

## Gays Mills residents serve as stream monitors on Branch Creek

By Elizabeth Goers

Dave Hackett and Ellen Brooks of Gays Mills have joined hundreds of volunteers who keep track of the health of streams across Wisconsin. They started with Water Action Volunteers, WAV, in 2000 and moved up to become Level 2 stream monitors three years ago.

"I did this not because I wanted to be a scientist but I wanted a reason to go outside and be by the water," said Dave Hackett.

Water Action Volunteers stream monitors use simplified methods to assess stream quality, such as timing an orange as it floats down the river to assess velocity. After learning the basics, volunteers may become Level 2 monitors who use the same equipment as the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) to monitor streams for pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen and water clarity. The data collected by monitoring volunteers is then entered into the WDNR's statewide water resources database.

Hackett and Brooks got into monitoring themselves

by chance.

"Someone else was actually monitoring in our spot and then they quit and we were aware of this program so we took over," Hackett said.

"Rob Horowitz owns the land the creek goes through. He actually asked us because he wanted someone to keep monitoring," said Ellen Brooks.

The WDNR, University of Wisconsin-Extension and River Alliance of Wisconsin sponsor the monitoring program. Dave Hackett and Ellen Brooks monitor Branch Creek in Crawford County.

Monitoring has been a learning experience for Brooks and Hackett.

"Before we started water monitoring, I didn't spend as much time down by the water," said Brooks. "It never occurred to me the number of changes that occur with rocks moving, trees falling down or pushed in the way."

"They also made some improvements to the road further up stream and we could tell when they were working on the road," Brooks said, explaining that the water

got more cloudy during that time. The cloudiness has gone away. Brooks said, "It cut back since they got done with road improvements, and the stream recovered quite rapidly."

Both Brooks and Hackett plan to continue caring for Branch Creek into the future.

"We're 60 and 68 years-old and what I have found with getting older is that we will probably be monitoring this stream for another 10 years," said Hackett. "I've started to find that I value doing something for a long time."

"I just like going out and seeing what the stream looks like," said Brooks. "When you look at one place over time, in an in-depth way without being obsessive about it, it's interesting to see the changes and what stays the same."

*Elizabeth Goers wrote this article for a graduate assistantship at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she is a first year student in Life Science Communications.*