

The Role of Service Providers in Enhancing Community Control in Volunteer Monitoring Programs

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Biographical Sketch of Author

Julie Vastine is the Assistant Director of The Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) at Dickinson College. She coordinates ALLARM's involvement in a statewide consortium to provide watershed specific technical assistance, mentoring assistance, and quality control assistance to over 150 volunteer watershed organizations in Pennsylvania. Julie has worked for ALLARM for 4 years and has a B.S. in Environmental Science from Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

Abstract

The Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) is a project of the Environmental Studies Department at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. ALLARM, an active player in the Pennsylvania Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Movement, promotes and establishes collaborative efforts among scientists, managers, policy makers, and the public by engaging watershed communities in citizen science. Playing a "service provider" role, ALLARM provides capacity-building programmatic and scientific assistance to watershed groups. Using the model of Community-Based Participatory Research, I will discuss how ALLARM engages volunteer monitoring community groups in developing and designing monitoring programs, collecting field data, managing data, interpreting data, and conveying results. By providing up-front intensive mentoring assistance for the first 2-3 years, we help watershed groups to develop the tools needed to sustain their organization, to accrue extensive monitoring data, and to address local water quality issues.

ALLARM's approach to working with watershed organizations is one of facilitation and guidance. In the beginning of a partnership with a group ALLARM provides intensive mentoring, training, and technical support. As the partnership evolves the group acquires the skills to continue with less direct assistance. The goal is to build community capacity leading to community ownership and ultimately to sustainability. This model has resulted in a state funded initiative, the Consortium for Scientific Assistance to Watershed, C-SAW of which ALLARM is a part, provides technical assistance under the guiding principle of capacity building as a key component for the long-term sustainability of watershed organizations. Using the Ridge and Valley Streamkeepers as a case study, I will focus on the roles that service providers play in helping to build community sustainability.