



25 Years Missouri Stream Teams

by Susan J. Higgins

Like many, Pat Haviland takes pride in the work she's done to beautify her backyard. Unlike most of us, however, her backyard is different – a river runs through it.

“The Jacks Fork is my backyard, and I like to keep my backyard clean!” said Haviland, who, with her husband, Ted, has been holding an annual cleanup on the Jacks Fork for 17 years. The first year they removed more than 8 tons of trash.

“It is nothing like the amount we used to collect,” said Ted Haviland. “Overall, folks are keeping the river much cleaner. I like to believe we have the cleanest river in the state.”

The Havilands, who are members of Stream Team 713 – Upper Jacks Fork River Rats, are among the more than 96,000 individuals in more than 4,800 Stream Teams who will be celebrating the Missouri Stream Team Program's 25th anniversary in 2014. Thousands of citizens who volunteer untold hours to help improve and protect the state's rivers and streams make the Missouri Stream Team Program, a partnership between the Missouri departments of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri, one of the oldest and most successful volunteer programs of its kind.

Scott Darrough and two other volunteers with the Ozark Fly Fishers (Stream Team 31) conduct a macroinvertebrate collection training session on the Current River, just outside Montauk State Park. Volunteers collect specimens using a 3-foot by 3-foot kick net.

DNR photo by Scott Myers.



(Top) The Big Piney River Stream Team Watershed Association (Stream Team 4623) cleans up trash on the Big Piney River. This event, on June 23, 2012, was their first event as a Stream Team association. (Above) The Ladue Middle School Stream Team (Stream Team 76) conducts water chemistry monitoring at Deer Creek in St. Louis County.

In 1988, when the first River and Streams Conference was held in Jefferson City, the citizens who attended were asked what they would like to see in a river conservation effort. Their answer was threefold: 1) help us identify where water quality is good and where there may be problems; 2) offer us opportunities for hands-on experience in tackling problems and applying solutions; and 3) help us express our opinions in a

knowledgeable way. This became the foundation for the goals of the Stream Team program – stewardship, education and advocacy.

Stewardship

The Stream Team program was officially launched in February 1989, when Stream Team 1, the Roubidoux Fly Fishers, signed up. At that time, the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Conservation Federation of Missouri were the sponsoring partners. In their first project, the fledgling team removed 28,000 pounds of trash from about 1.5 miles of Roubidoux Creek, in Pularski County, in two colossal cleanups. One of those events was attended by Gov. John Ashcroft, who planted a memorial tree in Waynesville City Park to commemorate the occasion. In his remarks Ashcroft said, “A few of you have started a good thing here. You will know you are successful when tens of thousands follow in your footsteps.”

In the Stream Team program’s inaugural year, 100 teams signed on and began actively holding stream cleanup events in their own watersheds. As word spread, the program grew, and by the end of 1991 there were 273 teams representing more than 7,000 Missouri citizens. Over the years, the program has continued to grow both in



The Bolivar Community Watershed Improvement Group (Stream Team 3151) conducts water chemistry monitoring on Bolivar's Town Branch in Polk County.

DNR file photo.

(Bottom) The Bolivar Community Watershed Improvement Group inspects macroinvertebrates from the kick net as part of the monitoring activities on Town Branch during World Water Monitoring Day in October 2008.

DNR file photo.

numbers of Stream Teams and active volunteers, along with the activities they employ to help protect Missouri's aquatic resources.

Stream Teams are well known for trash cleanups – removing thousands of tons of refuse from our state's waters. But Stream Teams also participate in many other activities: they mark storm drains to raise awareness that they drain to streams; plant trees to stabilize stream banks; remove invasive species; and attend or organize events to educate fellow citizens about the plight of Missouri's abundant stream resources.

Education

In 1993, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources became a partner in the Missouri Stream Team Program and volunteer water quality monitoring was added as a new activity. A series of free workshops DNR created taught participants the fundamentals of water quality monitoring. Funds were allocated by sponsoring agencies to supply equipment for the newly trained volunteers.

