter activity at the local park here. And the students that were served in that program are at risk kids, they are not on track to graduate. They are primarily Latino 90 percent, 9 percent African-American and 1 percent Caucasian. And they're having all kinds of issues ranging from poor achievement in school to truancy issues.

And on this trip, the students participated in a variety of outdoor learning activities including tapping from maple syrup, stargazing, hiking, those kinds of activities. The students made all their own meals, they participated in team-building activities and did a survivor challenge where the students had to make a fire and build a shelter. And (Lindsey), who is a teacher from Washburn who was on the trip, said this about the experience.

She said, "The kids loved the stargazing and talking with the facilitator, the Wilderness Inquiry staff about how big the universe is. They also really liked the maple sugaring. Both of these activities were science labs, but the kids didn't view it as that. They were just really curious and engaged. They discovered their own resourcefulness in the survival challenge and they all really enjoyed cooking and serving each other. It was inspiring to see how independent these students were. They were engaged, respectful and all got along very well in the trip. If you saw them out there, you would not know these were some of the most – some of the toughest kids we have. It was an environment that gave them a lot of independence and they stepped up to the challenge. When they came home, they were really proud. They shared their experience with other students in their class. This group was like a tight-knit club for the rest of the year."

"I think poor attendance is why a lot of these students are failing" she says. "One of the students who participated was a young woman who didn't come to school at all all semester. After the trip, she attended school almost everyday. She felt like she was part of a community. The improvements with her school work after that were remarkable. I'll never forget the bus ride home. On this trip, they've – they felt really amazing and confident. They were like a team of winners." So, she says, "So, I think the trip gave them something positive and boosted their confidence tremendously. I would love it if all students could have this opportunity." The UWCA program was extremely organized and the staff really care about following through. If we had the resources to do more of it, I think it could be really life-changing, a real game-changer for these students."

So, that is the conclusion of my presentation. I want to thank you for the opportunity to present. You can get more information about the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program at the website listed there, which is urbanwildernesscanoeadventures.org or you can email me directly at sarah2wildernessinquiry.org. And you can also access that video that you weren't able to hear on that website as well. And so, now, I think we are prepared to open up for questions.

Operator: At this time, if you have a question, please press star, one, on your telephone keypad. Once again, if you have a question, please press star, one. Your first question comes (Susan Santharcum), Independent Teacher.

Karen Scott: Go ahead.

(Susan Santharcum): I very much appreciate that, your program, that sounds wonderful. Could you talk a little more about the relationships with supporters' partnerships? I live in a very rural community, and so, I'm interested in other options.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Sure. Well, it's interesting that you mentioned that, because we are working right now with a number of rural communities in Minnesota who are looking to bring this program to their communities, and I think it's really important to note that the issue of connecting kids to the outdoors is not just an urban issue. And we're learning that by the, you know, the phone calls that

we're receiving it seems like, you know, it seems like it might be easier for kids to connect to the outdoors when they're in those more rural areas but that's not the case.

So, what we're doing is looking at, you know, forming partnerships with school districts in other communities and we're – right now we're working with the community of Sartell which is a little bit north of St. Cloud here in Minnesota. And we're working with them to try and identify funding sources. We are approaching, you know, some state funding sources, you know, Wilderness Inquiry has the ability to go into those communities and help do some demonstration projects, get kids out there, work with teachers to do that. Really, the biggest challenge is working together to try and find the funding to make that all happen.

You know, I wouldn't say that, y, I'm not sure where you are located, I think maybe trying to find a university that is not too far away that has an outdoor program might be a great way to connect with somebody in your community who would be interested in partnering to come out and help work with you to get kids connected to the outdoors. And I would certainly be willing to talk with you more to see if that's something that Wilderness Inquiry could help you with as well.

(Susan Santharcum): Thank you.

Karen Scott: This is Karen Scott. Again, I just wanted to let everybody know, you can also submit questions through the webinar if you'd rather, so you can either tell the operator that you'd like to ask a question or you can submit it through the webinar, and we do have a question through the webinar.

Female: Sarah, your question is, "Where did the canoes come from? How much do they cost?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Well, that's an interesting question. We work with a company in St. Paul called Northwest Canoe Company. It's a very small company. I don't know of anyone else in the country that is making these canoes. They are a large investment. They cost \$12,000 each to build. We have been building the fleet – we now have, I think, 26 canoes on our fleet and we've

been building up that fleet over the course of the last 15 years. I will say that there has been pretty great interest, you know, from the funding community to help us build those boats. A lot of funders like to build something, you know, to support something that's tangible. And so, that's been a way that we've been able to build up that fleet. So, I don't know if that answers the question.

