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NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Date: July 14, 2014

Photo A: Matt Helmers (with jar) has the teachers add pollutants to the jar of water, which represents a water body. The different pollutants added to one water body creates a memorable visual of the cumulative effect.

Photo B: Attendees play a competitive game of Biodiversity Jenga, which teaches about the ecological food chain and different trophic levels.

Water Rocks! holds first teacher summit

AMES, IA—Water Rocks! hosted its first teacher Summit on June 11–12, with 28 Iowa K-12 teachers and high school students from nine school districts congregating in Ames. The group received information about some of the greatest environmental challenges faced today as well as innovative ways to teach about them.

The Summit included expert presenters on topics including watersheds, water quality, climate change, soil, and biodiversity as they pertain to Iowa. The Water Rocks! team also demonstrated the unique learning modules they have developed for teachers to use in the classroom.

The teachers were diverse in their disciplines and background knowledge. Several schools brought high school students with them so the students could become peer mentors in their district. Katie Stoll, a 4th grade teacher from Sacred Heart Elementary in Monticello, attended the Summit to enhance her school's program. "We already have a unit on water conservation, and when I heard about the Summit, I thought that it could tie into our curriculum," says Stoll. Many of the attendees were science teachers and shared a goal of improving their school's science program by strengthening their own knowledge of water issues.

Other attendees, like Gina Hemmer, a 6th grade reading and language teacher from Cascade, attended the Summit because of her community's interest in water conservation. "Every year we do a walk-a-thon to raise money for third world countries with water shortages," says Hemmer. "We are always talking to our kids about water conservation."

Everyone discovered new ways to teach kids about water issues. The "learning by doing" approach was applied in full-force, as the teachers participated in the same activities that their students will be doing in the classroom—a relay race picking up fake dog poop to prevent it from mixing with rain water, learning new songs and playing Wetland Bingo.

Activities like these are integrated into the learning modules and the teachers agreed that they were the best part of the Summit. Each school received a kit of supplies for several of the modules, which was especially important to Jody Barr, an instructor from Newton elementary school's special education program. "The games are great because they add interactivity," says Barr. "And the modules were complete so they're ready for us to show the kids."

Over both days of the workshop, one message prevailed: educating today's youth about the importance of water will give them the knowledge to influence change when they become adult members of their communities.

Rick Cruse, ISU agronomy professor and Iowa Water Center director, was one of the Summit presenters. "Water Rocks! is great because it communicates the message in a way that kids can understand and want to listen to," commented Cruse. "It's all about planting seeds of information, and if we can get these seeds to grow in children's minds, it will change the future for the better."

Water Rocks! plans to host a Summit each summer, creating a network of educators who are knowledgeable about water issues in Iowa and can teach students in innovative ways.

To support this educational effort, contributions to Water Rocks! are accepted through the ISU Foundation:

<https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1463/give.aspx?sid=1463&gid=1&sitebuilder=1&pgid=467&cid=1428&bledit=1&dids=331&appealcode=20WR130L>

For more information about Water Rocks! and the Summit, go to: www.waterrocks.org. Follow Water Rocks! on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Partners of Water Rocks! are Iowa Department of Natural Resources (USEPA section 319), Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa Water Center and Iowa Learning Farms.