

BWSR strives to increase diversity in conservation



Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) staff this summer worked with 16 student fellows pursuing environment and natural resources careers in an effort to increase diversity in the state's workforce and combat challenges faced by women and people of color.

The Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC) program is a strategic partnership among BWSR, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa. The collaboration aims to reduce and eliminate barriers inhibiting under-represented students from completing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) degrees and getting jobs in the field. The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund paid for the project; a total of \$1.28 million was allocated to the DNR to execute three separate cohorts

serving a total of 43 students.

The program is one strategy to tap into a diverse labor market. But IDEC goes beyond simply developing a pipeline of potential employees — it's also about mentoring the next generation of environment and natural resources professionals.

“Research has long shown the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workforce: increased range of ideas, broader spectrum of creativity, a wider talent pool and better understanding and reflection of the entire population that the state of Minnesota serves,” said BWSR Assistant Director Angie Becker Kudelka. “The conservation workforce does not reflect the diversity of the state, and BWSR’s participation in the IDEC program is one way we’re trying to address inequities and increase access to opportunities.”

During the first summer internship in 2020, IDEC fellows spent time with

The first cohort of Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers student fellows gathered with two program staff members for a group photo in fall 2019. BWSR staff worked with these students for eight days in August, giving them a glimpse into the day-to-day work involved with conservation careers.

Photo Credit:
Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa

