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Hello,

I am the current president of the University of Florida (UF) Wetlands Club, a student organization at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. The UF Wetlands Club was started by a group of enthusiastic students in 1995 with a mission to increase awareness of the many values provided by wetland ecosystems. The activities were geared not only towards the campus community but also aimed at engaging the wider community. Since its inception members of the UF Wetlands Club have been actively promoting this mission. Few areas of involvement that highlight our commitment are environmental education and outreach, clean-ups, habitat enhancement activities and organizing field trips to various wetland ecosystems. Our members also partner with local agencies for environmental activities.

Wetland ecosystems perform vital roles in improving the sustainability of local water resources, however public perception and understanding of this value is often limited. The Wetlands Club has been utilizing one on-campus resource for its various environmental education events. It is a wetland located within University of Florida campus and is recognized as the Stormwater Ecological Enhancement Project (SEEP). SEEP was initially constructed as a retention pond, with minimal vegetative diversity and functionality. In 1995, the UF Wetlands Club helped design an improved contoured basin, and today SEEP is both a functional stormwater retention basin and a diverse wetland ecosystem. It also has an interpretive boardwalk that provides an informative and engaging opportunity for all visitors.

On 30th Jan, 2012 our club conducted interactive field-trip for local elementary school students at SEEP. Some 90 students from the Norton Elementary School attended this tour. The students visited six stations throughout the SEEP area, where UF Wetlands Club members led hands-on lectures using SEEP as an example to talk about stormwater runoff, healthy wetlands and watersheds. At the "Soils" station, students felt soils of different textures, tested their permeability, and discussed the role wetland soils play in filtering stormwater pollutants. At the "Vegetation" station, students used sampling quadrats to compare upland and wetland plant species, and learned about the plant adaptations of a wetland environment. At the "Aquatic Life" station, students played macro invertebrate game that helped solidify the concept of species tolerance to environmental stressors. At the "Water Quality" station, students used water sampling equipment to measure water quality parameters, and learned about what human activities can influence water quality. At the "Macro fauna" station, students learned about larger wildlife (birds, beavers etc.) that depend on healthy wetlands for their survival, and finally, students were taken on a "Wetland Walk" where they got an opportunity to appreciate how the SEEP wetland achieves both goals of serving as a stormwater retention basin and a healthy wetland ecosystem.

Later, on 2nd Feb, World Wetlands Day, club organized a meeting to recognize the importance of this special day and dedicated educational event towards wetlands education and protection. Some 35-40 University students, faculty members and researchers attended this meeting.

I wanted to inform Ramsar Secretariat about our club's active role towards spreading the message of wetlands conservation and protection. Attached are few slides from the educational event organized on 30 Jan 2012. More information about our club's activities can be found at our website <http://ufwetlandsclub.blogspot.com/>