

MAKING NEW FRIENDS WHILE BENTHIC MONITORING

JAMIE WELCH

This past spring marked my first season coordinating the water quality monitoring program. To say my first season was a “trial by fire” would be putting it mildly. We had record setting rain, overflowing creeks, and water levels that made it impossible to monitor some of our sites. But every time I think back to last season, I have one memory that sticks with me. I was monitoring with my husband Jeff and FRWC development director Casey Foote. We were about halfway down the stream collecting when Jeff announced that this was the best job on the planet. Not only were we doing something tangible to protect our local waters, but we got to play in the water and collect cool critters while doing so. Standing in the middle of the stream on a beautiful spring morning, I had to agree.

One of the biggest misconceptions we hear about the Flint River is that it is dirty, polluted, or in worse condition than it really is. We have spots in the watershed that need improvement, but there are many more areas that are not only beautiful, but are perfect for fishing, kayaking, canoeing, wading, and swimming. Our water monitoring program helps us track the health of the entire watershed and report back to you on the overall health of our river.

We monitor twice a year—every spring and fall—and track each stream’s score from season to season. At the end of each season

our monitoring committee meets to review the data collected and assess each site, including comparing the scores from the previous seasons. If we find a site is declining, we investigate to find out why and what can be done to help that site improve.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our volunteer monitors. Monitoring is a fun process, and easy to learn. Trainings are held each season for new monitors as well as a refresher course for our more experienced volunteers. If you are interested in learning more about monitoring, this is a perfect opportunity.

Monitoring labs this season are Thursday, September 29th and Saturday, October 1st, from 12-5 in Lapeer and in Flint. These labs are where our monitors bring the critters they collected at the stream for identification. Each lab has an expert or two on hand to help with identification and verify your samples. We also have our “Master Identifiers” again this season who will conduct more detailed identification which ultimately tells us more about the stream you just sampled. Feel free to stick around and see what they find! This program has something for everyone, from the person who loves getting out into nature to the one who enjoys being in the labs using the microscopes to get up close and personal to their critters.

So what are you waiting for? Contact Jaime Welch at jwelch@flintriver.org or 810-767-7140 to volunteer or to find out more information about this program.



just a couple of critters that monitors made friends with last spring!

