

IDAH2O: Master Water Stewards Serving Idaho through Volunteer Monitoring

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Maintaining water quality integrity in the state of Idaho is necessary to ensure a safe water source for drinking, recreating and to support fisheries and wildlife. Through education and outreach, citizens gain a better understanding of their interaction with the land and learn how to best preserve resources. Water monitoring is an integral tool in this outreach; however, most programs once supported by state agencies have been cut or suspended due to budget shortfalls. Monitoring by IDAH2O Master Water Stewards fills substantial gaps in data created by termination of these programs.

The primary goals of the IDAH2O program are: (1) Increasing citizen knowledge on water quality issues, (2) Promote volunteer monitoring on Idaho streams and (3) Enhance watershed stewardship. IDAH2O was developed into a 'Master' program to make use of a highly successful Extension model. IDAH2O volunteers receive training and in return, conduct monitoring in Idaho watersheds. Collected data is published and used to inform citizens and agencies about watershed conditions. These data can be used to make arguments to grantors and for watershed improvement projects. Furthermore, agencies such as Idaho Department of Environmental Quality may someday be able to utilize the data to assist in the TMDL process.

Since the program launch in fall 2010, nearly seventy-five volunteers have been certified, monitoring twenty different watersheds. Program evaluations show that 75% of certified volunteers plan to register and conduct regular monitoring. Over half of certified volunteers stated they would become more involved in watershed activities and restoration. Responses were very similar when asked whether or not they would educate others on topics they learned in class. The success of IDAH2O will hopefully lead to better coordination within citizens and agencies on water resource matters and in turn promote stewardship within Idaho watersheds which will ultimately lead to improved water quality.