Karen Scott: Thanks, Sarah. Operator, are there any other questions from the call-in line?

Operator: Yes, you have a question from the line of (Stacey Creek) from Northland College.

(Stacey Creek): Hello. I have a question about your internships, and I'm curious, what kinds of organizations are you working with to provide internships, and are you actively looking for other opportunities for the students?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Absolutely. In fact, you've said you're from Northland College?

(Stacey Creek): That's correct.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: That's great. We have a – we have a memorandum of understanding with your college, I don't know if you know that.

(Stacey Creek): I do, yes.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes, which is wonderful. We love Northland College. So, yes, we are always looking for individuals who are interesting – interested in interning. And right now, primarily those internships would be based right here in the Twin Cities area and they can really focus on a wide variety of different things that we do, but some interns do come in and work very specifically with this Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures Program. Could you say a little bit more? I just want to make sure I'm understanding what information you're looking for me to provide for you, I'm not sure I'm answering your question.

(Stacey Creek): OK. I guess there was (inaudible). What types of internships the students do, and I think your answer is that they do internships with Wilderness Inquiry, is that correct?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Right. I mean, when – so, I see. Through the Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures Program. So, yes, so Wilderness Inquiry certainly provides internships, but through this program, students might be – they're doing internships with a wide variety of organizations. So, some of our students have done internships with the National Park Service. Some have done internships with the City of St. Paul Park and Rec, the City of Minneapolis Park and Rec, Three Rivers Park and Rec. And we're working on actually building a whole, you know, kind of pipeline of those kinds of opportunities from the Nature Conservancy.

And so, the students could get kind of a broad view of, you know, what the opportunities are in the outdoor industry because it's really – it ranges. You know, everything from, you know, even just working for the National Park Service, there are so many different things that you can do working for the park service, so we're trying to expose kids to kind of what that, you know, what those opportunities are. So, we have a wide variety of partners here both locally in the Twin Cities and some statewide as well. If that's helpful.

(Stacey Creek): Yes, thank you.

Karen Scott: Great. We have several questions here from the webinar, so we'll go ahead and take one of those right now.

Female: Sure. Sarah, do you also allow Girl Scout Councils to sign up to bring a group for the day or for an overnight session? If there's interest in bringing some girls in to do the program?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Absolutely, and we have worked with the Girl Scouts a lot.

Karen Scott: Great. Do we have another call-in question? Operator?

Operator: Yes, ma'am, you have a question from the line of Rosemary Velasquez from Girl Scouts Northeast.

Karen Scott: Good follow-up. OK. Go ahead.

Rosemary Velasquez: I actually just typed my question on the chat thing. But basically, I wanted to know what the relationship is that you have with the schools. So, are the kids getting course credit, or how are they getting selected to go? And who's funding it when they actually go to (inaudible)?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes. Well, a relationship with each district is a little bit different, I'll say – I'll say that. So, in Minneapolis, we are working in a district-wide relationship. We are connected through their alternative learning area. And so, working directly with the Executive Director of Alternative Learning. And so, for instance, kids who are enrolled in summer school, as they come to summer school, they're in this program.

Rosemary Velasquez: Yes.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: So, that's how – that's how that works. And then there are some things than throughout the year too if they're enrolled in some of these alternative learning programs, then they – then they participate in the activities that we are doing together.

And so, we work really – I mean, we do work with the teachers in terms of specifically what they are wanting to teach, we have three different, kind of focus curricula that they can pick from. Water quality, natural and cultural history, and kind of birds and critters of the river. And so, we work, you know, directly with the teachers on those things, but the teachers aren't really deciding whether or not this is something that they're going to do that's decided at a district level.

As far as payment goes, in Minneapolis, we are working – the district actually pays about not quite half the fee that – or the cost that the programs costs for us to implement and then we fundraise for the rest of that. And again, it's a wide variety of sources. I'd be happy to share a little bit more about that, but – then in St. Paul our relationship is directly with the Office of College Readiness. And so, kids that are involved in this program, it's called AVID, which is a nationwide program. Any kid that's enrolled in the AVID Program participates in this program. And the – in St. Paul, we have a couple of

funders that are fully underwriting the activities for St. Paul. So, the district isn't putting money in from St. Paul at this point.

Rosemary Velasquez: OK.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Does that – does that answer your question?

Rosemary Velasquez: Yes, thank you.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes.

Rosemary Velasquez: OK.

