

Community Mapping: Changing Perspectives and Shifting Norms



Given the plethora of competing social and economic issues, what is the best way to engage communities on the topic of local biodiversity?

This poster highlights a series of Garden-convened and Garden-facilitated teacher summits and workshops conducted in 2014, held in collaboration with more than 20 community partner organizations, that challenged educators to visualize their local landscapes as outdoor learning labs and stewardship sites.

As part of their experience, teachers used Google Earth and other accessible technologies to map their schoolyard campus in the context of their immediate community/ neighborhood. Participants were prompted with questions and concepts about:

- local flora and fauna
- ecological functions of landscapes
- current realities and challenges
- their own capacity to act

The mapping and visioning exercise was designed as replicable and scalable for a variety of audiences, enabling citizens to literally see the bigger picture and how they fit into it.

Program



Objectives

- Convene the local early childhood community around the topic of ensuring positive, frequent experiences with nature during the early learning years
- Facilitate dialogue, encourage new thinking, enable new experiences, foster new collaborations, spark change
- Convene K-12+ educators around the topic of urban biodiversity as a community-wide issue affecting quality of life of the region
- Explore how STEM investigations by local students and teachers can contribute to urban biodiversity in the region
- Facilitate dialogue, encourage new thinking, enable new experiences, foster new collaborations, spark change
- Challenge STEMpact teachers to rethink (and map) the nature in their campus/ community as an outdoor STEM lab

Participants

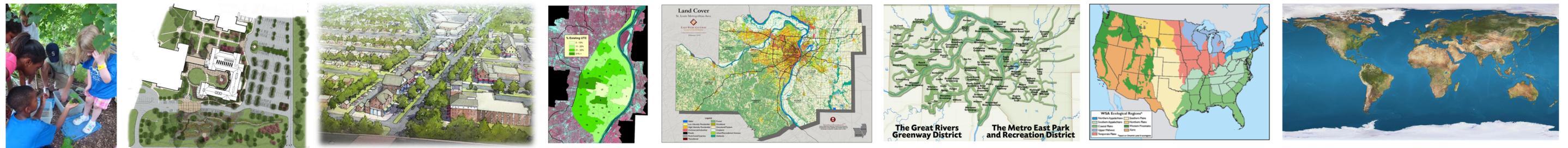
- 81 educators, parents, district-level staff
- Representing 20+ pre-schools, centers, universities, and organizations
- 73 educators, district-level staff, community professionals
- Representing 40+ K-12 schools, universities, and organizations
- 120 K-8 educators
- Representing 12 districts and 40 schools

Feedback/take-aways

- "You need to insist all administrators attend a similar summit. Open their eyes!"*
- "The energy to champion the cause of promoting more outdoor learning is boosted after realizing the joy I found in exploring the outdoors over these three days. The experts made readily accessible these days were an invaluable resource."*
- "This summit has been a huge motivator to make change on campus."*
- "An energizing experience that has motivated me to press the issues discussed with my school's administration."*
- "The apps that were shared are great. I had no idea that some existed."*
- "Thank you for designing this opportunity for educators to come together to plan, learn and discuss the importance and future of environmental/nature exploration education. Connecting to others in the St. Louis region and hearing their successes and struggles makes the process of adopting or further developing nature classrooms seem an organic growing process and a verification that we are headed in the right direction with our efforts. The summit was re-energizing."*



How can different scales prompt different thinking? Different questions? Different actions?



Technologies we played with:

- Free mapping software: ArcGIS, Google Earth, Microsoft Virtual Earth
- Misc. apps : iNaturalist, eBird, YardMap, Journey North
- Paper, pencils, and pens!

Technologies we look forward to playing with:

- EPA's EnviroMapper, EPA's MyWaters mapper
- TileMill (from Mapbox), CartoDB, Nature Passport

Can nature-mapping connect neighborhoods?

In 2015-2020, we intend to keep pursuing this question by...

- Enabling and inviting all citizens to nature-map online
- Following up with the mapping efforts of 2014 teachers and engaging district-level leadership/administration
- Engaging underserved communities/neighborhoods

