

Department of Ecology Joins Partners in Educational Mission

Eastern Washington experts help students understand complex watershed issues

Introduction

High school students are deciding what they want to be when they grow up, what matters to them, and how they will make a difference in their world. For those of us working to protect our natural resources, we must recognize that the future of our watersheds depends on our youth. What we teach students and the values we instill in them affect the health of our ecosystems and how those systems provide for future generations. This is why a group of natural resource professionals is taking part in the South Stevens Education Project sponsored by Stevens County Conservation District and funded by Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology).



Students of Lakeside High

The project

The South Stevens Education Project has the following goals:

- Increase awareness that each watershed resident has the ability to affect water quantity and quality within the watershed by making them aware of activities that degrade or enhance, maintain, and/or protect water resources.
- Create a sense of natural resource stewardship for all watershed residents.
- Use press releases, workshops, youth events, and displays to present information to schoolchildren as well as adults in the watershed.

Mrs. Teri Sardinia's Investigative Microbiology class at Lakeside High School in Nine Mile Falls, Washington, is part of the South Stevens Education Project. Her students learn about natural resource processes by focusing investigative study on the area around Lake Spokane. The students are divided into three groups, each with a different topic to study so that they can prepare presentations for adults and school students of various ages. One group is looking into managing runoff; one is studying water conservation practices; and the third is doing research on vegetative buffers. To help the students understand the complexity of the environmental issues concerning a lake of this size, the Conservation District brought many presenters to the classroom.



Martyn Quinn talks to students at Lakeside High

Milestones and outcomes

Martyn Quinn, an Ecology TMDL (water cleanup) lead, talked to the students about the concept of a watershed and how agencies and



different levels of government work together to help local residents improve or maintain water quality. Martyn also spent time answering student questions and reviewing student projects. “Martyn’s input in this educational effort has been invaluable,” said Charlie Kessler, Stevens County Conservation District water quality coordinator. “He has a way of explaining things that the students enjoy and can easily understand.”

Other presenters included Tom Wimpy of Inland Water Pest Control and Consulting, and Avista Utilities representatives. Tom spoke of the aquatic weed problem the lake is facing and how different people are tackling the problem. Many lake property owners use bottom barriers to cover the lake bottom like a blanket, compressing aquatic plants and blocking the light needed for them to grow.

Pat Maher and Mac Mikkelsen from Avista Utilities pointed out that Lake Spokane is the reservoir behind Long Lake Dam. This means the lake level may vary during the year as the reservoir is drawn down to prepare for the snowmelt runoff period. In addition, draw down during the winter months helps to kill some of the aquatic weeds as the weather gets colder. They demonstrated a model that showed how electricity is generated by the weight of the water going through the turbines in the dam. Mr. Mikkelsen was a special presenter, as he is a graduate of Lakeside High School and is currently on the Nine Mile School District Board.

Project highlights

“The support our educational efforts have received from these regional experts has been tremendous,” Kessler of the Conservation District stated, “I have also been impressed by the enthusiasm demonstrated by the students so far. Mrs. Sardinia has done a very good job getting the students prepared, and they have made good efforts since the first classroom visit on February 1. One never knows what they will find when they enter the classroom, but this looks like it will be a positive experience for all involved.”



Partners

Ecology staff worked closely with the Stevens County Conservation District, which in turn coordinated input from Inland Water Pest Control and Consulting, Tri-Counties Health Department, and from Avista Utilities representatives.

Funding

The South Stevens Education Project was funded with \$15,000 from a Watershed Planning grant to Stevens County Conservation District.

For more information

To learn more about this project, contact Charlie Kessler of Stevens County Conservation District at 509-685-0937, extension 111.

Acknowledgements

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