Operator: Your next – Your next question comes from Antoinette Wannebo from Brooklyn School of PTO.

Karen Scott: Go ahead.

Antoinette Wannebo: Hi, am I ...

Female: Yes, we can hear you.

Antoinette Wannebo: OK. I had a question for how you work with the teachers? You've partially answered it, but does a – do you develop – is it sort of a kind of a one-time thing, or are you sort of working with the science program through the year, how does – how does that interaction – what does it look like?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: It's look like – well, primarily right now, the wraparound, sort of in-classroom kinds of activities are web-based. And if you go on to urbanwildernesscanoeadventures.org and click on "For Teachers", you'll see the resources that are available there for teachers.

Antoinette Wannebo: OK.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: And our – the National Park Service here really has taken the lead on developing that educational content. That is their area of expertise and they do have rangers that will come into the classrooms if teachers arrange that, but it's not a set thing, like if you sign up for this program then you get,

you know, a ranger in the classroom X number of times. We also do offer a teacher training, it is not mandatory for teachers to participate in that but it's offered as an opportunity for teachers to participate.

The activities that we have developed do meet graduation standards, and so, we, you know, if teachers go in and look and say, "OK, if we do these pieces this is helping kids gain credit for the science objective that we have to cover, that sort of thing. And it's done by grade level and things like that. If that's – does that make sense?

Antoinette Wannebo: It does, yes. And if I might ask just one other question, you may have already answered it, I came in a little late. But this is – do you work with younger elementary age students, or is there a minimum that you found this to be most effective on?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Well, we have started with middle and high school.

Antoinette Wannebo: OK.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: We certainly have worked with younger kids, and it can be very effective. I mean, what we will often do with younger kids is what I would call more of a kind of sampler – per sampler kind of a day rather than getting them out for six hours on the Mississippi River which can be difficult. You know, we'll do a little, you know, a little paddle on a lake and a hike, and, you know, maybe kind of a, you know, a challenge kind of activity in the outdoors. And that can work very well for younger audiences. Again, it's that, you know, kind of getting them comfortable up there, having an initial experience that kind of peaks their interest. We have not developed curricula that is specifically for those younger grades. That's something that may, you know, that we may do in the future. But a lot of the activities can be, you know, kind of altered to work for a younger audience.

Antoinette Wannebo: And can I ask one more question and I'll ...

Female: I think we've got a couple more in the queue. (Inaudible).

Karen Scott: Yes, we've got – it looks like quite a few questions on the webinar and we might have more questions in the call-in line. What I might suggest is that if we don't get to some of your questions, if Sarah doesn't mind providing an email address tat people could send questions to, that might be one way to get – to get the questions answered.

Female: They can see it on the screen.

Karen Scott: That's right, on the screen there.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: OK, great. Because, it's looking like this has generated a lot of interest, and so, let's get right to another question.

Female: So, another question from the webinar is, "How did you keep the naysayers at bay when you started the project?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: You know, it's really interesting. We have not had that many naysayers. Nobody that we have talked to had said, "Well, that's a stupid idea. Nobody should be getting kids outside." The only, you know, the only naysayers were people who doubted that we could really do this on a scale that we're doing it at. But, you know, we just didn't really, you know, worry about that because we knew we could do it. And I think we've you know, made believers out of people just by doing it.

And again, I would kind of go back to my comment at the beginning where, you know, we didn't worry too much about getting all of the details ironed out at the beginning. We really work in partnership, we knew we needed the schools on board, so we went to the schools and said, "Here's what we want to do. How we can we – how can this program help you solve a problem that you have?" And there we started working together to figure out how to make that work.

And we really haven't – we really haven't run into too many people that have said, you know, "We don't want to hear", "We don't want to do this", "This doesn't, you know, we don't care about this." So ...

Female: OK.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: ... I think it's – I think there are a lot of – I think people are seeing the issue.

Karen Scott: Great. Thanks, Sarah. Operator, do we have another question on the call-in line?

Operator: Yes, Ma'am. Your next question comes from Carol Hunter from Orange County.

Karen Scott: Go ahead. Carol? (Inaudible) is open?

Carol Hunter: I was hoping to – I was hoping to get some information about where to receive the PowerPoint if the PowerPoint wouldn't be available at ...

Karen Scott: Yes, we can answer that.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes, sure. The PowerPoint, the studio from this call and the transcript will be available – it takes about a week and it'll be available on www.epa.gov/education. And there will be a – there's a link on there that says, "EE in Action" or "Environmental Education in Action." If you click on that link, it'll take you to a page where we store all of these webinars. So, you'll be able to access all of this in just about a week, it takes us about that long to get it up.

