WATER—Volunteer UI water stewards plan Boise area trainings and an online data map

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IDAH2O—the University of Idaho Extension’s Master Water Steward program—got a boost this year with a new $77,000 EPA Environmental Education grant to support development of an online web mapping service to host water monitoring data now being collected by some 75 trained volunteer water stewards. More volunteers will be certified through trainings this year in Boise and northern Idaho.

“The online map is vital for getting the word out about the data collected and to inform viewers about quality in their local waterbodies,” said Ashley McFarland, Coeur d’Alene, University of Idaho Extension’s water quality educator. The grant also funds a program assistant to help manage data and volunteers and free up time for the coordinator to conduct additional trainings statewide.

Already planned are water steward certification trainings in Boise July 27 and 28 in partnership with Cindy Busche at the Boise WaterShed Environmental Education Center. “We are reaching out to potential volunteers throughout the Boise Valley,” said McFarland. “Our goal is to certify an additional 25 volunteers in southern Idaho this summer.”

Inspired by the university’s popular Master Gardener program, the Idaho Master Water Stewards, now 18-months old, has certified volunteer monitors for more than 40 stream and lake sites in Idaho’s Panhandle. Anyone interested in participating will find workshop information and details on what is involved at the website listed above. In other developments:

Combining volunteers. The Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) runs a Citizen’s Volunteer Monitoring Program. McFarland is working with IDEQ’s Tom Herron, Coeur d’Alene, regional water manager, to integrate the two volunteer monitoring efforts. “It’s a natural fit to bring these two programs together,” said McFarland. IDEQ’s volunteers target lakes, while IDAH2O volunteers target wadable streams. Program integration may happen as soon as this summer.

Credits for K-12 teachers. Because of strong interest among Idaho’s K-12 educators, the UI’s College of Education now offers continuing education credits for teachers who wish to incorporate the program into their classrooms.

Data snapshots. McFarland created a “snapshot” of 15 northern Idaho locations being monitored—analyzing data collected for Nitrate-N, total phosphorus, total coliform bacteria, and E. coli bacteria. A second snapshot is planned in May.

Improving erroneous water mgmt. reports

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University of Idaho Extension’s Kimberly-based water management expert Richard “Rick” Allen joined internationally known water management consultant Harald Frederiksen to warn policy makers that the over-commitment of water in many global river basins may lead to incorrect predictions of water conservation benefits.

These incorrect reports full leaders into thinking that all conservation programs will reduce the over-commitments. Frederiksen and Allen made waves last May with a paper published in Water International Journal. Their paper launched a debate with one of the leading proponents of water conservation strategies such as drip irrigation and low-volume toilets.

“It’s not that all water conservation measures are good or bad,” Allen said. “What it boils down to is where water users are. In the Snake River Plain, for example, if water users flush a lot of water in toilets, the water is treated and a similar amount of water ends up to be used downstream in the ocean. “You have to follow the water,” Allen said, adding that science and hydrologic realities are often kept in the back seat during decision-making, resulting in inefficient investment of public monies and even wrong decisions. “Wrong ways of thinking impact studies by entities ranging from sophisticated non-government organizations in California to governments of the poorest developing countries,” said Allen. Their paper, “A common basis for analysis, evaluation and comparison of offstream water uses,” outlined a simple formula that can show the impact of a water use on the water resource. It accounts for how much diversion water can be reused.

DID YOU KNOW?

86.6 MILLION

Gallons of groundwater pumped by Idaho residents every day for domestic use. Water comes from aquifers statewide.

SOURCE: USGS 2005

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