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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 22, 23, 29 and 30.**

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, a simulation activity where students search for and classify benthic macroinvertebrates is 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. "We look forward to leading this learning experience with our partners for Franklin County students every year, stated Lilly Meighan, Communications Specialist at the Western Virginia Water Authority. "It provides students with localized hands-on experiences that show them they can make a positive impact on their water and community."

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.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. "Monitoring stream health is one of the cornerstones in our efforts to monitor water quality and ensure SML is clean and safe," said John Vidovich, president of SMLA.

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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 Lilly Meighan (lillian.meighan@westernvawater.org) to coordinate interviews.

ABOUT SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE ASSOCIATION

The Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) mission is to keep Smith Mountain Lake clean and safe. Established in 1969, SMLA is the longest serving advocate for the SML community. Activities help to retain the pristine beauty of Smith Mountain Lake and the vibrant local economy. SMLA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3), volunteer-led organization that relies on memberships, donations and grants to support programs that protect SML. To learn more visit www.SMLAssociation.org.

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.