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## UWSP hosts environmental science education summit

*By Nicole Strittmater  
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STEVENS POINT -- The first Wisconsin Environmental Science Teacher Summit at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point started on a high note Tuesday morning.

A group of about 100 environmental science teachers interrupted state school superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's speech with applause after a surprise announcement.

"(Some) environmental science courses exist because you lobbied for it," she said. "Now, it's time for the state to do more."

Kicking off the event, Burmaster announced she will reinstate funding for a state environmental education consultant in her budget this year, a position eliminated in the 1990s.

Coordinated by the Wisconsin Environmental Science Teacher Network, the day-long summit offered a chance for educators to network and explore new ideas in workshops.

Workshop topics focused on how to develop new environmental science courses and student action projects and how to teach current issues, such as climate change. The event also awarded a professional development experience in South Africa next summer.

"We have been getting a lot of teachers requesting more support for environmental science courses," WESTN coordinator Sunshine Buchholz said. "Oftentimes, environmental science courses don't get as much attention as other courses. We wanted to give them an opportunity ... to realize that they're not isolated and alone in what they're doing."

About one teacher from each school district attended, mainly at the high school level.

Karla Lockman, a new sophomore biology teacher at Stevens Point Area Senior High, said she looked forward to the day's events.

"(Environmental courses) really are kind of on their own," she said. "So what a unique opportunity to bring all these science teachers from all over and really forward the field of environmental science."

Emaan Abdel-Halim from the state's Division of Forestry said the turnout was fantastic.

"These are the folks that are going to mold the (next) generation and take care of our planet," she said.

While facing the planet's many challenges may seem daunting, it is possible through education, said Wisconsin Wildlife Federation executive director George Meyer.

"I truly believe the power of environmental education is that strong," he said.

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