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Earth to Sky

Addressing climate change in the Upper Delaware River Watershed

Residents across four counties in New York and Pennsylvania took a course on climate change organized by Earth to Sky.

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By LIAM MAYO

UPPER DELAWARE RIVER VALLEY — Twenty residents of Pike and Wayne counties in Pennsylvania and Delaware and Sullivan counties in New York recently completed a 10-session online course in communicating about climate change, organized by a partnership called Earth to Sky (ETS). The course presented state-of-the-art science on climate change combined with practical information and effective strategies for communicating with diverse audiences in the Upper Delaware River Watershed (UDRW) region. The four county teams each developed action plans for addressing the impacts of climate change in their areas.

The course provided a global perspective on climate change with presentations by climate scientists including Dr. Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies; Dr. Eric Brown de Colstoun, research physical scientist in the biospheric sciences laboratory, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center; and Dr. Peter Griffith, founding director of NASA's Carbon Cycle & Ecosystems Office. Other distinguished presenters included Abigail Weinberg from the Open Space Institute, Dr. Stefanie Kroll from the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University and Josh Parrish from The Nature Conservancy, who provided regional perspectives on the vital role of our local forests and aquatic habitats. Additional sessions focused on impacts of climate change on local agriculture, public health and climate justice issues.

The online course was organized by a Regional Leadership Team of five area residents who were trained in professional development techniques at the first Earth to Sky Academy, a weeklong course at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD. A partnership between NASA, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies and organizations, Earth to Sky promotes effective, science-based communication about climate change. Participants in Earth to Sky courses develop and implement plans for using NASA's climate science, Earth-observing satellite data and other outreach resources in place-based education that encourages open-minded investigation.

“Communicating about climate change doesn’t mean lecturing your neighbors, it means having a meaningful conversation,” says Dr. Geneviève de Messières, lead of the Earth to Sky partnership. “The participants in this UDRW course embrace that opportunity. They learned from their regional leaders about research on local opinions on climate change and talked with experienced communicators about how to lead conversations in productive, hopeful directions. Each county team is coming out of the course with plans that are focused on issues that their neighbors care about, along with achievable solutions.”

Don Hamilton, natural resources chief for the National Park Service on the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River and part of the UDRW ETS Regional Leadership Team, added: “Through Earth to Sky, we are creating a regional community of practice with a dynamic group of highly-motivated individuals. With ongoing support from NASA and Earth to Sky, we will continue to share knowledge, resources, and effective strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change in the Upper Delaware River Watershed. We have extraordinary natural resources that, if cared for, hold promise for greater resilience for our region in the face of climate change.”

For more information about Earth to Sky, visit www.earthtosky.org.