

Marion High School

2023 Project Report



The Project:

The Marion Green Team set out to create a new Biology unit on environmental justice, centered around the land contamination history of a local wildlife refuge, Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge, which is being monitored and restored by the EPA. Marion wanted to utilize the natural space as a learning lab for understanding ecosystems and human impacts through development of scientific method, scientific reading and research, and GIS analysis.

Project Focus: Environmental Justice

Staff Involved: 4

Location: Marion, IL

Grade Level: 10th Grade



Students' responses about the value of learning EJ at school emphasizes the importance of pushing forward with this topic in the future.



The Process:

The team collected an initial baseline of the students knowledge and relationship to the content and found that 65% of students were not familiar with the concept of environmental justice. Additionally, though the school is located only 15 minutes from the 44,000 acre refuge, they found that 40% of students had never visited.

To address this, 10th grade biology students participated in a project where they learned about redevelopment of contaminated sites, identified a local site, and developed a plan to safely repurpose the land. They were then able to visit the Crab Orchard Wildlife Refuge to hear from a CERCLA project manager and local wildlife biologists about their work restoring the land.



The Outcomes:

The Marion Green Team reports that their post-unit survey indicated a significant increase in understanding of environmental justice and environmental inequity. Due to the positive reception and impact on the students, this new unit has been permanently added to Marion's Biology curriculum and will be included in future years. The green team plans to continue developing this program and plan for even more time spent "in the field" at Crab Orchard Wildlife Refuge.

