Water ABCs for Solano teachers begins Aug. 3

Annual three-day summer workshop, designed for K-12 educators teaching watershed science and land preservation, highlights local land and water resources

Vallejo Supervisor Monica Brown (seated at far right) joined a group of local educators during the 2021 Solano Water Institute for Teachers, which included a tour of Lake Berryessa. (Contributed photo — Solano Resource Conservation District)

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In the 1956 film “The Rainmaker,” actor Lloyd Bridges, as Noah Curry, tells Burt Lancaster, as con man Bill Starbuck, “We don’t believe in rainmakers,” to which Lancaster replied, “What DO you believe in mistah? Dyin’ cattle?”

It’s no con the western United States is amid a prolonged drought, one which some scientists believe is the most serious in more than 1,000 years.

So how we conserve water and manage it is key to the economic and societal health of California and Solano County and the decisions we make today will affect us all in the years and decades to come.

To that end, the Solano Resource Conservation District will host its Second Annual Water Institute for Teachers from Aug. 3 to 5.

The Institute is an intensive, three-day workshop designed to support K-12 educators in teaching watershed science and land preservation "from a locally relevant perspective," Marianne Butler, the longtime education director for the Dixon-based RCD, said in a press release.

It will feature visits to Solano County parks and open spaces, as well as a boat tour of Lake Berryessa, one of the county's primary sources of drinking and irrigation water, she added in the prepared statement.

The training begins Wednesday at Rush Ranch Open Space near Suisun City and will feature a tour of the Suisun Marsh, part of the San Francisco Bay estuary and what is considered to be the largest brackish water marsh on the West Coast. Other training includes presentations from local education and conservation leaders, and hands-on activities teachers can take back to their classroom.

On Thursday, Day 2, participants will take a boat tour of Lake Berryessa, an excursion that includes commentary and activities featuring a panel of local experts from the Solano County Water Agency, the state Department of Water Resources, the City of Benicia, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Yocha Dehe Wintun tribe and the California Water Education Foundation's Project WET.

On Aug. 5, the final day, enrolled teachers will engage in hands-on training activities from Project WET at Fairfield's Dunnell Nature Park and Education Center. Project WET's curriculum aligns with California's Next Generation Science Standards "and provides excellent tools for both classroom teachers and informal educators," Butler said.

"We're looking forward to another successful program this year," she added. "Our place-based learning experiences help educators teach environmental science by connecting students to the place they live. Making that connection helps students develop a sense of stewardship for local natural resources.

"We've found that using our local parks and open spaces as laboratories make the subject relevant and encourages youth to explore parks and open spaces on their own."

Participants will receive a $250 stipend upon completion of the program and certified teachers can claim 27 hours of continuing education credit. Time is "allotted for teachers to work on integrating what they've learned into their yearly lesson plans," noted Butler.

The Institute comes as a recent major poll shows the ongoing drought to be a top — and growing — worry for residents of our parched state, outpacing wildfires and climate change.

With reservoirs and snowpack shrinking, Californians listed the state's water supply as their number one environmental worry, with 68% of adults saying it's a big problem — up from 63% a year ago, according to the Public Policy Institute of California, which conducted the poll.

The Institute also comes as Gov. Gavin Newsom earlier this year asked, but didn't require, Californians to cut their water usage by 15% compared to 2020. But the results so far have fallen dramatically short. In May, Northern California reduced consumption by 8.5%, while Southern California saw a reduction of just 2.2%, state data indicates.

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

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