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Upper Iowa River Watershed Karst Inventory Project Underway

A project is underway to survey and inventory the karst features of the Upper Iowa River Watershed (UIRW). The project will attempt to locate and map the locations of all springs, sinkholes, and disappearing stream segments in the watershed. The survey will target eight townships in Winneshiek County (Fremont, Burr Oak, Orleans, Bluffton, Decorah, Glenwood, Springfield, and Frankville) to be inventoried during 2005, with plans to survey the entire watershed over the next three years.

The karst inventory survey is being conducted by the UIRW Project at Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) and is part of a larger geologic study of the UIRW being conducted by the Iowa Geologic Survey Bureau (IGSB). The RC&D recently hired two individuals, Justin Rilling and Nick Steffens, to conduct the karst inventory survey on the initial eight township portion of the UIRW this summer. Justin is a 2003 graduate of Decorah High School and recently completed his sophomore year at Iowa State University where he is majoring in electrical engineering. Nick is a 2002 graduate of North Fayette High School and recently completed his junior year at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas where he is majoring in agricultural business.

The two will complete the ground survey by identifying karst features and obtaining a Global Positioning Systems (GPS) reading of the location of each feature. The locations and feature descriptions will then be downloaded into a database that can be used to create detailed maps depicting the locations of the karst features.

Areas of karst topography have the potential to significantly influence water quality due to the dynamic surface and groundwater interactions caused by their unique geologic features. Extensive knowledge of the locations of karst features will enable area resource professionals to more effectively target watershed and water quality improvement projects. When completed, this project will represent the most detailed karst inventory in the state of Iowa.

For more information please contact Regional Watershed Coordinator Paul Berland at NE IA RC&D at (563) 864-7112 or by e-mail at pberland@northeastiowarcd.org.

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