Open House to show off facility meant for education, research

By Paul Riemerman – Times-Record

The recently established Prairie Waters Education and Research Center in Kathryn is introducing itself to the public with an open house, tour and demonstrations from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m Tuesday.

Andre DeLorme, a biologist and Valley City State University science professor, is the director of the center, which is part of VCSU. The center’s other full-time employees are education specialist Joelle Manlove and lab manager Louis Wieland.

The facility’s goal is to serve as a statewide resource for water education, research and management. It has four main areas of focus: educational activities for students, teacher workshops, professional workshops and research on aquatic biological resources.

“It (the center) was my idea. I’ve been thinking about the idea for several years,” DeLorme said on Friday.

Manlove’s background is as a high school science teacher at Kenmare and Barnes County North Wimbledon/Courtenay.

Wieland “is our lab manager and helps get things ready,” DeLorme said. He also works at DeLorme’s VCSU research lab. “I will be moving my research lab to the center.”

DeLorme said a five-year, $732,000 grant from the North Dakota Department of Health made starting the center possible. “The grant runs for another four years,” DeLorme said.

He said the center is an environmental learning facility with a focus on water. It works with both school and business groups, and focuses its programs on specific topics.

For example, DeLorme said, one school group called “and told Joelle they wanted something on plants. We also did a program for fifth graders on fish, which included going into the Sheyenne River in high rubber boots. We tailor our activities to what people want.”

“We also did a workshop for 20 water resource professionals.”
The center started less than one year ago. “We got grant money last spring or summer, and we’re getting the building up and running. We’ll probably be one-half to three quarters done by the open house.”

Although the facility is not yet completed, DeLorme said, “We began bringing in school groups this fall. There is no cost to school for programs.

“We’re just beginning,” he said, estimating that to date the center has done programs for about 10 school groups and three workshops for adults. “I would estimate we’ve had about 250 students and adults so far,” and the center plans to expand its offerings.

The center is housed in the former Kathryn School building. “We fixed it up and got the building and plumbing up and running. When the Kathryn School became available, we jumped on it,” DeLorme said.

The grant money is administered by the North Dakota Department of Health, and it comes from the federal Environmental Protection Agency “for the prevention of water pollution. It also has a component for education.”

DeLorme said the Barnes County Soil Conservation program also receives grant money from the program, using its funds to help stabilize the banks of the Sheyenne River.

Manlove said Friday, “We’re trying to do a hands-on environmental learning program related to water.”

She said, “If a teacher calls, we create something from there.”

Manlove said Valley City’s entire fourth grade population came out for one program, and first graders from Enderlin came out for a program on the mussels of North Dakota.

We tailor our programs to specific age groups,” and present more technical programs to high school aged youngsters.

At some point, Manlove said, center staff will generate a list of options teachers can choose from.

Said DeLorme, “We have a lot of ideas, but teachers have ideas, too. We want to fit into what they are doing.”

Manlove said she is also looking forward to helping with the North Dakota State Envirothon, an environmental competition for high school students. “It will be nice to be involved in a role other than as teacher and coach. We are also working with Project WET, a large water education program in the state. We have some very exciting things on the horizon.”

Manlove taught high school at Kenmare for eight years, and science at Barnes County North Wimbledon/Courtenay for two years. She has majors in biology and composite science from VCSU.

DeLorme said, “Fall is a great time (for outdoor programs), but we can do winter activities at the center and outside – we’re year-round.”
Devils Lake water makes center adapt
Director says he tries to keep role, political position separate

The Prairie Waters Education and Research Center will rely on the Sheyenne River less than originally planned because of water from Devils Lake.

The center, part of Valley City State University, is in Kathryn and is hosting an open house on Tuesday night.

“When we set-up the center, we planned to take the kids out on the Sheyenne River, but (as a result of Devils Lake water going into the Sheyenne River) the river is always too high. We’ve had to adapt” and spend less time on the river, said the center’s director, Andre DeLorme, on Friday.

The biologist and VCSU science professor said he has personal political positions on the effect of Devils Lake water running into the Sheyenne, but said he tried to keep his roles as center director and as a private citizen with positions on the lake separate.

DeLorme has gone on record saying that increased flows and added sulfates from the existing west end Devils Lake outlet and the possible new east end outlet will change wildlife in the river, including the invertebrates he specializes in studying.

On Friday, DeLorme said the increasingly popular idea of an east end outlet and expansion of the west end outlet on the lake – along with Devils Lake flooding in general – affect he center.

State Engineer Todd Sando of the North Dakota State Water Commission has recommended an east end outlet into the Sheyenne River. He says such an outlet will cost less than it does to operate a west end outlet. Water from the west end must be pumped uphill for more than $1 million each year, while the east end outlet could basically run on gravity.

On the effect Devils Lake water has on the Sheyenne, the center’s education specialist, Joelle Manlove, said Friday, “We are utilizing the river and it will change some of the data for the education programs.”

She said it is true the center is relying less on going to the Sheyenne than was originally planned because of Devils Lake water.

“We also use Clausen Springs, Little Yellowstone and several large wetlands (that may not be affected by Devils Lake water),” she said. “We’ll be able to do programs as long as Kathryn is still here.”