Carol Hunter: Thank you.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: And I've put the exact link into the chat box, so if you look at your little toolbar on the right side of your page you might see an orange area that'll open it up. There should be a box that says, "Chat" and I have put the web address in their feedback system.

Karen Scott: OK.

Carol Hunter: Thank you.

Karen Scott: OK, let's take another question from the webinar.

Female: From the web, Sarah, your next question is, "Do you and your partners use a lot of Project Learning Tree and Project WET in programming?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: I am not familiar with those, but maybe I should be.

Karen Scott: Yes, it sounds like what you've been saying you use curriculum primarily from the National Park Service, that was developed by them. Project WET and Project Learning Tree developed curriculum for a lot of outdoor kinds of activities, environmental education-related. So, yes, Sarah, you and I can talk about those later.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes, I'd love to hear more about that, that sounds great.

Karen Scott: OK, great. And we could take another call from the call-in line.

Operator: There is another question coming from Lily Cason from the University of Georgia.

Karen Scott: Go ahead.

Lily Cason: Hi.

Karen Scott: Hi.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Hi.

Lily Cason: Do you hear me?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes.

(Nellie Casen): OK. I – my name is Lily Cason and I have worked in environmental education for two years since I graduated college. And I've worked with kind of similar programs but I think to the one you're describing, in a national park and then most recently at a (OH) center, kind of giving kids some experience, kind of a field trip experience where a lot of kids are experiencing the wilderness for the first time. And I really loved working in this program, but kind of the question I have is what happens after these kids have that initial experience? Are they able to continue to experience the outdoors and get the

benefits from it once they go back to their community, you know, maybe where they could have that available to them before? And if not, is there anything that we can do to help make experiences like the wilderness canoe trip, you know, a longer-lasting experience in their lives.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Sure. Well, that's a great question, and I think that, you know, I mean, that is the \$40,000 question here.

Lily Cason: Yes.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: You know, our program is designed to have opportunities if you can – if you think back to that pyramid of engagement, that slide that I showed. I don't know if you were on the presentation at that point, but, you know, we're looking kind of at the base of our program at providing those introductory experiences for kids. But then, we are providing opportunities for them to take kind of the next step and do, you know, an overnight trip that would be, again, close to home, something that's not too far away. As part of that experience, one of the things that we're doing and offering is information to those kids on how they can get back to the river on their own on our nice ride program, on other programs in the Twin Cities that they might avail themselves of if they're interested.

You know, through this program, there is an opportunity for kids that really have a great interest in this and they're kind of sticking with it through their school activities. It's going on, you know, visiting a national park that's outside of the urban area. So, National – Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and Glacier National Park are the two that, you know, we've mostly been working in, but there are other opportunities as well.

And then, you know, kind of those connections for – we're providing connections to kids on what, you know, what educational opportunities would be available to them if they want to pursue this interest further and, you know, kind of the job opportunity piece. So, that's what, you know, we're sort of looking at the whole continuum of engagement. But we really do feel like that, you know, at every level of the program, there's, you know, takeaways that are valuable in and of themselves. So, even just that initial experience, it

says, "Hey, this was great." We are providing information to kids on how they can, you know, bring their parents back or do other things.

And we're working right now actually with the National Park Service on a program that we hope to roll out next year, that would be every kid that participates on that introductory experience would receive a passport. And that passport would contain all kinds of activities that they could do in their community to get connected and engaged to the outdoors and it would be activities with all of our different partners at the, you know, the DNR and the city parks and, you know, all of these different kinds of things and then kids would actually then get that passport stamped. It would direct them to some online resources and then at the end, you know, once they get all, you know, X number of activities stamped, they can turn that passport in and, you know, maybe win a bike or, you know, a canoe trip or other kinds of activities that would then be related to, you know, kind of the whole concept of being connected to the outdoors.

So, that's Mighty Mississippi Passport is what we're going to be calling it and looking at that as a model as a way to kind of provide that opportunity for people to continue to stay engaged over time.

Lily Cason: Well, that's great. Thank you.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes.

Karen Scott: We have another webinar question?

Female: Sure. And we're getting close on time, but some of the research about connecting kids from different cultural backgrounds indicates that models for getting kids outdoors that work with Caucasian kids don't necessarily work with kids from communities with other cultural value. What efforts have you made to find out how other cultural values influence engagement with the UWCA Program?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Well, I think that's, you know, absolutely true. And I think – well, we, you know, we're working in partnership with the school districts and with people, you know, from different ethnic backgrounds to, you know, to find out

what they're interested in. I can tell you, just an example, would be with the Somali community. And we've met with some parents who were looking at whether or not they were going to send their kids on this program and they were telling us, if they really felt it was an important part of their cultural background is around – well, first of all, the importance of being able to survive, the survival skills on the outdoors and having that self-confidence to know that you can take care of yourself and, you know, knowing how to navigate and those kinds of things.

And then, also, that there is a huge connection to poetry that uses imagery from nature. And that that's a big part of their culture. So, when we are working with kids from the Somali community which we do quite a bit of, we weave those elements into the trip. So, we're talking about some of the Somali traditions, reading some of the poems, those kinds of things. But they're – we've actually had really great response from different folks from all different backgrounds who are just excited that we're to offer something that doesn't necessarily require taking the kids 200 and 300 miles away to get out into the environment. We're just introducing them to the environment, that is, sometimes literally in their backyard.

So, I don't know if that gives you an idea.

Karen Scott: OK. Thank you, Sarah. I think maybe we can take one more call-in question? Is there ...

Operator: Ma'am, we have no further questions.

Karen Scott: OK. Well, maybe we can take one more webinar-based question then.

Female: Sure. This one is asking, "Do you currently work with tribal charter or magnate schools who involve American-Indian or Native American kids in your program? If not, is this something you're interested in pursuing?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes, I would say, so we are not – I think the question is, are we specifically working with magnate schools, and I don't believe that that is the case. We would be interested in doing that, but we are working with other tribal organizations to work with Native American youth through the program.

But always interested in doing more of that, so if there are connections that I should know about, I would appreciate an email about that.

Karen Scott: OK, great. We're getting to 5 o'clock. Sarah, do you – no, 5 o'clock our time. Do you need to go, or do you want to take one more question before we sign off? We have a number of web ...

Female: We've got – we've got three left. If we can answer them quickly.

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Yes, that's fine. I can do that.

Female: "Do you have a minimum number of boats you would take out, or would you take only one boat for a small group?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: We would do – yes, we would do that. We would take one boat for a small group.

Female: "On the overnight trips, are students expected to supply their own sleeping bags, tents, (inaudible) kits, et cetera?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: No.

Female: OK. And the last one is, "Do you do bird education or citizen science activity for the students like monitoring an inquiry program from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology?"

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Well, we do citizen science activities and birding. I don't it's specifically what you just mentioned. Those are activities that are led, again, by our Park Service rangers. And I don't know if that's specifically what they're using, but I know that they are collecting data that is going on to websites that are hosted by the University of Minnesota tracking, you know, different, you know, temperature and looking at, you know, different issues related to, you know, birds and counting fish and all that kind of stuff. But it's – if we should know about, I think it was at Cornell, if we could know something about some work that's going on there, if you could please email me, I can pass it along to our educators and make sure they know about that.

Female: Great. And Sarah, there was one last one. I think you may have kind of answered this, but how is the cultural aspect infused with the science part of the program?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: Well, it's – I mean, it would be two different pieces, I think. You know, the science piece is kind of the science piece that some of the – some of the groups really choose a more cultural and natural history sort of track. And so, then they spend quite a bit of time talking about, you know, on the Mississippi, we definitely talk about the different cultures that – in different interpretations of the river from different cultural views, and then we might talk about different cultural views of nature in general. And, you know, working with, you know, whatever groups we're working with to make sure that their perspectives are brought into it. So, it's not necessarily integrated with the science piece, but it's more part of a cultural and natural history track that a class would choose.

Karen Scott: Great. OK, that is all from our web-based questions. So, I think that concludes our presentation today. Thank you very much, Sarah, for being willing to spend time with us today, and Thank you, participants, for joining us today and for the great questions we got. If there are any further questions, I think Sarah is willing to answer them through email. And do be sure to go to their website to find out more about their program and to view that video that look like it was pretty terrific. And I think you can learn a lot from looking at that too.

So, is there anything else you'd like to say, Sarah, to end the program?

Sarah Milligan-Toffler: I just really appreciate the opportunity to present today, and I really thank the EPA for hosting this, and really want to acknowledge our partners at the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and the Mississippi River Fund who are equal partners in delivering this program. So, thank you very much.

Karen Scott: Thank you. Goodbye, everybody.

Operator: This concludes today's conference. You may now disconnect.

EPA
Moderator: Karen Scott
06-20-12/4:00 p.m. ET
Confirmation # 89471829
Page 27

END