

**EDUCATING NEW LEADERS IN CONSERVATION: THE PROFESSIONAL SCIENCE
MASTERS IN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT AT UNI**

**LAURA L. JACKSON*, DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA,
CEDAR FALLS, IA 50614-0421**

**MARK C. MYERS, DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA,
CEDAR FALLS, IA 50614-0421**

Abstract: Conservation professionals must call on a variety of talents in order to be effective leaders and managers. Strong academic fundamentals and coursework in ecology or natural resources, should be combined with applied courses such as ecological restoration, fire ecology, geographic information systems, and environmental policy. Beyond these attributes, our research suggests that conservation professionals need to be able to work effectively in a team, manage a project from start to finish, and navigate within a complex social environment of stakeholder groups and partners. To this end, the University of Northern Iowa has developed a Professional Science Masters (PSM) program in Ecosystem Management, an intensive one-year, 30 credit program for recent college graduates and early career professionals. PSM degrees combine professional workplace skills (e.g. communication, organizational management) with advanced scientific training. In addition to required coursework, teams of students work closely with faculty, natural resource professionals and community members to carry out a significant project, usually involving multiple stakeholders. Recently, our students have created management plans for two county natural areas; designed and written a grant proposal to fund new stormwater infiltration structures on the UNI campus; designed and overseen the construction of an urban stream restoration, and developed a “Big Pots Facility” to grow specimens of prairie roots for public conservation education purposes. We will describe the opportunities, challenges and lessons learned with this model of graduate conservation education over the first 3 years of its development.