The Prairie Waters Education and Research Center at Valley City State University has been awarded a five-year, $732,000 grant by the North Dakota Department of Health. The grant will allow the center to serve as a statewide resource for water education, research and management.

“One of the ways that the educational experience at VCSU is unique is the opportunities for hands-on research and field experiences we offer to our students, and the Prairie Waters Education and Research Center is an outstanding example of this,” said Steve Shirley, president of VCSU. “In addition, the center will serve as a valuable resource for area teachers and several state agencies to improve awareness and understanding of issues related to water resources in North Dakota.”

The center will have four main areas of focus: educational activities for students, teacher workshops, professional workshops and research on aquatic biological resources. It will be housed in the Kathryn School, which is located about 17 miles south of Valley City in the Sheyenne River Valley and within easy access to a variety of aquatic resources including the Sheyenne River, Clausen Springs, Little Yellowstone and several large wetlands.

The center will be headed by Andre DeLorme, who has been on the faculty of VCSU since 1996. In addition to teaching classes in biology and zoology, DeLorme founded the VCSU Macroinvertebrate Lab, which conducts research on aquatic geological resources and water quality in North Dakota and provides research opportunities for VCSU’s undergraduate students. The lab currently serves as the identification resource for the aquatic macroinvertebrate biomonitoring program of the North Dakota Department of Health. During the last 10 years, the lab has generated more than $1 million in grants and contracts to VCSU.

The center was initially approved by the State Board of Higher Education at its September 2009 meeting. Though seed funding was provided by the state of North Dakota and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, the grant from the NDDOH is the first major funding the center has received to allow it to begin operations. The center is expected to begin operations as soon as updates to the Kathryn School are complete.