Stream Team monitors – now 4,000 strong – provide valuable water quality data to the department. Soon thereafter, a Stream Team Academy was established to further educate volunteers on issues related to rivers and streams.

Stream Teamers can learn about a diverse multitude of related topics: fish, mussel, or crayfish identification; how stream hydrology works; how to advocate for water resources; and even how to build

a plywood canoe, among many other fun and educational subjects.

Billy Backues, a Missouri Master Naturalist from Stream Team 4193-Lake Ozark Area Chapter, was born and raised in the Ozarks. His fondest memories are of family activities in and around the beautiful Ozark streams. Backues was introduced to Stream Team through the Master Naturalist Program.

"It immediately appealed to me to be able to do something useful while being in and around the beautiful streams I had always enjoyed," said Backues. "I would be hard pressed to single something out that I





DNR file photos

Volunteers haul trash from the Bourbeuse River as part of Operation Clean Stream in August 2009. (Right) Stream Team volunteer water quality monitoring is part of the curriculum at Ladue Middle School in St. Louis County.

like best about the program, but near the top of the list would be the people I have worked with, from staff to other volunteers. They are all top notch. I'm a Stream Teamer for life."

Advocacy

"The Stream Team program is a crucial citizen effort that truly makes a difference in the quality of Missouri's streams," said Holly Neill, executive director of the Missouri Stream Team Watershed Coalition. "We are very lucky to have passionate individuals throughout the state that volunteer their time to protect and improve our valuable water resources. One of the most beneficial accomplishments of the program is the elevated awareness of our water resources and their importance to all Missourians. Because of the Missouri Stream Team Program, thousands are conscious of the significance our rivers and streams provide to our state and are actively taking a role in protecting them."

The Missouri Stream Team Watershed Coalition was formed in 1999 to help fulfill the Stream Team program's goal of advoca-



cy. MSTWC works to assist the program by promoting and supporting watershed-based Stream Team associations and acting as a resource for information and education. The group also facilitates communication among associations and serves as a united voice for healthy watersheds in Missouri. MSTWC published two *State of Missouri's Streams* reports that highlight volunteer water quality data, and work to raise the visibility of the program and Missouri's rivers and streams through advocacy.

Since 2013, thanks to MSTWC, Missouri citizens have had the opportunity to show their commitment to water resources by getting a Missouri Stream Team specialty li-



DNR photo by Scott Myers



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cense plate. More information about the license plate can be obtained by visiting mstwc.org. The Missouri Stream Team Program assists many other organizations, such as the Ozarks Water Watch Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring project in the Upper White River basin in southwest Missouri.

“Stream Teams are wonderful to work with and provide valuable data that we use in our annual *Status of the Watershed* report,” said Ronna Haxby, Project Manager for Ozarks Water Watch. “Teams are really active in the Ozarks and take pride in the beautiful streams and rivers that are such an integral part of this area. Everyone involved

with Stream Team should be proud of the way it has flourished in the last 25 years, and I hope it doesn’t diminish in the next 25.”

Haxby knows Missouri streams and rivers still face challenges, and that organizations like Stream Team keep stream advocacy alive and thriving.

“Their excitement is contagious and their passion is inspiring,” Haxby said.

In 25 years, Gov. Ashcroft’s tree has grown to maturity. In that same time, the Stream Team program has grown to more than 4,800 teams and approximately 96,000 individuals are volunteering on behalf of stream resources. To Pat Haviland, the motivation to continue maintaining her “backyard” lies in the future:

“I have heard people say that the children are our future, but I believe that our rivers and streams are our children’s future.” 

Susan J. Higgins is an environmental specialist in DNR’s Division of Environmental Quality, Water Protection Program. She serves as the volunteer water quality monitoring coordinator and is responsible for the department’s participation in the Missouri Stream Team Program.

Mark Van Patten, Stream Team biologist with the Missouri Department of Conservation, joins three volunteers in collecting macroinvertebrates during the Ozark Fly Fishers’ annual water quality monitoring outing. The event was held on the Current River, just outside of Montauk State Park, southwest of Salem. (Left) After collection, the samples are sorted and counted.