Area High School Students Get Feet Wet Solving Real River Issues

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Godfrey, Ill. – More than 60 environmental science and biology students from two local high schools will work to solve river issues in a professional setting during a Mississippi River Learning Session later this month.

The students, from Southwestern and Alton High schools, will meet at the new, state of the art, sustainable Jerry F. Costello Confluence Field Station from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on March 23 for a facility tour and brainstorming session on topics ranging from hypoxia (Dead Zone) and invasive species to floodplains.

"Skills such as the ability to problem solve, think critically, design solutions and lead a team of peers are all needed to protect and plan for our natural resources," said Christine Favilla, Three Rivers Project Coordinator for the Sierra Club.

Working together, the students must form a consensus, utilizing requested input from expert volunteers from the Illinois Natural History Survey, United States Department of Agriculture and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center in their critical thinking process, and then present their solutions to the group.

"The issue solving session is meant to mimic a real-world civic experience where students from two schools work together to form consensus," said Elaine AbuSharbain, professor of biology at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. "It is rare to be involved in that method of learning at the high school level, so we hope we're filling a void."

This educational program is co-sponsored and conducted by the Upper Mississippi River Education Committee, a group of non-profit organizations and higher education institutions working to introduce river education to high school students. Member organizations include NGRREC, Principia College, the Sierra Club and SIUE.

"Experiences like the UMR Education Learning Session prepare today's youth to ensure our resources are well managed tomorrow," said Rebecca Steiner, environmental educator for NGRREC.