Dixon Independent Voice

Teachers Enjoy Outdoor Professional Development at the Annual Solano Water Institute

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A boat makes its way towards Monticello Dam at Lake Berryessa. Photo courtesy of Solano Resource Conservation District

SOLANO COUNTY, CA (MPG) - From a hike around the Suisun Marsh to a boat ride on Lake Berryessa, twenty-seven teachers fit in one more summer adventure before the school year starts as part of the annual Solano Water Institute. Hosted by the Solano Resource Conservation District, the Solano Water Institute is a three-day, field-trip-based professional development training for K-12 teachers that introduces them to many of our county's open spaces and enhances their understanding of our region's water resources.

From July 31 to Aug. 2, teachers heard from local experts and engaged in workshops that built on their knowledge and skills in environmental education. California Project WET (Water Education Today) Coordinator, Brian Brown, facilitated training in activities from the Project WET curriculum, connecting the knowledge teachers gained on the field trips with activities they can bring into their classrooms with their students. Teachers also had the opportunity to network and plan together, sharing ideas for the coming year.

The training kicked off with an exploration of the Suisun Marsh at Rush Ranch Open Space and at Grizzly Ranch. Introductory activities included an exercise from the BEETLES curriculum from UC Berkeley's Lawrence Hall of Science that emphasized mindfulness and observation skills in the outdoors. Angeline Persinger, a teacher at Pennycook Elementary in Vallejo, noted that she was especially "thankful" for that activity, saying that it would be a perfect exercise to do with her students after recess.

Teachers also heard from Steve Chappell and John Takekawa from Suisun Resource Conservation District, who discussed the management of the Suisun Marsh and how climate change will affect the habitats there. After a picnic lunch, teachers boarded a bus to head further into the marsh and heard from Matt Ferner of the National Estuarine Research Reserve about current scientific research at the Suisun Marsh. Once at Grizzly Ranch, teachers' attention turned to their pedagogy, with teachers participating in an activity from the Project WET curriculum and hearing from Jennifer Leonard about the Solano County Office of Education's environmental literacy initiatives.

Teachers interact with the soil at the annual Solano Water Institute. Photo courtesy of Solano Resource Conservation District

The second day of the Solano Institute focused on Solano County's water resources and included a boat tour of Lake Berryessa. Teachers heard from Alex Rabidoux of the Solano County Water Agency, Kathy Schulz and Karen Swan from the California Department of Water Resources, and Jennifer Onufer of the Bureau of Reclamation. Speakers described the particulars of water management in the county and state, as well as the unique ecology of Lake Berryessa. Several teachers also noted during the Q&A session how inspiring it was to hear from the experts working on water conservation issues and learning about who is working to solve these problems.

Teachers enjoyed time thinking about their classroom instruction on the third day of the Solano Institute, held at Dunnell Nature Park & Education Center in Fairfield. The day included Project WET curriculum activities led by Brian Brown and Solano Resource Conservation District staff that were geared towards thinking about water access and

equity. Teachers also heard from Chris Drake from Solano County Parks, who described opportunities for recreation at the county's outdoor spaces. Additionally, Ramiro Jimenez and Kurtis Westbrook, from the City of Vacaville, discussed the city's water sources and conservation efforts.

Participants will receive a $400 stipend upon completion of the program and can claim up to 27 hours of continuing education credit after an October 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, with support from the California Department of Water Resources and the School Water Education Program (Solano County Water Agency; Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District; Cities of Vacaville, Fairfield, Suisun City, Vallejo, Dixon, and Benicia). The workshop is hosted by Solano Resource Conservation District with support from Brian Brown, Project WET Coordinator for California.

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

Next year's training is tentatively set for the end of July 2025. To be added to our waitlist, please email Shea Kinser at shea.kinser@solanorcd.org.