



Water Rocks! Multi-State Youth Education Summit

Winner of a 2016 Iowa Governor's Environmental Excellence Award in Environmental Education



Background

Since 2012 *Water Rocks!*, an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach youth water education program, has been working to raise the environmental literacy of youth before they are in a position to make decisions. Through an integration of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and the arts, *Water Rocks!* challenges and inspires young people to think, learn and create in a world where boundaries are as blurry as the flow of water within a watershed.

Water Rocks! aimed to expand its reach beyond traditional youth classroom educators and the state of Iowa by hosting the *Water Rocks!* Multi-State Youth Education Summit in November 2016. The Summit is a two day, interactive professional development workshop, held in partnership with extension youth educators from the following North Central Region states:

- Missouri
- Nebraska
- South Dakota
- Iowa

Addressing the Challenge

Participants at the November Summit represented a wide range of professions, from county extension, 4-H, state DNR offices, county conservation programs and botanical gardens.

Funding was provided by the North Central Region Water Network, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach/Extension Water Quality Program, Iowa Learning Farms, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (US EPA, Section 319 of the Clean Water Act).

Educators took home \$800 worth of educational materials to use in their youth outreach programs and heard from Iowa State University faculty on the newest research related to:

- Water quality
- Soil health and erosion
- Nutrient transport from agricultural land
- Climate change

Presentations were followed up with interactive demonstrations from the *Water Rocks!* team, allowing Summit participants to channel their inner 5th graders, and engage with the educational presentations as students would. *Water Rocks!* youth educational modules, games, and activities cover a wide range of environmental topics, including biodiversity, watersheds, wetland ecosystems, and soil health. Attendees participated in regional roundtables to share their tools of the trade with the

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larger group, and also discussed the challenges they face in their home states in reaching target audiences.

The Water Rocks! Multi-State Youth Water Education Summit was an overwhelming success. It opened up dialogue among professionals in neighboring Midwestern states who face similar environmental issues and outreach challenges, and who hope to utilize Water Rocks! educational materials and [music videos](#) to address these challenges, and bringing in a fresh, artistic perspective to their existing programming.

Impacts

Expanding the reach of the Water Rocks! program across the North Central Region enhances extension educators' abilities to deliver outdoor- and place-based youth education. It improves extension educator knowledge and access to youth-tested and approved environmental education tools including technology and hands-on activities to engage young people in discussion and activities related to water issues across the North Central Region. Long term, youth will demonstrate a higher level of water literacy and a greater understanding and willingness to make responsible future decisions that protect water and soil resources in the North Central Region and beyond.

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RESOURCES

Website: www.waterrocks.org
Facebook: [@WaterRocksISU](https://www.facebook.com/WaterRocksISU)
Twitter: [@WaterRocksISU](https://twitter.com/WaterRocksISU)
Instagram: [@waterrocksisu](https://www.instagram.com/waterrocksisu)



The North Central Region Water Network comprises 12 Land-grant colleges and universities:

