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FAIRFIELD-SUISUN CITY, CALIFORNIA

Lee Ascencio, Education Program Manager for Solano Resource Conservation District, second from left, shows third graders a salamander during a Watershed Explorers program field trip to Lagoon Valley Park in Vacaville, Monday, Feb. 13, 2023. (Aaron Rosenblatt/Daily Republic)

High schoolers to assess health of local creeks through SRCD program

By Daily Republic Staff

FAIRFIELD — More than 500 students from nine Solano County high schools, starting next week, will be out monitoring the health of local creeks.

The winter storms will make this year's field work much different experiences than during the recent drought years.

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“The value of the field-trip experience in helping students understand the role of creek monitoring cannot be overstated,” said Shea Kinser, education program manager for the Solano Resource Conservation District. “These hands-on experiences collecting data out in the field help illustrate the concepts we teach in the classroom and hopefully instill in students a desire to be stewards of our local waterways.

“Whether it’s putting on a pair of waders and holding a D-net in the creek or collecting a water sample and testing it for phosphates and nitrates, students gain valuable scientific field experience they can put on their resumes,” Kinser added.

This is the 15th year for the Biomonitoring Program, but it is only one of several water-education programs the district offers.

Education director Marianne Butler recently made a presentation to the Solano County Board of Supervisors outlining those programs.

In addition to Biomonitoring, the K-12 programs include the Watershed Explorers, as well as the Suisun Marsh Watershed, School Watershed Education and the Benicia Water Education programs.

More than 1,500 third-graders participate in Watershed Explorers; just as many sixth-graders are part of the Suisun Marsh curriculum; 600 students are in the Benicia program; and 4,000 students countywide are enrolled in the School Watershed program, Butler said.

In all, 8,000 students from 260 classes take part in the 85 field trips.

The Boater Outreach Program, the Solano Water Institute for Teachers and the county cleanup events are targeted toward adult and family education, Butler told the board.

One of the more popular programs is the Solano Water Institute for Teachers, which educates the educators about water issues in the county – including a field trip to Lake Berryessa – with lessons to bring back to their classrooms. It is in August.

In addition to the Biomonitoring field trips – 15 planned for this spring – students participate in two classroom lessons that include hands-on activities to introduce them to the terminology and techniques involved in the assessments they perform. A third classroom lesson, after the field study, teaches students how to analyze the data they’ve collected and engages them in important conversations about how to improve the health of creeks in their area, the conservation district noted in a statement.

Students also learn about related career opportunities.

The Biomonitoring Program is free to participating schools. It is funded through the Solano County Water Agency, county Department of Resource Management, the Vallejo Flood and Wastewater District, the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District; and Benicia.

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Other funding comes from Fairfield, Suisun City, Vallejo, Rio Vista, Vacaville and Dixon; the cities' water departments; Potrero Hills Landfill; the Solano County Orderly Growth Committee; and state grants from CalRecycle's Used Oil and Beverage Container Funds and the Department of Water Resources.

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