



Coldwater River Watershed Monitoring Project # VSM2010-02
Final Implementation Report

December 14, 2012

July through October, 2012

With permission, our funds were sufficient enough to extend our grant one additional quarter. Therefore during the ninth quarter of implementation, Branch Conservation achieved the following items for this grant:

In the ninth quarter we completed a final round of samplings and bug id events. We continued with the new training style, since again our new recruits were few. This seemed to go very well. One of our new volunteers happens to be a degreed entomologist and interested in continuing with us. If she follows through, she should be a very good resource for the program.

This sampling round itself was more difficult than in previous events, with our extreme weather affecting the sampling quality and quantity. First, due to the severe drought in our area this summer, several sites were too dry to sample. The lack of rain had also dried out areas, which are normally bountiful containing very good quality samples. In some of our highest quality sites we could not acquire enough macro-invertebrates to qualify under our QAPP. We did keep the samples and review what we had. The weather on the main sampling day was nice at the beginning, but dangerous storms hit part of the way through. While most viable sites were completed on September 22, we did have one we needed to be sampled later in the week. Our Bug ID night was held on September 26th. The BISD teams completed their work around the same time frame and the final QC data was returned to us last week.

Kathy was able to attend the fall MiCorps conference at Higgins Lake on Monday and Tuesday, October 29 and 30th, which was quite good. The information on human impact was very interesting and social networking time helpful.

Publicity:

We continued to promote and recruit for the program through all of our contacts and events, i.e.; promo materials, website, by word of mouth, and through outreach presentations throughout the county. Our volunteers continue to bring in additional recruits and others inquiring about the program. We are hopeful these volunteers will continue to assist us. Kathy addressed the Coldwater Exchange Club in July 12th, which went very well. We also promoted the program during a Clean Boats Clean Waters coordinated by Rachel Smith meeting through district's 319 Prairie River Grant on July 28th. Joe Latimore and Paige Filice presented for us. We gave one presentation in September 15th at the North Chain of Lakes Association fall meeting, which also went very well.

Additional steps and concerns:

We continue to see potential volunteers continue to show interest, although our day-of volunteer numbers remain mostly steady. We are uncertain whether the target partner groups for funding will step up once the grant is completed. However our volunteers, BISD partners and the district board have decided to continue after the grant funding is complete. The BISD has been a very good partnership for our MiCorps program.

We are continuing to seek additional funds, sponsors and volunteers. At this point the volunteer numbers are sufficient to maintain the program as is, but we will need more people and funds to expand the program to additional sites. Our next samplings will be in April.

Review of the Full Grant Implementation:

During the extent of this grant, the Coldwater River Volunteer program seemed to gain a good volunteer foundation. A corpse group of volunteers has been trained, most showing a sincere desire to continue. While the makeup of our volunteers does depend upon the season, there are enough to maintain the current ten sampling sites as established for the fall and spring samplings. We would still like to expand the number of sites to a much wider area and are still exploring ways do so.

We have developed two versions of training new recruits dependent upon the number attending. For larger groups we hold a traditional training day, which lays out a very good foundation. For smaller groups two to three people at most, we do a shorter version of the training on sampling day, which includes an overview of the program, safety concerns, a run through of the equipment and sampling techniques. The team captains, who are now more experienced, then do additional training in the field. We are very careful to watch how we proceed with these volunteers keeping our approved QAPP in mind. Additionally future volunteers who wish to become team captains are required to do further training and show they understand the workings of the program, along with the QAPP.

While we did accomplish all of the tasks listed in our work plan, we do wish we had progressed a bit further broadening our sampling reach within the watershed. For this we will need a larger volunteer base and additional funding. The Branch Conservation District Board has committed to continuing our sampling and expanding the program as we are able. Bill Earl at the BISD has also committed to continuing the program for the time being and views this as a valuable activity for his young adults.

One of the things that limited our growth was the loss of partners due to a lack of funding or in one case I believe the partner simply did not understand the very real commitment they had made. So, perhaps the biggest thing we learned beyond the need for all of the proper forms and careful organization would include our most important advice to other volunteers attempting to create their own program. Though you believe you have conveyed the correct information to your match partners, in truth it may not be clear to them. It is very important to sit down with your “atypical” partners, and make certain they truly understand what these commitments entail. Many are unaccustomed to the way match partnerships work and the language we use may not be understandable to them.

Overall, we have not really had any major struggles beyond future financial support commitments and the loss of some partners. Our volunteers who have stuck with the program truly seem to enjoy themselves and we find are they actually spending time to learn more on their own. Some of our partners, like the BISD with Bill Earl, Branch Conservation District Board Directors, and Paul Rentschler from ASTI, have gone above and beyond in helping us progress. They have always come through for events, training, sampling, ID, and other items well beyond what was expected.

One more note about this program is that it inspires. At least one of our young adult volunteers who helped us throughout this grant accepted substantial scholarships to continue his studies at Lake Superior College this fall in natural resources. This program is one of the reasons why he chose to do so. It is truly delightful to find MiCorps is also helping to inspire future professionals in environmental sciences.