

# LINKING ONSITE AND DISTANCE EDUCATION EFFORTS TO IMPROVE REGIONAL WATERSHED EDUCATION EFFORTS

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**Abstract.** The Southern Regional Water Program's Watershed Education and Restoration Team, which is composed of Extension faculty from Land Grant Universities in the southeast partnered to offer multiple regional workshops focused on practices that improve ecological function in developing watersheds. Partners included USDA NIFA Southern Regional Water Program, University of Georgia, NC State University, Auburn University, University of Kentucky, Texas A&M, Clemson University, and University of Florida. Soil Scientists, engineers, hydrologists, horticulturalists, and landscape architects combined their skills to develop a series of webinars and workshops that were designed to improve water quality and ecological function of streams by advancing education on stormwater management and stream restoration.

One focus of this effort was advancing stormwater management. In 2009, a web-based train-the-trainer effort that featured regional stormwater experts was initiated to introduce innovations in wetland, stormpond, rain garden, and rainwater harvesting techniques. Archives of the training, presentations, activities, relevant publications and evaluation resources were compiled into an online learning center to support county-based training efforts. <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/water/lc/rwh.html>

Over 200 people were trained, survey respondents indicated that rainwater harvesting knowledge increased by 25.2%, rain garden knowledge increased by 32.4%, 94.7% of participants found the learning center useful, and 86.5% of attendees reported that they either already conducted a training, or plan to conduct a training in the future.

A second focus of this regional effort was stream restoration. In 2010, a webinar workshop was broadcast from AL, NC and GA, combined regional expertise in order to train Extension Agents and Watershed Coordinators. Over 150 participants from 17 states were trained on vegetative stream restoration techniques. A web-based learning center was developed to enhance the success of this training effort: <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/water/lc/StreamVeg.html>

This training resulted in a 16.8% increase in knowledge on vegetation for ecosystem restoration, knowledge of soil considerations for restoration increased by 15.2%, and 91.2% of respondents indicated that they plan to use information from either the workshop or learning center in future training events.

Keys to success in this education effort included: cooperative partners, good communication, and dedication to developing practical workshops that are fun for trainers and participants. Webinar training and online Learning centers were developed by the Southern Regional Water Program's Watershed Education and Restoration Team successfully increased knowledge on water resource management and ecosystem restoration.