

In celebration of and education about the gift of water

The second Smoky Hill River Water Festival was held last October 5, at the Ruppenthal Middle School in Russell, Kan. The first festival was staged two years ago in Hays. This year, 15 schools and 26 classes from Barton, Ellis, Ellsworth, Rush, Russell and Trego counties were represented.

The Ellsworth-based Smoky Hill Task Force sponsored the festival with a grant from the Kansas Association of Conservation and Environment Education. Judy Duryee, project director for the task force, noted that the goal is to have the state's 105 counties involved in a school or community water festival in the future.

The festival's purpose is to educate students on conservation and nurture an appreciation of natural resources.

Although KRWA cannot underwrite the entirety of such events, the ability to be an event sponsor and enable staff to contribute is a priority for the Association.

Doug Helmke, KRWA Ground Water / Water Rights Specialist, participates in one or two of these festivals a year. His favorite activity to share with fourth-graders is the edible aquifer.

An edible aquifer is a small and simple working model that demonstrates how layers of sand and gravel can store water underground, and how the quality of the water can be impacted by activities that occur on the surface of the land over the aquifers. Kids of all ages love soft gelatin candies (sand and gravel), lemon-lime soda (groundwater), vanilla ice cream



(soil) and snow-cone flavoring (contamination). Even at 8:30 in the morning, children listen intently, watching red-colored snow cone flavoring leach down the sides of their plastic cups, anticipating permission to eat their sundaes.

After asking the students to think of sources of contamination that can degrade

Having received permission to dispose of the "contamination" in their edible aquifers, fourth-graders from Ellsworth Elementary School dig in to their sundaes.

their family's drinking water. I emphasize that they can taste the contamination in their sundaes, but that many times,

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the quality of groundwater, most students eagerly ask for more "contamination" in their edible aquifers.

"I really think that the students who attend the edible aquifer sessions go home with a much better understanding of geology and groundwater," says Helmke. "More importantly, they learn that human activities can have an impact on quality of

contaminants in drinking water can be dangerous and at the same time tasteless. I hope the message in this lesson stays with them into their adult lives."

"I also hope that more water professionals get involved with water festivals. Anyone can get involved and contribute to the broadening of our children's knowledge," Helmke said.