



# Worldwide Water

Bozeman nonprofit's water education materials will span the globe during upcoming World Water Day celebrations.

BY NICOLE ROSENLEAF RITTER

The Project WET Foundation is going to be in a lot of places at once come March 22—or at least its books, lessons and other water education materials will be. The Bozeman-based water education organization will have a hand in World Water Day festivities in as many as 110 countries this year through its work with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT), World Water Monitoring Day and Nestlé Waters.

World Water Day—founded as an outgrowth of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro—is observed every March 22. This year's main World Water Day event will be held in Cape Town, South Africa. Project WET Senior Vice President John Etgen and Project Manager Julia Nelson will be there delivering a workshop with UN-HABITAT. This year's theme is "Water for cities: responding to the urban water challenge."

Etgen is passionate about the issue of water in urban areas—and how education can change lives for the better.

"Rapid urbanization has put pressure on existing water resources," Etgen explains. "In many countries, poor urban residents have been left with unsanitary and unreliable water sources. Water, sanitation and hygiene education can play a strategic role in promoting positive behavior and attitudinal changes."

Education around water, sanitation and hygiene—often shorthanded as WASH in the international develop-

ment sphere—has become a primary vehicle for Project WET's international expansion in the past several years. In 2007, Project WET partnered with the United States Agency for International Development's Africa Education Program to develop water education materials for teachers and students in cooperation with educators and government officials on the ground in several African countries.

The resulting materials—the Healthy Water, Healthy Habits, Healthy People educators' guide and children's activity booklet, along with additional materials such as durable, water-resistant posters—have now reached more than 23,000 schools, 239,000 teachers and 10,000,000 students in sub-Saharan Africa with hands-on lessons about proper hand washing, disease prevention and water source protection.

"Our methodology relies on investigative, hands-on, easy-to-use activities that teach about water resources and empower change by encouraging participants to take action in communities," Etgen says. "Project WET works because the activities make learning fun."

Follow-up impact assessments bear out that assertion. Hand washing with soap and water—one of the most important disease-fighting actions that can be taken—has improved dramatically in schools using the Project WET WASH materials. School absence and reported illness rates have fallen correspondingly.

The success of the Africa WASH materials has led not only to workshops such as the one Etgen is leading in South Africa for World Water Day but also to opportunities to expand the materials geographically and linguistically. With materials already available in French and Kiswahili in addition to English, work is underway to translate and customize them for use in five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and in India.

## TEACHING TEACHERS ABOUT WATER

Still, WASH education is a relatively recent addition to the Project WET fold. Founded in 1984, Project WET—the "WET" stands for "Water Education for Teachers"—was for many years best known for its Curriculum & Activity Guide and the U.S.-wide network of Project WET organizations that use it to conduct water resources education training for teachers. Hundreds of thousands of teachers have been trained to use Project WET materials with students in classes ranging from science to history, covering topics such as water quality and conservation, water chemistry, water rights and the language of water.

It was that expertise that led to Project WET's partnership

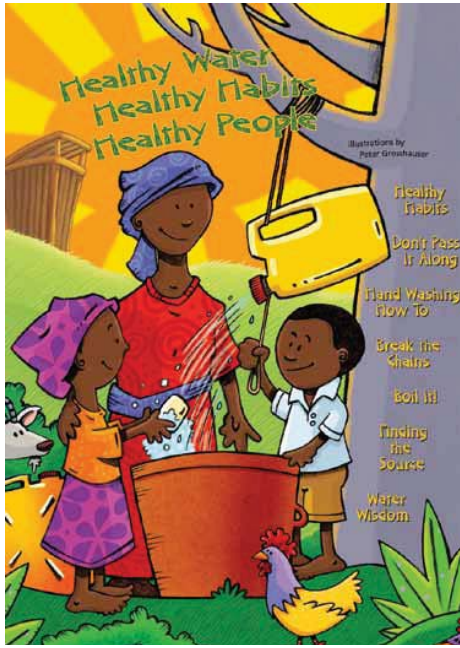
with World Water Monitoring Day (WWMD), an international education and outreach program that builds public awareness and involvement in protecting water resources around the world by engaging citizens to conduct basic monitoring of their local water bodies. WWMD will kick off its annual data collection on World Water Day, offering free, downloadable lesson plans for teachers and other educators developed in partnership with Project WET.

Coordinated by the Water Environment Federation the International Water Association, WWMD last year saw more than 200,000 people in 85 countries taking the time to test the quality of their local waterways. The organizers hope to expand participation to one million people in 100 countries by 2012.

"Local water monitoring of the kind that takes place for World Water

**Project**  
**wet**<sup>TM</sup>  
**Educate. Empower. Act.**

Educate. Empower. Act. The mission of Project WET is to reach children, parents, educators and communities of the world with water education. We invite you to join us in educating children about the most precious resource on the planet — water.



**Healthy Water, Healthy People!**

Celebrate World Water Day in Montana with Run for the Rivers, a fun race in a beautiful place.

Run for the Rivers seeks to increase awareness of local watershed issues, provide opportunity to improve waterways Southwest Montana waterways, and develop a self-sustaining program. Proceeds benefit Bluewater Taskforce, the Greater Gallatin Watershed Council and Montana Watercourse.

Sign up early and receive a free pint glass: 5-7 p.m. on March 21 at Montana Ale Works in Bozeman. [runfortherivers.com](http://runfortherivers.com)

Monitoring Day promotes stewardship of water resources," contends Project WET's founder, Dennis Nelson, who is also the organization's president and CEO. "It is crucial to teach educators and students about the relationship between water quality and human and environmental health."

**SUSTAINING THE BLUE PLANET**

Water quality and its importance for human health is also a theme behind celebrations that Nestlé

Waters is mobilizing with Project WET in World Water Day celebrations in 24 countries. More than 10,000 children in countries where Nestlé Waters has a production site are expected to participate in World Water Day Water Care Festivals.

Children from each local community are invited to a Nestlé Waters factory or a nearby park to engage in Project WET lessons. The activities focus on water in nature, water for healthy hydration and water for hygiene and disease prevention. In addition to organizing the events, Nestlé Waters employees are also engaged in activities with the children, or learn more about water through educational programs on World Water Day.

"The impact of these festivals and the involvement of Nestlé Waters employees in reaching local communities cannot be underestimated," Nelson says. "The engagement of children, plants and communities is central to the creation of meaningful local actions and solutions, especially to honor important international observations such as World Water Day."

In all, Project WET's deep and wide-ranging involvement with World Water Day celebrations demonstrates the reach that a small, Montana-based organization can have in the wider world. And they are hoping to show that scope to locals when they convene the Sustaining the Blue Planet: Global Water Education Conference in Bozeman in September.

"We are expecting 300-500 people to come to Bozeman for the event," Nelson notes. "Water education—whether it happens through celebrations such as those surrounding World Water Day, in conferences like Sustaining the Blue Planet or in individual classrooms with a single teacher—has the potential to lead to sustainable, local solutions for pressing water issues. That is always our goal at Project WET."

**WORLD WATER DAY:**  
[worldwaterday.org](http://worldwaterday.org)

**PROJECT WET FOUNDATION:**  
[projectwet.org](http://projectwet.org)

**WORLD WATER MONITORING DAY:**  
[worldwatermonitoringday.org](http://worldwatermonitoringday.org)