

## **Sea Grant Files**

### **Season 8, Episode 11**

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**Title:** Environmental Literacy: Teach Your Children Well

**JESSE:** Hi. I'm Jesse Schomberg and you're listening to the Sea Grant Files.

Today's subject is environmental literacy. I've invited two of my colleagues – Cindy Hagley and Marte Kitson – here to share some insights and experiences about what it means to be environmentally literate and why it is important.

Cindy and Marte lead most of the youth- and educator-focused opportunities supported by Minnesota Sea Grant. Their work includes building relationships between teachers and scientists, offering educator workshops, engaging with the community and schools, and managing UMD's Partners in Education, a program allowing university students to earn volunteer hours while sharing lessons about the Great Lakes with area elementary school kids.

I'll start with a question for Cindy Hagley. Cindy – what exactly is environmental literacy?

**Cindy:** We think of an environmentally literate person as someone who understands how the natural world functions; can communicate accurately about how the environment supports us; and is able to make informed, responsible, and sustainable decisions that support a healthy environment. Sea Grant's work is the kinds of things that Marte and I are leading to help build environmentally literate workforce and public that understands and uses accurate science to make informed decisions about how they live and work in our area.

**Jesse:** Now Marte – why is it important for people to be environmentally literate?

**Marte:** Environmental literacy helps develop and expand children's (and adults) critical thinking skills, prepares them for citizenship, nurtures their appreciation of the natural world, and enhances their physical well-being.

**Jesse:** You've both spent a number of years working with students and teachers, in particular, on programs designed to increase their environmental literacy, especially on Great Lakes issues. Have you had any big or pivotal moments in your years conducting these Great Lakes literacy programs?

**Cindy:** A pivotal moment for me was when I first observed the teachers we were training stop a scientist mid-lecture and challenge him to explain complex science in a way that teachers could translate for students in their classrooms. The scientists, educators, their students, and ultimately our environment benefit from partnerships like this. How about you, Marte?

**Marte:** I think my biggest, most pivotal moments come when I share teaching and engagement opportunities with college students who are fulfilling an internship with Sea Grant. I enjoy watching them teach school-age kids and I think that in this way, we build Great Lakes Literacy in two groups at once - the undergraduate college intern and the younger kids. That, to me, is really fun and impactful.

**Jesse:** So, in May, Minnesota Sea Grant staff are talking about rip currents and aquatic invasive species as part of the St. Louis River Quest field day for 1,450 area 6<sup>th</sup> graders and participating in the Lake Superior Youth Symposium at UMD. What else is on Minnesota Sea Grant's radar with respect to environmental literacy?

**Marte:** I'm hoping the community ... kids, families, extended families ... will join me and Minnesota Sea Grant in the City Nature Challenge.... April 26-29.

**Jesse:** sounds interesting... can you tell me a little more?

**Marte:** The City Nature Challenge for Duluth and the surrounding areas including Superior, Carlton, and Cloquet will be participating for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the City Nature Challenge. This is a worldwide event. It is a friendly competition among cities to make the most observations of wild living things in our area. It helps with understanding our biodiversity looks like here. Over time we can take a look at how biodiversity changes in any given area and also worldwide. We hope that everyone comes out and helps us in this friendly competition.

**Jesse:** How about you, Cindy?

**Cindy:** Marte and I are busily planning shipboard science workshops for educators to take place this summer through Sea Grant's Center for Great Lakes Literacy, which has the goal of developing a community of Great Lakes literate educators, students, scientists, environmental professionals, and citizen volunteers, dedicated to improved Great Lakes stewardship.

**JESSE:** Before we close, I just have to ask ... what can people listening do to improve their environmental literacy today?

**Marte:** Well, World Water Day was last Friday. It's a United Nations observance that highlights the importance of freshwater. Living in Minnesota, a state famous for its lakes including 18% of Lake Superior's volume, I would encourage listeners to ask themselves one challenging question about a nearby water body and dig around for the answer.

**Cindy:** Hmmm, put down your phones and get outside. Unstructured time outside is the best medicine and learning environment for you and your children. Learn about the ways we depend on the environment and how we can be better stewards of it.

**Jesse:** You've been listening to Minnesota Sea Grant's Cindy Hagley and Marte Kitson. They work with educators, school kids, families and college students to improve environmental literacy in Minnesota and beyond. Thanks for joining us today, Cindy and Marte. Keep up the great works!

For more information about how Minnesota Sea Grant is leading efforts to improve environmental literacy, call us at 218-726-8106 or email us at [seagar@d.umn.edu](mailto:seagar@d.umn.edu)

This episode of the Sea Grant Files was produced by Sharon Moen, Chris Harwood, KUMD and, me, Jesse Schomberg. To listen to other episodes of the Sea Grant Files, visit Minnesota Sea Grant at [www.seagrants.umn.edu](http://www.seagrants.umn.edu). Thanks for listening!