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Curriculum a boon for Beaver Lake
By ELISE CASTELLI
Union Leader Correspondent

DERRY — Students at Pinkerton Academy could get real-life experience in watershed management as early as this spring, as the school joins the Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership in designing a plan to protect the lake from pollution.

Science teachers and administrators will meet with other members of the watershed partnership next week to begin to develop a curriculum that would allow students in field biology classes and Students for Environmental Action to use the lake and watershed as an outdoor classroom.

"It's not just talking about science, but actually doing science," said Christopher Harper, assistant principal for curriculum. "We do simulations in the classroom, but this is doing it with a real purpose in the community."

The watershed partnership was formed in 2003 after the Beaver Lake Improvement Association detected changes in the lake's water chemistry that were attributed to development in the watershed, said Rob Tompkins, chairman of the improvement association.

Earlier this year the Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership, which also includes Pinkerton Academy, town boards and others, received nearly \$60,000 in federal aid through the state Department of Environmental Services to develop a watershed management plan that would help identify the sources of pollution in the watershed and establish means of resolving those problems.

Students at Pinkerton would help the partnership collect and test samples along the watershed to ensure water quality, Tompkins said.

"It's one of the most exciting parts about the project, having a curriculum that incorporates Beaver Lake into the science department" he said. "They should be using Beaver Lake as a resource."

The watershed partnership will develop a quality assurance protection plan to be approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency that will train and guide students in sample and data collection.

In the past, students in the field biology programs collected random samples from ponds and streams near their homes, using the school's water testing kits to record results that reflected only one point in time, Harper said. Under the partnership curriculum, students, year after year, will be collecting samples using federally approved methods for use by the state, the town and the partnership.

Students will also note changes in plants, animals and other organisms in the watershed to determine the health of the system, he said.

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"It will give them a taste of what a real scientist will do," said Harper. "It's not just a point in time, but it looks at the system in a manner to identify trends."

By having Pinkerton conduct annual studies of the watershed's water quality, there will be trend data that allows the state to see the effectiveness of any management plan developed, said Steve Landry, the Merrimack Watershed supervisor for the state Department of Environmental Services and liaison with the partnership. Right now, the state has only enough resources to test lakes every 10 years.

The current spike in development along the watershed threatens to reverse more than 20 years of work by the Beaver Lake Improvement Association and others to restore the lake's water clarity and decrease levels of pollutants, he said.

"The volunteer lake assessment is starting to show a decrease in the water quality in the tributaries because of development," said Landry. "We need to treat Beaver Lake at the watershed level and guide land use to be sure the watershed is sustained."

The trend data provided by Pinkerton students will help in the tracking and treatment of pollutants entering the lake's watershed. The lake's watershed extends to Chester and Auburn and includes Jenny Dickey Brook, Cat O' Ninetails Brook, and Manter Brook.

A meeting of the partnership's core group was held earlier this month to begin to establish a plan of action to develop the overall management plan, by the December 2007 grant deadline.

The management plan would aid Derry in enforcing existing zoning and planning ordinances designed to protect the lake by providing the town the trend data needed to track pollution, Tompkins said. In addition to the data collected by Pinkerton, the plan would map storm drains and other outflows into the watershed, which could be used by the town to trace and treat sources of pollution.

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