DAILY REPUBLIC

Teachers get hands-on training in county's open spaces

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Rush Ranch Open Space hike. (Courtesy photo)

FAIRFIELD — Twenty-nine teachers joined Solano Resource Conservation District and area experts for a three-day professional development training in Solano County's open spaces.

The Solano Water Institute gave teachers a local perspective on water and conservation issues that they can bring back to their classrooms. Teachers also had time to share ideas and enjoy the outdoors before kicking off a new school year.

Each day of the training featured hands-on lessons from Project WET, an award-winning environmental education curriculum created by the Water Education Foundation.

On the first day of the training, teachers learned about the unique ecosystem of the Suisun Marsh during their time at Rush Ranch Open Space outside Suisun City.

Adjoa McDonald, a seventh-grade English teacher at Hogan Middle School in Vallejo and founder of the Vallejo Project, said “I wish every teacher had the experience of coming into nature with the experts and learning how we can apply innovative conservation information across all content areas," said Adjoa McDonald, a seventh-grade English teacher at Hogan Middle School in Vallejo, in a press release.

Teachers were joined by John Takekawa from the Suisun Resource Conservation District and John Durand, Senior Research Scientist at the University of California, Davis, for a hike around the Suisun Marsh, and heard from Nicole Byrd Braddock about Solano Land Trust’s work to preserve land throughout the county.

Solano County’s local water resources were the focus of the second day of the training.

Teachers took a boat tour of Lake Berryessa and learned about Solano County’s drinking water supply from Alex Rabidoux of the Solano County Water Agency. Marc Bautista, from the City of Benicia, provided details about local water management, and Kathy Schulz, Water Education Specialist at the California Department of Water

Resources, added additional perspective on the state's management of our water resources.

Jennifer Onufer, former U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Supervisory Park Ranger, discussed biodiversity at the lake.

On the Solano Institute's third day, teachers immersed themselves in the Project WET curriculum at Dunnell Nature Park & Education Center in Fairfield. Brian Brown, California Project WET Coordinator, led teachers through activities.

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Valerie Miner, a seventh-grade science teacher at David Weir Preparatory Academy in Fairfield, shared that the training "provided an incredible way to implement hands-on activities for students of all ages that promote a deeper understanding of how valuable water is and of the resources we have in our community, and how important it is to collaborate and work together."

Teachers also heard from Jennifer Leonard from the Solano County Office of Education about resources available to them and their students. Chris Drake from Solano County Parks provided teachers with information about other open spaces nearby and updated them on resources available at the parks.

Ramiro Jimenez, from the City of Vacaville, shared details about the city's efforts at managing and conserving water.

Participants earned a $300 stipend upon completion of the program and can claim 21 hours of continuing education credit. Teachers will come back together in October for a workshop day when they will share how they've applied the training's content in their classrooms.

The Solano Water Institute for Teachers is funded by the Solano County Orderly Growth Committee; the California Department of Water Resources; the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District; the Solano County Water Agency; and the School Water Education Program, including the cities of Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun City, Vallejo, Dixon, and Benicia.

For more information, please visit https://www.solanorcd.org/projects-and-programs/education/educatorworkshops.html or email education@solanorcd.org.

Next year's training date is tentatively set for July 31 through Aug. 2, 2024.