

Greenwood resident invested in water quality

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Georgia Janssen of Greenwood devotes time monitoring local streams through the citizen-based Stream Monitoring Program in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, UW-Extension and the River Alliance of Wisconsin.

Volunteers like Janssen work May through September monitoring water quality to aid in gathering information for the WDNR's database. Volunteers track vital signs of the stream such as water temperature, clarity, dissolved oxygen and pH levels (whether the water is acidic, basic or neutral.) These factors determine what type of fish and insect life can inhabit the water as well as giving an overall picture of stream health and water quality.

Level 2 volunteers must commit one year of service as a Level 1 volunteer in which they learn the basics of stream monitoring before moving to Level 2 monitoring like Janssen. Level 2 monitors use the same equipment as the WDNR to conduct their monitoring. They must calibrate meters for monitoring pH and dissolved oxygen and they use continuous temperature monitoring devices called thermistors.

With about 84,000 miles of streams in Wisconsin, WDNR scientists cannot monitor every waterway on their own, and volunteers are imperative to the WDNR in assuring that a broad range of streams are monitored on a regular basis.

"I have been a Level 2 volunteer for four years," Janssen said. "I have monitored different sites -- started at Rocky Run Creek, Spence Creek, South Eau Claire River, Popple Creek, Wolf Creek and Rock Creek. Our monitoring group, just this year, started sending samples to the State Lab of Hygiene in Madison. I've often fly fished on the Popple for smallmouth bass so that would be my favorite site. I saw a bulletin, somewhere, just a flyer about monitoring out at Beaver Creek so I called and signed up for the orientation and things went on from there. It was six years ago when I started with Level 1.

"We have a good time when we are out there monitoring. I know people who are interested in doing the same thing-- being in the outdoors. Getting interested friends involved is the easiest way to get new volunteers. Our neighbor is a retired accountant, but he loves the outdoors and to hunt, and he wanted a different way to volunteer. We've recruited quite a few monitors actually, probably four more monitors who are now working with the WDNR," Janssen said.

"To get the word out about stream conditions, I meet other anglers out on the lake and streams and I express my concerns. Usually talking one on one is the way to get farmers not to use chemicals.

"We got a lot of people together last night -- maybe 75 -- for a meeting. The WDNR organized the meeting, concerned about Mead Lake and the Watershed area. Property owners, people who

fish, the farmers from the community along with the Amish were all present. After a two-year study on the runoff pollution into Mead Lake, the WDNR presented the data," she said.

"We contacted as many people as we could. A lot of property owners got together with other property owners, articles were published in the newspaper and representatives from the WDNR visited the Amish. We see evidence of concerns about the water quality in Mead Lake. If people can understand the effects on the lake, then people will start to care about the streams in their backyard and water quality in general. After presented with data and evidence, maybe there will be more area residents interested. Part of the WDNR's plan is to use the data from stream monitoring for restoration in the future.

"We are also interested in getting some of the young people involved. A monitoring partner and I would like to approach the elementary school and get them involved. They would probably be interested in the insects and larvae and get excited about that. I think the earlier they get to appreciate the outdoors and environment, the more active they will be," she said.

"I'm contributing to preserve our natural resource. I love to fish and play in the water. I've been in the water since I was a kid. I just love being outdoors, so while I'm in the outdoors I can contribute in some way."

If you are interested in volunteer water monitoring, call Kris Stepenuck at 608-265-3887 or e-mail kris.stepenuck@ces.uwex.edu.

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