

Grant Report for “Addressing Critical Issues in IPM” Projects

A. Grant Data

- **Grant Agreement #:** 07-001492-ORE18
- **Title:** Innovative Outreach for City Parks to Implement IPM Strategies
- **Type:** Addressing Critical Issues in IPM
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- **Team Members:** Tim Stock, IPM Education Specialist, Pesticide Safety, IPM in Schools, Oregon State University Integrated Plant Protection Center
- **States Involved:** Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, California
- **Funding Years:** January 2010-March 2011
- **Funding Amount:** \$19,986

B. Nontechnical Summary

The goal of this project was to develop innovative interactive tools and conduct outreach to increase the implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategies among city park employees across the west. The project will achieve this goal by developing user-generated content and officially launch a professional network website, Sustainable Parks Information Network (SPIN), to support city park managers in learning and implementing IPM techniques.

C. Introduction

The wider adoption of IPM in urban settings is critical because research shows that pesticides used in yards and public spaces often end up in rivers and threaten water quality. Fortunately, many city park employees have been leaders in adopting IPM techniques, and as a result, the number of city parks managed without pesticides across the Northwest is growing. NCAP has already documented more than 19 cities throughout the region that have adopted strategies to reduce pesticide use in city parks.

While this trend is growing and more parks are interested in reducing pesticide use, city park managers often lack information and techniques for managing weeds without herbicides. Parks employees looking to use non-herbicidal weed control strategies have limited resources available and they often work in isolation, unable to share techniques and ask questions of other city parks managers. Many successful IPM strategies used to maintain parks, while available, are not currently readily accessible or well known.

Previous to this project, NCAP and Oregon State University Extension (OSU) developed strong partnerships with city park managers to initially promote proven solutions through a series of written reports. The reports were extremely well received and valuable to parks employees who were able to read about techniques they were unfamiliar with. However, they did not provide an opportunity to see the

techniques directly or interact with other parks employees to ask questions. As a result of this initial development and the request for additional resources, parks employees requested that the project be expanded. The next logical next step was to provide the opportunity and platform for sharing IPM information, resources and techniques in a new and innovative way.

This project focuses on building an institutional infrastructure that enables managers of city parks to better access and implement these successful IPM strategies. Along with OSU Extension, NCAP gathered city park employees from across the region and the OSU State Coordinator of the Master Gardener Program to identify and outline strategies for effectively sharing successful IPM techniques their peers.

The group determined that in order to have a successful peer-sharing network, we would need web-based tools such as factsheets, blogs, and videos. The group then developed a detailed plan for implementing a web-based IPM sharing network. The group named the network “Sustainable Parks Information Network” (SPIN), to highlight that this network will focus on providing city parks with information on how to implement IPM techniques and strategies that effectively promote sustainable city parks. This project is the implementation phase of this six-month planning process.

D. Objectives

Objective 1: By June 2010, officially launch an online professional network site for the parks network (SPIN) that hosts a blog, discussion forums, resource list and other social networking features, where city park managers will share information and resources on proven, successful IPM strategies used in managing parks.

NCAP built the professional networking site on NING and launched the site in May 2010, which currently boasts 92 members. The site was launched with a blog (and several published posts), interactive member map, resource section that included NCAP’s previously published reports on non-herbicidal weed control strategies, photos, and general guidelines on how to use the site. Since its launch, the site has added several new features including archived power point presentations and ten short videos highlighting IPM practices and discussions with IPM professionals. Members also have the ability to contact each other directly or to start public discussion threads.

Objective 2: By July 2010, NCAP and OSU Extension will interview at least five city park managers to create at least 12 blog posts on proven, successful IPM strategies to publish on the parks network (SPIN) website. Founding SPIN members have indicated they would provide information on the following techniques: mulching shrub beds, increased density of plantings in shrub beds, timing weed control to most vulnerable life state, using a turf cultural maintenance program to improve turf resilience and thickness, and

community advocacy and work groups to assist with weeding and other maintenance tasks.

Throughout this project, NCAP has published 58 blog posts with 18 posts on proven, successful IPM strategies, including topics on flameweeding, native landscaping, IPM policy language, GPS, creative outreach to the public on IPM issues, maintaining turf and more. To create some of these posts we conducted interviews with 5 city park managers and researched information for the remainder of the blog posts.

Objective 3: By January 2011, NCAP and OSU Extension will create five three-to-five-minute videos on specific IPM practices used in maintaining city parks and post them on the parks network (SPIN) website. Base upon input from a meeting of city park managers in July 2009, the videos will likely focus on the following techniques: maintaining tree wells with mulch and fescue, flaming techniques to control weeds n shrub beds and hardscapes, and techniques for controlling broadleaf weeds in turf.

As of January 2011, NCAP and partners have created and published seven short videos covering: principles of IPM, pesticide-free parks, conditions that lead to dandelion growth, managing for clover, general organic turf care, creating low maintenance landscapes and inspecting for bed bugs. Other SPIN members have contributed videos on flameweeding, landscape design, and athletic turf. In addition, video has been collected and is currently being organized into additional videos on city wide IPM strategies, PHAER zones, volunteer weed pulls, tree wells and compost tea.

