

Brian Vollmer-Buhl

School: Mapleton High School

Subject: Science

Grade(s): 7 – 12

What first interested you about attending an aquatic invasive species workshop?

I think I was involved with the very first workshop. At first I was interested because it was a weekend workshop, and it seemed to be well supported because they put teachers up with accommodations and gave us money to integrate some of the ideas into our curriculum if we needed to purchase supplies.

What are some ideas and concepts that you learned in the workshop?

I learned how to get the kids to care about invasive species. For example, when the kids just look at plants, they don't know what they're looking at, but learning about invasive species gives them a new lens to interact with their environment.

After doing the workshop, I've had some ideas since that I've integrated into the curriculum. I can better introduce them to what invasive species are, and the lessons are written to comply to state curriculum, which is helpful.

How have kids benefited from learning about AIS?

It applies to many areas in biology. I have the kids make a food web of their normal environment and then introduce different invasive plants or animals. Then, I have them look at the food web and try to identify what sorts of organisms are going to be affected. In some applications, we're able to mimic authentic scientific methods and help conduct research.

How are you and your students using AIS knowledge in the community?

One hands-on activity we did was look for an invasive snail. We met a biologist down by the stream where we were looking and she explained how to identify them. The biologist was a good role model for the kids with her enthusiasm about snails. Part of the trip involved somewhat of an adventure driving a mini-bus down a dirt road, so the kids very quickly got into snail hunting, as they called it. Their enthusiasm from the field trip continued when we went to look in our own estuary afterwards.

There's a possibility that next year we might be doing invasive species research on crawdads. Also, River Trust is looking for someone to do a snail survey for one of their recently acquired properties. Hopefully, they can see if there's any change in the snail population before and after the restoration efforts.

What are your future plans for continued teaching about aquatic invasive species?

At this point, I really like the model I've been using. For their final project, the kids make an informational video on invasive species. Conceivably, it could reach a state or national audience on the internet.

Once a year, the local watershed council has a meeting where they highlight what they've done and they invite the people doing watershed educational outreach to present to the council members, so we show them the videos. I think having an authentic audience for the kids' work motivates them to put together a quality product instead of just doing another assignment.