ABSTRACT

The Midwestern United States includes the north-central states ranging from the eastern border of Ohio to the western border of Iowa and encompasses a diverse range of ecosystems, such as the Great Lakes, wetlands, rivers, prairies, and forests. This diverse geographic region has been heavily impacted by agriculture, industry, urbanization, and invasive species. As result there are a wide range of challenges facing ecological restoration projects within the Midwestern United States. The provision of ecological restoration is critical for facilitating coordination and supporting grassroots efforts in restoring degraded aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems within this region. The Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) recognized the Midwest-Great Lakes (MWGL) SER chapter as a Regional chapter in March 2008. This SER chapter was formed to serve a six state region consisting of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The chapter’s primary mission is to promote the science and practice of ecological restoration to assist with the recovery and management of degraded ecosystems within this region. The objective of this presentation is to summarize the MWGL SER Chapter’s activities in the past three years and report on what we feel are the most effective approaches for promoting ecological restoration. In the past three years we have established a chapter webpage, moderated an electronic listserve, developed a Facebook page, regularly published chapter newsletters, held annual chapter meetings, and held field day activities. Our experiences suggest that a combination of face-to-face and indirect electronic activities will be most effective in promoting ecological restoration to interested individuals and organizations.

ANNUAL MEETINGS

Our Annual Meetings (www.ser.org/mwgl/meetings.asp) are the most important event of the year as it marks the one time during the year that we come together and share what we have learned about ecological restoration. Planning and organizing the meeting takes almost an entire year, but we have had three highly successful meetings in the past three years. We rotate the locations of the annual meetings among different parts of our chapter boundaries. Our annual meeting was held at Marian College (Indiana) in 2009, University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum (Wisconsin) in 2010, and University of Illinois Springfield (Illinois) in 2011. We have had an average of 117 meeting attendees (range 98 to 130) from 13 states and Ontario, Canada. In general, our meetings are two to three day events that include an invited keynote presentation, an invited special plenary session, workshops, a poster session, oral presentation sessions, a business meeting, and field trips. Attendee contributions to the meetings is high as we have an average of 39 submitted poster presentations (range 13 to 22) and an average of 32 contributed oral presentations (range 23 to 37). We also created opportunities for attendees to socialize during the meeting by providing a sponsorship reception, breaks, and selected meals during the meeting.

OVERVIEW OF MWGL SER CHAPTER

The Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter of SER was initially recognized as a SER Regional Chapter in March 2008. The Chapter serves a region of the Midwestern United States that consists of six states that border the Great Lakes. The Chapter's mission is to promote the science and practice of ecological restoration to assist with the recovery and management of degraded ecosystems within this region of the United States. The Chapter's mission is to promote the science and practice of ecological restoration to assist with the recovery and management of degraded ecosystems within this region of the United States. Chapter leadership consists of a member director of Board of Directors. Specifically, the Board of Directors contain a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, six state representatives, four at-large representatives, and two student representatives. The chapter currently includes 26 members from 13 states. Chapter membership consists mostly of regular members, with an additional portion of student members (10%). Chapter members consist of individuals representing academia (43%), private firms (25%), federal/state/county agencies (14%), and nonprofit groups (10%). The Chapter’s regular activities from its inception to the present include establishing a chapter webpage, moderating an electronic listserve, forming a Facebook Group, regularly publishing chapter newsletters, holding an online business meeting, conducting a membership survey, and providing feedback to SER on issues related to chapter members.

CHAPTER WEBPAGE AND FACEBOOK GROUP

Our chapter webpage (www.ser.org/mwgl/default.asp) is a critical resource for communicating chapter goals and activities. With the help of SER Staff we established a webpage that describes our goals, current activities, and past activities. The image on the vision for the webpage is to develop it so it serves as a resource on regionally specific information on ecological restoration within the Midwestern U.S. During our first two years we used a moderated listserve offered by SER to communicate with our members. The listserve was unexpectedly terminated in 2009. So we established a Facebook group to replace the listserve. We currently have 105 members in our group. We feel our Facebook group has great potential as a medium for promoting ecological restoration because it is accessible to the 500 million users of Facebook. Here is the link if you wish to join the group: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=116944704993694

CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

Restoration News Midwest is the chapter newsletter of the MWGL SER Chapter. The Newsletter Subcommittee has produced eight newsletters in the past three years. The newsletter is distributed via email as a pdf file and posted on our chapter website (www.ser.org/mwgl-newsletters.asp). The newsletter provides a fantastic way to communicate information about MWGL activities and goals to a wide range of other individuals and groups within the region that are involved with restoration.

CONCLUSIONS

Our experiences gained from a wide variety of MWGL SER Chapter activities suggest that others interested in promoting ecological restoration should:
- Develop and hold events where people can meet face-to-face and interact with each other
- Use both interactive (Facebook, email) and passive (webpages) methods of electronic communication
- Solicit feedback from individuals and organizations who you know are supportive and those that you think might be interested as part of your outreach efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the other past and current members of the MWGL SER Chapter Board of Directors for their contributions. Bret Bacon assisted with printing the poster. We are grateful for the support from Alan Unwin, Stu Allison, and Karen Rodriguez. Levi Wickwire, Carolyn Bronaugh, Amanda Jorgenson, Cynthia Taylor, Kate Samuelson, and Sasha Alexander, assisted us with a wide range of tasks over the years and we gratefully appreciate their assistance. Additionally, we thank all of the MWGL SER Chapter members because without their participation and support the MWGL SER Chapter would not exist.

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

In the past three years we have also participated in various outreach activities by which we attempt to engage and interact with our members and those who might be interested in joining the MWGL SER Chapter. We had an exhibit in November 2008 the Chicago Wilderness Congress to help with membership recruiting efforts. This event taught us that we needed to be prepared to teach people about the MWGL SER Chapter and SER itself. Also, in 2009 we held an online business meeting to provide individuals with updates on recent activities and future goals. The webinar was a free event presented to participants located throughout the region. In 2009 we developed a poster presentation that was presented at the SER meeting in Perth, Australia. In 2010 we conducted an online survey of our Chapter members. This was a valuable exercise and assisted greatly with identifying workshops for the 2011 Annual Meeting, and for guiding future Chapter activities.

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