

Media contact: Beth Potier
UNH Media Relations
603-862-1566
beth.potier@unh.edu
Twitter: @unhnews
@unhscience

Reporters and editors: Subhash Minocha, professor of plant biology and genetics and director of Project SMART Summer Institute, is available for comment at subhash.minocha@unh.edu or 603-862-3840.

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UNH Project SMART Receives USDA Grant to Promote Diversity

DURHAM, N.H. –Project SMART Summer Institute, a University of New Hampshire science and technology program for high school students, has received a \$30,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to enhance the diversity of students it reaches. The grant, made through the U.S. Forest Service's "More Kids in the Woods" initiative, will support Project SMART's environmental and forestry education and will help the program reach out to underserved youth from inner-city schools in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York and rural districts in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont and Alaska.

"America's children should have the opportunity to experience our great outdoors and gain first-hand knowledge about our magnificent natural resources, which are important to this country's wealth and health," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack when he announced the grants made to 30 projects total earlier this month. "Now more than any other time in history, our children are losing their connection to nature and our hope is to reverse that trend while instilling a curiosity about nature and a life-long commitment to conservation and stewardship." Vilsack added that the grant recipients support the goals of both President Obama's America's Great Outdoors Initiative and First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! Initiative.

"The value of expanding our programs for children must not be underestimated," said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "Young people are tomorrow's stewards of our public lands, and we have a duty to help them develop a lasting connection and passion for conservation of America's great outdoors."

Project SMART, now in its 21st year, is a four-week summer institute for rising high school juniors and seniors. It offers a combination of lectures, discussions, hands-on experience, field trips and an opportunity to get involved in research with UNH scientists in the areas of biotechnology and nanotechnology, space science, and marine and environmental science, which is the focus of this grant.

"Project SMART offers young scientists the opportunity to learn science and its societal applications and implications in the rural environment of UNH as well as a chance to learn about the geography and cultures represented by their peers," says Subhash Minocha, professor of plant biology and genetics at UNH and director of Project SMART (Science and Mathematics Achievement through Research Training) Summer Institute.

Working with U.S. Forest Service Scientists, the students will explore the White Mountain ecosystems for first-hand observations of the importance of forests and lakes within, conduct small research projects, and learn the use of satellite imagery and do actual sampling for analysis of forest health. All participants will visit the White Mountains to see multiple uses of our forests.

For Forest Service scientists, Project SMART Summer Institute provides an opportunity to reach out to students from diverse backgrounds at the point when students are making serious decisions about higher education and careers. "Before you pursue a career in forest science, you have to be captivated by forests," said Michael Rains, director of the Northern Research Station. "For some participants, Project

SMART Summer Institute is the first opportunity they have to be captivated by nature." The Forest Service participation is headed locally by Rakesh Minocha, senior research scientist at the U.S. Forest Service in Durham.

More than 30 UNH faculty contribute to the Project SMART Summer Institute, which for the first time this year will include students from Turkey, in addition to students from Greece, who have participated in the program for the past two years. In addition to immersing themselves in science, participants in Project SMART stay in UNH dormitories and experience college life first-hand. For more information about the program, which runs July 5 – 29, 2011, go to www.smart.unh.edu. Financial support is available to needy students who qualify for participation. Learn more about a project from the 2010 Project SMART Summer Institute here: http://www.unh.edu/news/cj_nr/2010/aug/ds04smart.cfm.

Financial support for Project SMART is provided by the Dean of the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, the Dean of the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, the N.H. Space Grant Consortium, the NSF-NH EPSCoR Grant, and N.H. Sea Grant program. The USDA (Civil Rights Diversity Special Funds) and the Liberty Mutual Foundation have provided grants for increasing diversity in the program, with particular focus on minorities and under-represented groups. Donations of cash and lab supplies, and discounts on supplies and equipment from several biotechnology companies also provide assistance to the program.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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