

Annual Spring Runoff Conference will bring all interested in water together

MANDY MORGAN on March 13, 2016 at 6:37 pm



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For those interested in all things water, the annual Spring Runoff Conference will be held at Utah State University on April 5 and 6.

Researchers, professors, graduate students, community members and others wanting to learn about water research being done in Utah can register to attend the conference up to a few days before it begins.

“It’s a forum for interdisciplinary sharing and exchanging of water-related issues in Utah, and it brings together water science, field studies, people interested in policy, people interested in engineering, people who are interested in managing some of these issues,” said Jeannine Huenemann, iUTAH Communications Specialist. “It brings together people from the university and outside of it to talk about water-related issues.” Huenemann has worked on communications for the conference this year.

The conference was first held at USU in 2004, and started being annually held in 2006. It is meant to bring people from all over the state studying water in any capacity. However, students in all fields of study are also encouraged to attend to learn more about those things they may interest them, Huenemann said.

The conference came about when the previous university president, President Kermit Hall, put together a Water Task Force to evaluate the strength of water research at USU, said Michelle Baker, a professor in the biology department who is co-running the conference this year.

“He wanted to have a way of knowing about what faculty and students were doing with water research,” Baker said, so the conference was started to share. In regards to the name of the conference, the task force wanted to “have something that reflected water: snow, ice, runoff – and more of our water comes from runoff, and spring is the time it happens, so we decided on that,” Baker said.

Because water is a subject touched on by many different departments and colleges at USU, the work and research done surrounding the issues of water usually demand interdisciplinary work, said professor David Tarboton, the other co-runner of the conference, who works in the college of engineering and the Utah Water Research Laboratory.

“Students who are studying subjects involving water need to develop an interdisciplinary perspective and the conference is an opportunity for learning how other disciplines are involved in addressing water problems,” Tarboton said in an email to the Statesman. “Students who have water projects or research to share can submit and present their work, in a talk or poster, or you can just attend and see what others are doing and enjoy interacting with them,” Tarboton said.

The conference is an opportunity for professional development and networking, where leading thinkers and researchers in the water area are invited to campus for students to interact directly with, getting a chance to ask questions, connect and share thoughts and ideas, Tarboton said.

“What I really think is cool about this is that it is sponsored across so many areas: the College of Engineering, the ecology center, it’s a state-wide initiative that works on projects across the state surrounding water-related issues so that people in Utah may know about the issues they are facing,” Huenemann said.

Besides having speakers and poster sessions for research and work to be shared, there will be a movie shown on the night of April 5 in the Eccles Conference Center called “A River Between Us,” about the Klamath River in Oregon and the restoration project surrounding it. The filmmaker, Jason Atkinson, will also be present to discuss the film and water issues after the showing, Huenemann said.

Doug Jackson-Smith, a professor in the Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Department, wrote a grant to have the filmmaker come, and to have the film shown as part of the conference, Huenemann said.

Tarboton wants people in the community to realize that this is their conference and if anybody has ideas for conferences in coming years to share them, so that each year can be improved, he said.

The conference is casual, and those running it try to keep the costs low so that all students feel they can attend, Tarboton said. For students, the cost is \$25 for both days, or \$15 for one.

All students who wish to attend need to pre-register before the end of March. Those who want to submit an abstract to present research must do so by Wednesday March 16. All information can be found at: water.usu.edu/htm/conference.

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