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For Immediate Release

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Benjamin Franklin Middle School Students Participate in Creek Week

ROCKY MOUNT, VA – The Western Virginia Water Authority (Authority), Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA), and Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District are partnering once again with Benjamin Franklin Middle School (BFMS) for their annual Creek Week program. Each spring, all Franklin County sixth grade students use the outdoor classroom built on the school's property to study the water quality of Powder Mill Creek. This year, students will be at the creek on **April 25, April 27, April 28, May 3 and May 4.**

Started in 2013 by the Western Virginia Water Authority to give students the opportunity to learn about watersheds, environmental impacts of pollution and best management practices to improve water quality in their own community, this program features classroom education and hands-on learning along Powder Mill Creek on the campus of BFMS. Prior to going to the creek, educators from the Authority conduct individualized classroom instruction using a model of a watershed to help the students understand watersheds, point and non-point source pollution and best management practices. A simulation activity where students search for and classify benthic macroinvertebrates is also used in the classroom so the students understand how the macroinvertebrates they find in the creek can be used as indicators of water quality. During creek week, the students rotate through different volunteer-run stations at Powder Mill Creek, using chemical tablets and electronic readers to test for temperature, pH and dissolved oxygen. Students also get the opportunity to collect and analyze benthic macroinvertebrates from the creek alongside master naturalists from SMLA to determine the health of the stream. "This is always such a meaningful and memorable experience for the students. The environmental learning outside of the classroom provides a comprehensive approach to environmental literacy and an introduction to education and careers in the environmental field," stated Laura Schirmer, Public Relations Specialist at the Western Virginia Water Authority. "We enjoy working with local organizations that have shared environmental education goals to make this program happen for the school each year."

The SMLA volunteers helping students in the stream are trained and certified stream monitors who conduct semi-annual stream assessments on 17 tributaries to Smith Mountain Lake. Geoff Orth, the Save our Streams Chair for SMLA explained that "water quality of the streams is an early indicator of water quality at the lake." Volunteers from Clean Valley Council and students from Ferrum College are also participating in the program. "We are thrilled to have environmental science students assisting this year," shared Frances Lash, Ferrum College Biology Instructor. "This is a fantastic opportunity for our students to apply their coursework knowledge while also giving back to the local community."

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ABOUT THE WESTERN VIRGINIA WATER AUTHORITY

The Western Virginia Water Authority employs over 300 employees to provide drinking water for the City of Roanoke and the Counties of Roanoke, Franklin and Botetourt and sanitary wastewater service for the greater Roanoke Valley. Free in-class and education outreach programs, tours and field trips are offered to school groups in the Authority's service area. Water science programs are centered around Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) and offer experiential lessons both in the classroom and outdoors. Learn more and sign up for a program by visiting www.westernvawater.org. Please contact Sarah Baumgardner (sarah.baumgardner@westernvawater.org) to coordinate interviews.

ABOUT SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE ASSOCIATION

Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) is a nonprofit, all volunteer organization that is focused on keeping Smith Mountain Lake clean and safe. SMLA coordinates one of the most successful lake water monitoring and management programs in the nation. The Association is administered by the SMLA Board of Directors, with leadership from its Lake Quality and Water Safety Councils. One of their comprehensive programs is Save Our Streams, where their citizen scientists collect and identify insects that live on the bottom of 17 tributaries that flow into SML. Serving as an early-warning system, the count of insects that live in our streams can help us understand water quality impacts. To learn more visit www.SMLAssociation.org or contact John Vidovich, Communications Director for SMLA.

ABOUT BLUE RIDGE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation District promotes conservation of our natural resources in Franklin, Henry, Roanoke Counties and the City of Roanoke including all their incorporated towns through education and cost-share programs. Through education outreach and administration of cost-share grants, producers and homeowners are supported in efforts to protect the soil and water resources in the district's area.