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The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” Educational Exhibit
Project Profile: “A Fun Approach to Learning”...

The “Fantastic Fun-River Run” is a hands-on, interactive educational exhibit designed to educate students of all ages—as well as adults—by challenging these participants to interact and solve issues pertaining to the ecological balance of maintaining a dynamic river system called “Harmony River”. The name “Harmony” was selected because the challenge of the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” is to keep the entire ecology of the river in harmonious balance. “Harmony River” is a fictitious river that begins as snow pack in the mountains (“Headwater Zone”), winds through an “Interstate Compact Zone”, becoming a regulated river with a reservoir & dam and moves through agricultural & municipal use areas and finally discharges from the basin.

Picture if you will, that the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” educational exhibit is a giant board game. The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” winds across the floor surface for over 34 feet in an “S” curve. The river run is comprised of 16 trapezoidal modules that fit together to form the entire river exhibit. The river run exhibit rises from the surface of the floor to 12 inches high, thereby making the River Run truly 3-dimensional. (see the following pages for color photos of the exhibit). It also features lighted panels and a complete sound system playing nature sounds and running river water sounds.

Participants form two teams (Team #1 and Team #2). At the starting point, each team reads what their mission is: *“Your team is on a special fact-finding mission to assist the **Harmony River Management Board of Directors**. The management board is in need of your help to determine how to keep the Harmony River effectively flowing by balancing factors of agriculture, commerce, wildlife habitat, recreation, and urban, municipal & industrial uses.”*

Each team then works through a series of challenges (multiple choice questions) in each zone and must calculate their answers correctly before moving on to the next zone. The teams enter their answers via a series of buttons labeled A, B, C, and D. A green light will light up if the answer is correct and a red light lights up if the answer is incorrect. A point system is assigned for the total number of correct answers at the end of the game to determine the winning team. The teams must work through all the zones successfully to finish the River Run. In essence, the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” is a gigantic educational board game.

The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” then becomes a resourceful learning tool as the participants engage mentally to master the challenges presented. Participants are visually and mentally stimulated by the exhibit’s size, dimension, layout, and colorful graphics, which also aids in retention of the subject matter when discussed post-completion of the River Run. Several teachers have been tailoring their lesson plans and curriculum for their classrooms based on the information provided through the exhibit.

What is our Objective?: Educational/Information Needs Addressed as the Objective:

The educational information need addressed is to provide the participants with an understanding of the diverse and dynamically interactive workings of a full-scale river system replete with unregulated and regulated river zones. Participants are encouraged to evaluate how a change in one of the zones can positively or negatively affect the outcome of the adjoining zones. This correlates into discussing water policy issues such as drought, shortages, depletion, flow-rates, environmental impact, water rights, usage and economic impact including hydroelectric power. Disseminating information regarding the vital role water plays in economic stability, supply, sustainability, development, and conservation is paramount as a key objective.

How this project is consistent with our Goals:

This project is consistent with the goals of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, whereby the public (youth-students, adult groups, the business community, media, etc.) is informed and educated as to the role of water developments and issues affected by both human interaction with the environment and inter-related natural forces at work. The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” interactive educational exhibit explores these issues in a prolifically fun and dynamic way by engaging participants to become accountable for their decisions as they navigate through the fluvial intricacies of the game. The overall goal, is to inform and educate the public as to the issues involved with water and the relationship it establishes with all living things.

What is our Message?: Specific Message Disseminated: “Cause & Effect Relationship”

The specific message is to educate the participants as to the vital importance of conserving and preserving water as one of the World’s most precious natural resources. The participants work to find solutions to keeping the river system—and those who benefit from it (human, fauna and flora)—in balance. Participants can learn that there is a “Cause and Effect Relationship” that affects every aspect of the river system both up and down stream, and that human and natural forces determine the quantity and quality of water available.

Who is our Audience?: Target Audience

Students and adults of all ages are the target audience. Educating the public about water issues need not be age specific, as everyone must become aware of the value of water as a natural resource. Questions/challenge cards will be tailored to be age sensitive so that all age groups will be capable of playing and enjoying the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” interactive educational exhibit.

How did we Accomplish it? (methods or process, rationale, types of media used): Geographic Scope of the Project & Collaboration with other Agencies/Organizations

The Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District (NRD) encompasses all or parts of nine Nebraska Counties: Adams, Butler, Clay, Fillmore, Hamilton, Polk, Saline, Seward and York Counties. The District territory covers 2,865 square miles. The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” has already been featured at and is available to all school districts, libraries, civic/community centers, public power companies, county fairs, natural resources educational festivals, state fairs and other governmental agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, University of Nebraska Extension Service, etc.) and non-profit organizations (Prairie Plains Resources Institute, Nature Conservancy, and The Nebraska Environmental Trust).

