

This is Wisconsin Water News, a production of the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Program. I'm your host, Marie Zhuikov. Today's episode is:

### **Thinking through the lens of the Great Lakes**

*Teacher mentor program connects both teachers and students*

Teachers with a passion for the Great Lakes are sharing their expertise across the region with other teachers in a program that benefits the educators and their students. The mentor program, organized by the [Center for Great Lakes Literacy](#) (or CGLL), is funded through the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative](#).

Wisconsin is home to five teacher mentor/mentee pairs. They're organized by Anne Moser, senior special librarian and education coordinator with Wisconsin Sea Grant. She explained this is the first formal year of the program and that it's growing.

*"The teachers we have chosen for mentoring, they just are really dynamic Great Lakes educators. They're so committed to bringing place-based education to their students and then sharing that love with either colleagues in their school or with their community."*

The mentors were chosen from a pool of teachers who had participated in past CGLL programs. Moser explained these teachers are always,

*"thinking through the lens of the Great Lakes. So, whatever they're teaching, they're often drawing on their watershed."*

The program kicked off in June 2021 with a two-day workshop where the mentors and mentees got to know each other better and plan which activities they wanted to work on. A check-in this past fall included a professional learning opportunity, featuring a presentation by [Jackson Parr](#), the J. Philip Keillor Flood Resilience-Wisconsin Sea Grant Fellow who is working with communities on flooding issues. In January of 2022, the teachers were introduced to the Watershed Game, an interactive, educational tool that helps people understand the connection between land use and water quality.

One of the mentors is Kelly Koller, technology integration specialist at Bay View Middle School in Green Bay. She actually has two mentees: Mona Forbes, an eighth-grade science teacher, and Chandra Johnson, a special education teacher.

Koller first became involved in mentoring when she applied to one of the CGLL summer professional learning workshops aboard the Denis Sullivan sailing ship in 2019. That experience showed her the value of such relationships.

For her current mentoring connection, she's working with Forbes and Johnson to provide their students with opportunities like raising brown trout in the school library and growing wild rice plants.

Koller works in the library and thought the fish would be a great addition and would capture students' interest.

*"We didn't have any pieces of student engagement that were living. Everything is books and decorations."*

Koller organized the fish rearing through [Trout in the Classroom](#), a program offered by Trout Unlimited. By raising the fish from egg stage to adult, the students gain knowledge about the fish and the

environment where they live. The goal is to release the trout into a local stream under the guidance of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The wild rice project is being done in conjunction with the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, which provided the seeds and equipment. The goal is to plant the rice in a wetland the university is working to restore.

Koller explained she did the heavy lifting to get the projects started so that the weight of organizing didn't all fall on the mentee teacher's shoulders, since they had enough challenges already teaching during a pandemic. To orient Johnson's students to the fish's environment, she organized a boat trip on Green Bay through [Hands on Deck](#), a local nonprofit.

*"So, even before they started putting together our trout tank and receiving the trout eggs, they were learning about the Great Lakes through being on one of the Great Lakes and the bay of Green Bay. Any time you have a shared outdoor experience it helps build relationships and a positive sense of community."*

After navigating two months of start-up challenges, Koller received the agency permissions needed to house the tank. Johnson's students set up the tank and then Forbes's students took over once the eggs arrived. Koller said three middle-schoolers have shown impressive dedication: Mercades, Sandra and Emily.

*"They do all the water measurements on their own. They take the pH level, the ammonia level, they change out water daily. They have to siphon some water from the bottom of the tank just to keep it clean. They've been just wonderful about the caretaking involved with trout and have seen them grow."*

Despite a rough start one weekend after the automatic feeder malfunctioned and a third of the larval trout died, the students said the experience of caring for the fish has made them more interested in nature. Here's what Mercades had to say.

*"I know I've been having a little bit more fun in science, learning about the fish. I can apply that to my science class."*

Emily said that seeing the tank sparks interest from other students in the library.

*"We've had people come in and ask us questions about the fish, like how big they're going to get or how old they're going to live, and what we do with the tank."*

Emily said that learning about the fish's life cycle has sparked her interest in biology. She has also enjoyed watching the fish grow under their care.

When asked if they are excited to release the fish into the wild, the girls all replied with a resounding,

*"Yes!"*

Mercades added:

*"We hope that they'll be healthy because they grew up healthy with us, and that they'll stay healthy in the water that they live in."*

At the end of the school year, Moser said the mentor/mentees and their students will gather together for a student showcase. This will offer the students an opportunity to present their projects and receive feedback from other students across Wisconsin and Minnesota. In summer, mentor/mentee pairs will be invited to their own summit where they can provide the CGLL network feedback about their experiences.

Moser said the goal of both events is to build a community of educators passionate about Great Lakes literacy and to build a community of youth who will be the future stewards of the Great Lakes watershed.

*"It's been an exciting year, even as we have had to navigate the challenges of a global pandemic. To work with such passionate and resilient educators has been a gift."*

A new mentor/mentee cohort will be formed in the fall of 2022. Please contact [Anne Moser](mailto:akmoser@aqua.wisc.edu) if you are interested in learning more. (She's at [akmoser@aqua.wisc.edu](mailto:akmoser@aqua.wisc.edu))

That's it for this episode of Wisconsin Water News, just one of the ways that Wisconsin Sea Grant, which is 50 years old this year, promotes the sustainable use of Great Lakes resources through research, education and outreach. Listen and subscribe to us through I-Tunes and Google Play or at [seagrant.wisc.edu](http://seagrant.wisc.edu). Thank you to Anne Moser, Kelly Koller, Mercedes, Sandra and Emily, and thank you for listening.