E. Approach

This project started with the development of the SPIN professional networking website using a NING site to enable social networking features. The site development included a blog, interactive member map to showcase where site members were located in the region, personal pages for each member of the network to highlight their IPM background and experience, photos depicting IPM techniques used to maintain parks, resource list and a welcome center explaining how the site was started and how to use it. The site was launched in May 2010 with 25 members.

Over the course of the next year, we worked to build SPIN membership through presentations at the Oregon Tilth Organic Landcare Conference as well as various other meetings and trainings on IPM techniques. In addition, SPIN founding members actively recruited peers to join the site through personal contact.

The other focus was to build content for the site and encourage SPIN members to create content. In the process of creating videos for the site, we visited SPIN members and other IPM leaders in Oregon, Idaho, Washington, California and Montana, including them in the production of network content and working with them to encourage their colleagues to join.

Finally, as NING (our hosting platform) changed its features to no longer allow groups to access services free of charge, we began the process of seeking a new platform that would be sustainable.

F. Progress

NCAP launched the SPIN networking site in May 2010 with 25 members. It has grown to 92 members. The site has interactive features encouraging members to participate and network with their peers. Site features include:

- Welcome Center – providing an overview of the site, how it began and how to use the site.
- Blog – posts highlighting SPIN members and the latest in IPM related news.
- Multimedia Section – Includes photos, PowerPoint presentations and videos (produced by NCAP and other SPIN members).
- Members Section – List of current SPIN members and an interactive member map.
- Learn More Section – hosts the topic discussion forums, resources to download and other useful links.
- Events – highlights IPM related events such as conferences and trainings.

Members have participated with the following:

- 58 blog posts
- 10 topic discussion forums highlighting IPM
- 99 photos featuring IPM techniques
- 9 powerpoint presentations about IPM techniques
- 9 videos (6 produced by NCAP) showcasing IPM techniques and information and SPIN members
- 15 events on the event calendar
- Resource and links page – submitted by founding SPIN members
- Hosted 2 webinars for members. One on how to use the site and one on flameweeding.

G. Results

Through this project NCAP provided a means for innovative peer-to-peer outreach and IPM education for park employees throughout the west. After the site was launched in May of 2010, we conducted outreach through periodic emails to members, highlights in the NCAP Action News, direct meetings and video projects with SPIN members in WA, OR, CA and Montana, and 20 presentations to landcare-specific audiences reaching more than 600 potential SPIN members in total. Site membership grew from 25 initial and founding members to 92, increasing roughly threefold.

As a result of the formation of this network, NCAP has increased the implementation of IPM strategies across the western region. 90% of SPIN members surveyed indicated that they had tried new IPM techniques as a result of discussion that occurred through or because of the site. Some of the techniques they listed include:

goat grazing for English ivy, sheet mulching and green mulching, employing fish emulsion as a bird repellent, landscaping with natives, trapping gophers and squirrels, flaming and mechanical weed control, creating tree wells with mulch and fescue grasses, and tarping for weed control.

H. Impacts

1. Innovations

The goal of this project was not to develop new IPM strategies, but rather to connect city park employees with each other through a peer network to share and learn about effective IPM strategies. Of the members who were surveyed, 70% claimed that SPIN had helped them connect with others in their field to learn about IPM. The same group also reported that they had recommended SPIN to their peers. A smaller percentage, around 40% indicated that they had been active in actually producing content for the site in the form of a blog, video or discussion question.

2. Safeguarding human health and the environment

a. Around 50% of survey respondents state specifically that they have reduced their use of pesticide chemicals or have changed their practices to include only least toxic pesticides.

b. 90% indicated that they had tried new IPM techniques as a result of discussion that occurred through or because of the site.

c. Through a local campaign, SPIN members in Ketchum, Idaho worked with the city administration, staff and local landscapers to craft a new countywide IPM policy for parks and public spaces. Their new policy explicitly prioritizes preventative, ecological and non-chemical steps for pest management.

3. Economic benefits

This project did not focus on economics.

4. Implementation of IPM

a. Our project did not have a focus to validate IPM strategies or systems, but rather create a platform for city park managers to share and learn about successful IPM strategies from each other.

b. The site holds educational materials such as 9 power point presentations, webpage with resources and links, 9 videos (6 produced by NCAP), 58 blog posts and 10 topic discussions in the forum.

c. The site was promoted to more than 600 city park employees through 20 presentations and currently has 92 active members.

d. In one year, the SPIN website has had:

- More than 16,696 page views
- 5,194 visits (4,157 unique visitors)
- Average of 14 visits per day

f. The SPIN site has allowed city parks managers to better network with each other and share information on effective IPM practices and techniques. In addition, this project has grown to accommodate the growing interest in applying IPM techniques in schools, low-income housing units and other urban public spaces. Forums specific to these venues are currently under development on the SPIN site and will play an increasing role as NCAP continues the project over the next year.

5. Collaboration

The SPIN network promotes collaboration by successfully fostering communication between its members, and between SPIN members and outside IPM leaders, on the use of effective IPM techniques. The communications tools available through the site's blogs, discussion boards and private messaging functions allow for the easy exchange of information, while the videos actually demonstrate the techniques at hand. From this combination of resources, members are not only well equipped to employ IPM techniques and adjust them to what works best for their situation, they are also equipped to share the results back to the network for the benefit of others. Reaching a point where a larger percentage of members are engaging with the network at such a level will mean the ensured long-term viability of SPIN.