Media such as radio, television news programs and newspapers have been vigorously cultivated to cover the travels and performance of the exhibit (enclosed are copies of press clippings). We do not charge a fee for the exhibit’s appearance. The Upper Big Blue NRD underwrites the cost for its travel, because we do not want money to become an issue as to whether or not a school or organization can afford it. This type of education is free and accessible to the public.

Did you achieve your desired Outcome? (evaluation & documentation): Expected Outcomes & Impact of the Project:

The expected outcomes of the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” is to make an educational impact in the form of curriculum enhancement and supplementing educators with a resourceful teaching tool. The critical impact of the project’s justification will be centered on cognitive retention and value-added learning. The purpose is to educate the public by creating awareness and an understanding of just how valuable water is as a resource and how the power of its properties affect every aspect of life.

We have already realized an immediate impact from this program as “word-of-mouth” spread across Nebraska and neighboring states. Many organizations have requested that the exhibit become an annual fixture at their events including the Children’s Groundwater Festival (Grand Island, NE) and the Nebraska State Fair (Lincoln, NE). Other venues outside the state are currently being scheduled for 2007 and 2008. In particular, school districts are requesting that the exhibit be featured annually, as teachers are building their science and ecology lesson plans around the exhibit.

Other details:

Designed and created by Upper Big Blue NRD staff beginning in January 2005, the exhibit took five months to build. One-half of the funding for the construction came through a grant from “Water For The West” (Coachella, California) and the other half came from the Upper Big Blue NRD as cost-share. The total project cost (including the 7’x14’ enclosed trailer to haul the exhibit) was \$29,000. It consists of over 500 pieces of welded tubular steel and angle iron. It has four 6”x9” speakers, a Sony 5-CD Changer, Sony Tuner-Amplifier, and over two-hundred feet of electrical and speaker wire to power the exhibit. Since June 2005, it has traveled over 8,000 miles throughout Nebraska including a trip to Big Sky, Montana, for a special presentation to a “Water for the West” Board of Directors meeting. (Enclosed are the event schedules for the past two years).



Seventh Grade students at David City Junior High School (David City, NE) enjoy the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” at their School. Their teacher (pictured in background) is now using information from the exhibit in his lesson planning.



Perennial Public Power Company (York, NE) featured the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” educational exhibit during their Customer Appreciation Day in August 2005. Over 140 adults and children interacted with the exhibit.



Above: The “Fantastic Fun—River Run” is being used by Nebraska junior high school students at the Audubon Society’s Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska (June 2005).



To the Right: Fifth Grade students from Western Nebraska work along side of the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” exhibit during the Frontier County Education Day in Curtis, Nebraska (Sept. 2005).



In order to move the exhibit from site to site, we needed an enclosed trailer large enough to accomplish this task. Pictured above is the 7'x14' H&H Trailer that has all the “Fantastic Fun—River Run” graphics on it. The exhibit comes apart in sixteen trapezoidal pieces (much like puzzle pieces) that are stored in carpet-lined crates to protect the paint and photographic images on the surface of the exhibit.



Pictured to the Left: Dan Leininger, Water Conservationist and Scott Snell, Public Relations Specialist of the Upper Big Blue NRD are unloading “trapezoid #2” from a protective crate.

It takes about 2 1/2 hours to set up the entire exhibit. There are sixteen trapezoids that fit together to form the 34-foot long river and over two-hundred feet of electrical and speaker wire must also be run to connect all 16 pieces.

Information & Education: Public Relations



The unveiling of the "Fantastic Fun — River Run" took place on June 21-23, 2005, at the Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon, Nebraska.

Students from Shelby High School utilized the "Fantastic Fun — River Run" as part of their Biology/Ecology educational curriculum. Over 100 students participated with the exhibit on March 28-29, 2006.

To date, the exhibit has traveled nearly 10,000 miles and over 9,000 people have interacted with it at various water festivals, schools, fairs and a special series of stops for the University of Nebraska's School of Natural Resources Big Red Road Show.



The "Fantastic Fun — River Run" educational exhibit received the National Association of Conservation Districts Top Winner Award for "Excellence In Communications."

Scott Snell (left) receives the national award from NACD President Bill Wilson at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel and Convention Center in Los Angeles, California on February 7, 2007.