

## UNC Environmental Resource Program recognized for partnerships and community service

By Sara Mishamandani

The NIEHS-funded Environmental Resource Program (ERP) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) was honored for its partnerships with North Carolina organizations and its project to communicate fish consumption advisories to people who may eat fish caught in contaminated waterways. The program was presented with the 2015 UNC Office of the Provost Engaged Scholarship Award for Engaged Partnership on April 7.

The Office of the Provost Engaged Scholarship Award recognizes faculty members and other university groups for exemplary engaged scholarship in service to the state of North Carolina, in engaged teaching, research, and partnership. [ERP Director Kathleen Gray](http://erp.unc.edu/about/staff/kathleen-gray/) (<http://erp.unc.edu/about/staff/kathleen-gray/>) accepted the award on behalf of the program at the UNC Public Service Awards ceremony, which is sponsored by the Carolina Center for Public Service.

With funding from the NIEHS Superfund Research Program (SRP) and Environmental Health Core Centers Program, as well as other governmental agencies and private foundations, the ERP connects UNC environmental work to North Carolina communities, classrooms, and businesses. The award highlighted its partnerships and engagement work with the Upper Neuse RIVERKEEPER Foundation, Lake Crabtree County Park (LCCP), the North Carolina Division of Public Health (DPH), and the NIEHS-funded Center for Human Health and the Environment at North Carolina State University (NCSU).

### Communicating with vulnerable populations

Working with DPH, program staff and graduate students informed anglers around Badin Lake in North Carolina of advisories against consuming fish caught there because of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination from industrial activities. With NCSU researchers Gregory Cope, Ph.D., and Catherine LePrevost, Ph.D., they also helped DPH identify more effective ways to inform anglers of potential risk to vulnerable groups they may share the fish with, such as pregnant women and children.

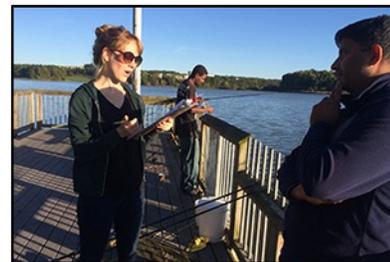
Collaborating with the Neuse RIVERKEEPER Foundation and LCCP, ERP staff and students are also developing low-literacy messages and interventions to help communicate the potential risks of eating PCB-contaminated fish caught in Lake Crabtree, another North Carolina Lake, with a special emphasis on Spanish-speaking populations. SRP Research Translation Core staff are piloting these English and Spanish educational materials at four Lake Crabtree fishing locations. They survey anglers to better understand their perception of PCB risk and receive feedback on the educational materials, including whether the materials affect the angler's intent to reduce consumption of contaminated fish.

"According to the Neuse RIVERKEEPER Foundation and LCCP, the efforts to protect vulnerable populations from consuming contaminated fish had direct and immediate benefits to those who previously had been consuming or sharing such fish," said Gray. "Other outcomes included better understanding of how people access information on fish advisories and how or whether they factor such information into their decision making."

(Sara Mishamandani is a research and communication specialist for MDB Inc., a contractor for the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training.)



Gray, center, accepted the award with UNC Chancellor Carol Folt, Ph.D., left, and UNC Provost James Dean Jr., Ph.D. (Photo courtesy of Kathleen Gray)



"We felt it was crucial to involve the target audience in the process of both developing educational material and generating ideas for future outreach and education projects," explained SRP Research Translation Core community engagement coordinator Kat Bawden, left, shown surveying an angler at Lake Crabtree. "Recreational anglers know fishing and their community's resources better than we do." (Photo courtesy of Sarah Yelton)

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