Assessing the Impacts of Field Days for Youth

Wayne Seidel, Lake County Extension & SWCD
Barb Liukkonen, MN Sea Grant Program
Nate Meyer, Regional Extension Educator
Today

- Background on Lake County NRFD
- Research Design
- Results
- Conclusions and Implications
Goals of the research

- Identify the impacts of a single-day event
- Assess Lake Co field day for improvement
Natural Resources Field Day
Lake County, MN

- Goal – to educate youth about **cultural** and **natural** resources in Lake County
- All 6th graders, 3 schools
- In May every year since 1987
- Split Rock Lighthouse State Park
Best Practices for Field Days

- Pre-event classroom visits, advance materials
- Introduction – prepares students for the day
  - Outline goals, expectations
  - Manage novelty
  - Pique interest
- Theme integrates across stations
- End-of-day review of learning from the day
- Hands-on, interactive activities
- Class groups of 15-20 students
- 35 minute sessions
- Taught by professionals
- Lighthouse movie & tour
- 4 stations – forestry, recreation, water, wildlife conservation
Conservation station
Forestry station
Recreation station
Lake Superior station
Survey Research

- Silver Bay & Two Harbors High Schools
- Written survey
- Focus groups
  - Students
  - Teachers
  - Presenters
Written Survey
- All 7th, 9th, 11th graders
- During class period
- 11 questions
- Passive parental consent
- Active student consent
Survey Questions

- Do you remember the field day?
- What is one thing you learned?
- Did you do anything differently as a result?
- Do you still do it?
Survey Questions

- Did the day change how you look at natural resources?
- How much did the day increase your interest in going to college?
- Did the day influence your potential career choice?
- How can we improve?
Student Focus Groups

- 7th, 9th, 11th in each school
- Active parental and student consent
- 6 questions
Student Focus Group Questions

- What do you remember about the field day?
- What was the best thing about it?
- Write down 3 ways you were influenced.
- Did it connect with your school work?
- Compare it with other student field trips.
- How could we improve the day?
Teacher Focus Groups

6th grade teachers

Asked about

- value of the day
- preparation & follow up
- did students change?
- how can we improve?
Presenter Focus Group

- Most have presented for many years
- Asked about
  - preparation
  - value for them and youth
  - how could we help them prepare?
Survey Results
both schools, all grades

- **352** surveys; 193 girls, 159 boys
- **64%** remembered the field day
- **22%** said they did something as a result
- **96%** continue to do it
Survey Results
both schools, all grades

- 46% said it changed how they see issues involving natural resources
- 45% said it increased interest in college
- 19% said it affected career choice
Differences by grade & gender

- 74% of all 7th graders remembered
- 84% of Silver Bay remembered (all grades)
- 58% of Two Harbors remembered (all grades)
- 25% of girls changed behavior; 18% of boys
- 12% of TH 7th graders changed behavior; 46% SB 7th
- More 7th & 9th graders said it affected career choice than 11th graders
Results from student focus groups

- Place is important – Split Rock
- Interactive learning is key
- Being out of the classroom
- Reinforced the written survey
- Unclear connection with school work
Teacher focus groups results

- Look forward to the field day
- Believe it has educational value
- Find it complements classroom curriculum
- Could integrate it more fully
- Wish students could go to all sessions
- Believe cultural AND natural resources are important
Presenter focus group results

- Helps them accomplish departmental goals
- Enjoy and anticipate the event
- See educational value for students
- Don’t perceive they do much prep
- See value in long-term involvement
- Roles as professionals – not as teachers
Conclusions & Implications

- Students remembered details and concepts
- All participants valued event
- Clear evidence of learning & behavior change
- Opportunity & willingness to more fully integrate event with classroom work
- Regular evaluation will help improve the program
Implications

- Following Best Practices can help improve learning and stewardship
- Single-day field day events can have both short- and long-term impacts
- Regular evaluation will help improve the program
Changes made in 2007

- Extended day
- Advance material
- Volunteer letter
Unexpected outcomes

Effects of Thank You letters
Students were eloquent and thoughtful about event, could make connections
Older students remembered in great detail
The day could be improved with simple changes

- Differences between TH & SB
Thank You

- Lake County Forestry Department
- Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Lake Superior School District Faculty & Students
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Minnesota Sea Grant Program
- Split Rock Lighthouse Historic Site
- Split Rock Lighthouse State Park
- University of Minnesota Extension
Comments?
Questions?