

South of Moab Happenings

Local Youth Help Monitor Water Quality



Water is a vital component of the Colorado Plateau. While many plant and animal species have adapted to the desert conditions around Canyon Country, a year with little water can bring other challenges. Compared to previous years, we've received very little water, through snowpack, over the past winter. With minds on current drought conditions, we ask if the water we have remains healthy.

To answer this question, the Canyon Country Discovery Center (CCDC) and the Utah Water Watch (UWW) has teamed up. UWW, a program out of Utah State University, is a water quality education and data collection program that seeks to increase awareness about the importance of water quality. UWW also promotes stewardship of Utah's aquatic resources. Volunteer citizen scientists monitor streams and lakes April through October.

UWW is all about citizen science. Citizen science consists of scientific collection and analysis of data by members of the general public, usually as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists. Citizen science is a big part of the CCDC's mission. We focus on building lifelong connections to the Colorado Plateau through education, adventure, and stewardship. Our education and stewardship divisions have led the charge to help collect data in the region.

Dissolved Oxygen Demo; Education Director, Holly Phillips, demonstrates dissolved oxygen test to Monticello High School students.

The CCDC has three monitoring locations. One location is in the Abajo Mountains at Monticello Lake, and the other two are along the San Juan River at Sand Island and Mexican Hat. We monitor each site once a month and report our results to the UWW online data base. The CCDC has been

involved with this citizen science project for a little over a year now.

During the month of May, 65 students from local high schools, Monticello and Monument Valley, helped to survey these sites. Students worked in teams to conduct chemical testing, as well as search the shore for macroinvertebrates, aquatic invertebrates (animals without backbones) that can be seen without a microscope.

When teaching about water quality, we feel it is important that students understand the broad picture that both chemical and biological testing can reveal. Chemical testing provides numerical results, but collecting macroinvertebrates can be just as important. While some macroinvertebrates tolerate a wide spectrum of water quality, there are others that will only survive under specific conditions. If these "sensitive" species are found, we know that we are looking at a healthy body of water. An example



Macroinvertebrate Collection; Local student collects macroinvertebrates at Monticello Lake.



Stonefly; Please label with (Photo by David Huth)

of a sensitive species to keep an eye out for this summer is the Stonefly Nymph. They are often identified by their two telsons, or tails, that are on the abdomen of the insect.

In addition to the three sites in San Juan County, there are nine sites in Moab and four in Castle Valley. UWW is always looking for additional groups to get involved. Visit their website <https://extension.usu.edu/utahwaterwatch/> for more information. If you'd like to help the CCDC with their monitoring in the Abajo Mountains or on the San Juan River contact us at info@ccdscountry.org for more information. Want to learn more fun facts about the Colorado Plateau? Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for us to share fun facts and upcoming events!

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