

More than 200 students and teachers participate in 28th annual River Watch Forum

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Mar. 11—GRAND FORKS — Minto High School took first place in the Judge's Choice category, and Larimore High School won the Red River Joint Water Resources District-Manager's Choice award Wednesday, March 1, during the International Water Institute's 28th annual River Watch Forum at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks.

More than 200 students and teachers from 20 different schools attended this year's forum.

As part of the forum, River Watch teams from schools across the region competed against each other in an assignment to compare water quality data from rivers in their community to sites farther downstream on those same rivers. The students also determined the drainage area for several monitoring sites and their entire watershed and compared their water quality data to state standards. Each school made a poster board and a brochure and presented this information to a live panel of judges at the forum.

Other River Watch awards were as follows:

- Second Place Judge's Choice: Cavalier High School.
- Third Place Judge's Choice: Norman County East High School.
- First Place People's Choice (student voted): Cavalier High School.
- Second Place People's Choice (student voted): Norman County East High School.
- Third Place People's Choice (student voted): Sacred Heart High School.
- Red River Watershed Management Board-Manager's Choice: Campbell-Tintah High School.
- George (Bud) Sinner River Watch Scholarship: Kaylee Kemp, Cavalier High School.
- George (Bud) Sinner River Water and Natural Resources Scholarship: Andrew Myrdal, Valley-Edinburg High School.

The River Watch Forum continues to connect students and teachers to their watershed in many ways. For the past 28 years, the Red River Basin River Watch Program has delivered innovative watershed education programming to schools and communities across the Red River of the North Basin. Education is the most effective tool to change attitudes and behaviors, and River Watch offers a suite of classroom and outdoor activities designed to address water quality improvement initiatives, including:

- * Build capacity of local communities to protect and sustain water resources.
- * Provide education and outreach to inform citizens from North Dakota and Minnesota water choices.
- * Encourage citizen and community engagement on water.

This year's River Watch Forum featured five speakers and an artist who all interact with water and rivers in different ways. Andy Ulven, the keynote speaker, is a familiar face in the Red River Basin to many educators and water professionals. Ulven's story literally started off in the same seat as River Watch students attending the Forum, as he participated in River Watch in Hawley, Minnesota during high school.

After college, Ulven was an intern for the International Water Institute, and a year later, he was a full-time watershed educator and water quality data specialist.

One of Ulven's biggest accomplishments was leading the charge to revitalize River of Dreams, a fourth- or fifth-grade program that shows how local rivers and watersheds connect to the bigger world. The River of Dreams program now reaches over 1,500 students at 44 school districts within the Red River Basin.

Ulven is now the Water Quality Planning Bureau chief for the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. He oversees statewide water quality standards, monitoring programs and leads efforts to reduce nonpoint source pollution.

One of this year's breakout sessions featured hands-on demonstrations in field science. Colten VanZee, a hydrologist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, brought in equipment used to measure flow in tributaries of the Red River. Laura Bell, the Natural Resources Lab coordinator and naturalist at the University of Minnesota-Crookston, showed students all things wildlife biology — from furs and skulls to tracks left by those animals. Greg Vandeberg, a UND geography professor, let students create watersheds in a virtual sand table. Beth Hill, outreach and education manager for the North Dakota Forest Service, brought in forestry equipment and had students age "tree cookies" of different sizes.

Another breakout session featured a collaborative art project, led by local artist Jamie Sebby. Students used pieces of recycled magazines to create a river scene mosaic on eight canvases. At the end of the day, all eight canvases were put together to show a large river scene created by all students together.

More information on River Watch and other International Water Institute programs is available at iwinst.org.