

▲ ARC teachers in the field at Freels Bend



Northern slimy salamanders, ponds covered in lime-green duckweed and squawking great blue herons were all part of a morning hike for four teachers taking part in the two-week 2010

ARC-ORNL Math-Science-Technology Summer Institute. Deborah Lee, Athena Waddell, Sonya Picklesimer and Laurie Hulbert arrived at the Lab on June 12 and quickly launched into field work at natural area 21, called Rainy Knob Bluff, located in the Freels Bend area on the reservation.

"When I originally signed up, I thought we'd be in a lab somewhere," says Laurie Hulbert, a teacher at Windsor High School in Kirkwood, New York. "But this is much better."

ORNL mentors Larry Pounds, Bill Johnston and Neil Giffen of the Environmental Sciences Division have been guiding the teachers through the forest to peer into caves, stare up at cliffs and identify nearly every species that crosses their path. The teachers are helping collect data necessary to characterize the plant communities found in the Rainy Knob natural area. Approximately 50 natural areas are found on the Oak Ridge reservation.

Expanding the available data from Rainy Knob area will help ORNL scientists make decisions about proper land management, such as knowing where to remove exotic pest plants that threaten native plant species. In addition to the morning field trips, the teachers are spending their afternoons processing data, preparing for their summary presentation and listening to speakers talk about environmental research and biodiversity on the reservation.

These four teachers, dubbed "The Dream Team," by their mentors, comprise one group within the 62 participants of the 2010 ARC-ORNL Summer Institute. ORNL is hosting 13 high school teachers and 49 students, who come from 13 states within the Appalachian region. The ARC-ORNL Summer Institute is administered for ARC by ORISE; it has been in operation since 1990. --Morgan McCorkle



Toads turn the Oak Ridge Reservation into a classroom for Athena Waddell, a visiting teacher from South Laurel High School in Kentucky, as mentor Larry Pounds (background) of the Environmental Science Division looks on.