

YOUTH WATER SUMMIT

The first Youth Water Summit for Itasca County 5th grade students was held on May 24, 2012. It started wet and it got wetter with temperatures in the high 50's. Approximately 270 fifth grade students, 39 presenters, 23 volunteers, plus teachers and chaperones took part in the full-day, hands-on water-science activities. Itasca Waters (formerly Itasca Water Legacy Partnership) initiated the Water Summit with help from the partners listed below. Rain did not hinder the first event, and one unique comment from a student on the post-event survey was "They must really feel water is important to do this in the rain!".

The first summit was a success and generated tremendous community support. Subsequent youth water summits were held every year through 2019 until Covid-19 canceled the event in 2020. School Districts involved have been Grand Rapids, Bigfork, Greenway, St. Joe's, and Deer River. By the year 2019, the number of students had increased from 270 to 425 and presenters from 39 to 53 (46 unique session choices in 2019).

Students arrive at 8:45 a.m. and are greeted with a Native American drum and song presentation to set the tone for the day. The Native American understanding of water means "life". Volunteers then escort each group of 12 students to their first presentation. Presenters are local science educators, natural resource agency personnel, and local water-related businesses. In 30-minute intervals, students move by group to the next presenter. Topics taught at the Youth Water Summit include water Olympics, water science instrumentation, pH, groundwater, watersheds, septic systems, surface tension, hydrologic cycles, invasive species, macro and micro aquatic invertebrates, water art, heavy metals, kayaking, observing aquatic plants, rain gardens, and hard vs. soft water to name just a few.



The students are entertained over the lunch break by Justin Liles, WDIO Meteorologist, and the "Uncommon Loons" who present a water-related skit.

Students are provided a vocabulary list of terms prior to the event and go home with new water science information to be shared with their family and friends. Due to the mingling of volunteers, chaperones and students, adults who sometimes take water for

granted, also learn a lot about water quality and the responsibility to conserve the finite resource. Post-event surveys from students, teachers, presenters, and volunteers are taken to guide planning for the next year.

MEASURED PROJECT OUTCOMES:

T-shirts with the “Team Up for Clean Waters” logo are given to all students, presenters and volunteers who participated in the Youth Water Summit. When worn, these T- shirts are a continual reminder to the students, their families, and the community about the importance of keeping our waters clean.



Teacher Post-Event Survey:

Completed surveys indicate that teachers feel the event is worth doing every year with some of the teachers saying they are either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to add the information to their curriculum.

Student Post-Event Survey:

A high percentage of students (79-89%) indicate a positive response. The following are some of the reasons the students give for choosing either a positive or negative response:

- Awesome, Amazing, Cool, Interesting, Loved It, Fun
- Because it taught me things I did not know
- It was fun and I learned a lot
- Because some were fun and some weren't, so I see how you cannot make it so everyone likes the same thing, so I get it, so nice job!
- Because I got to go on the pontoon or paddle the kayak
- Because I got to touch a crayfish/turtle
- Would like more hands-on activities
- It was boring
- It was too hot, too cold, too wet
- I had to walk too far



Partners:

ISD #318 Endowment Fund, Itasca County Environmental Trust Fund, Itasca County Fairgrounds, Let's Go Fishing with Seniors, and ICTV