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Participants in the Iowa Teachers Conservation Camp learn how to measure soil temperature, wind speed and relative humidity. Dave McCalley, left, assistant professor of biology at UNI, explains techniques to Rita Schmid and Kurt Gundacker, geography teachers at Harding junior high in Cedar Rapids, and Belle Plaine high school biology teacher Joe Baber. Recording measurements is Julie Bright, biology teacher at North Linn high school.

Nature Gives Teachers Soil Conservation Lesson

By Merlin Pfannkuch

Farmers aren't the only ones yearning for sunshine. Two Cedar Rapids teachers taking summer courses to help them prepare an outdoor education program have been getting some lessons on the subject from Mother Nature herself. Last week 10 inches of snow fell while Rita Schmid and Kurt Gundacker attended a course in the Colorado Rockies. This week, they were drenched twice along with 21 other teachers participating in the three-week Iowa Teachers Conservation Camp.

Local Conservation

The conservation camp emphasizes "practical field experience with conservation problems of the local area," said director Bernard L. Clausen, associate professor of biology at the University of Northern Iowa. Despite drenchings Monday while on a nature trail in Pinicon Ridge park near Central City and again Wednesday while inspecting a forest in the Matsell Bridge natural environment unit, no one has complained, said Clausen. If the rains continue, however, the camping plans of Noel and Sandra Drewry may be altered, acknowledged Noel, vo ag instructor at Wellsburg. Sandra teaches second grade. Participants in the camp develop a practical conservation education program or project based on their own teaching environment. Schmid and Gundacker, for example, will use their gleanings from the course in the preparation of an outdoor education program for seventh graders at Harding.

Specialists Help

About half the time is spent in the field. Lectures and some inside lab work take place on the College Community school campus. Three staff members supply basic instruction augmented by specialists in numerous fields. Others, such as county park personnel and members of regional planning groups, help localize the course. The 23 teachers attending range from

kindergarten to high school instructors. Fees for all of them are at least partially paid by local organizations, such as soil con-

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servation districts, Izaak Walton League chapters and Federated Garden Clubs of Iowa chapters. Julie Bright, who teaches high school biology at North Linn, said she enrolled in the course because "the rural setting of my school is ideal for teaching conservation. I want to be able to utilize the setting to its fullest potential."

She said she hoped to prepare nature trails.

Extended Classroom

Gundacker noted, "We don't want to make the outdoors a classroom, but rather use the outdoors as an extension of the classroom." Clausen said participants are exposed to a variety of teaching techniques in the course, which deals with both agricultural and urban environments. "We feel the best way to learn about conservation is to go out and actually see it," he said. Field trips include Indian Creek nature center for identification of birds, geological and soil sites and mineral industries, farm conservation practices and watersheds, fish and wildlife management and the urban environment. For 23 years the camp was conducted at Springbook state park in west central Iowa, but for the past three years has been held twice each summer at locations throughout the state.

Furnish Tools

"We were finding that teachers needed on-site help in areas where they actually teach," explained Clausen, noting that outdoor laboratories available to teachers range from the school playground and the immediate neighborhood to state and county parks. "We help make vague things specific," he said. "We give teachers tools to do a better job."