

Final Project Report Narrative

Grantee Name: St. Joseph County Conservation District

Project Name: Bug Brigade

Grantee: Carolyn Grace, administrator SJCCD

Project # VSM2016-1

Period Covered May 2, 2016-May 10, 2018

Turn in June 19, 2018

Project Objectives and Goals: We set out to accomplish a variety of goals when we applied for the startup grant. We were awarded the first part of the grant in 2016. We had some lofty goals to accomplish, and I feel we accomplished an amazing amount of them and with our strong volunteer groups, we will accomplish the last goal; connecting and extending the data collection into Cass County.

- **Outreach:** Our outreach began with about 3 groups of established partners. As a new administrator, I wanted to find, write and obtain grants that I could begin to build the Conservation Districts image. By writing the startup grant, it not only gave me confidence in my skills of writing, I realized that I love and have a passion for water. Our partnerships have grown in the community, from that three to over 30 groups and they are involved in a variety of our grants. In Conclusion, we feel we met this goal 100%. We have increased our volunteer base of a few people to 47 different people involved in our collection groups.
- **Selection of Sites:** We selected nine sites in three different rivers in our county. We were faithful in collecting these sites as the water levels and weather provided. Now with the completion of the grant, we have located and will be adding 3 more sites to our program. The guiding factors have included working with the NRCS department and using the Watershed Management plans written by others. The Portage, Rocky and Prairie Rivers have a management plan that we followed. We will use the St. Joseph and Fawn River watershed plans to continue the work with our volunteers. Our goal: We have met this goal 100%. We will increase our river count for the Fall of 2018
- **Engage new groups.** We exceeded this goal. I could not have dreamed the number of interested groups that had me come and speak at their clubs, meetings, programs and conferences. It has been a humbling experience to be invited to speak and engage so many people in my excitement about collecting bugs. My goal was 8 groups and 15 stakeholder groups were informed.
- **Recruit and Train:** We have recruited about 69 different people to get involved in this program. Some have stayed and new have joined but each time everyone leaves with the WOW experience of Denny Stelzer and I. Denny is such an amazing man, showing the bugs under the microscopes, teaching, explaining and showing us such a great variety of their traits or parts of their bodies. The volunteers leave with a greater appreciation of the life living in our rivers. Our goal was met at 100%
- **Work with Surrounding Conservation Districts:** This was a goal Cass County and I set out to accomplish. However, the District Administrator took a new job in Washington, so it quickly was dropped. This year however, I have been coaching the then new manager, to work with us to monitor the Rocky River which begins in Cass County. I hope in the fall of 2018; this goal will come to be. The Southwestern Michigan College became a partner and two professors and a few of their students attended our training. **Only 25% of the goal was accomplished**

To accomplish these goals, the SJCCD utilized the MiCorps Volunteer Stream Monitoring procedures. We spoke at many meetings and our local fair each year, reaching out too many stakeholders, Emails, flyers and press releases along with newspaper articles.

Project locations:

Nine Project sites:

- **Prairie River.** Site #1 is in Burr Oak Township. Site #2 Sherman Township and Site #3 Centreville. These sites were selected with the help of the Prairie River Watershed Management Plan. They had identified non-point sources of contamination. The plan asked to have macroinvertebrate studies done in order to test water quality. Site one and two we generally lower quality than site #3. The team used this data to go upstream and start looking for possible problems.
- **Portage River:** Site #1 Silver street. Site #2 Park Township and site #3 Three Rivers. This river was chosen because the SJCCD had a proposal to remove a dam in the river. So, testing for aquatic life was done above at and below the dam removal site. The dam has not been removed to date, however good quality of water is al all sites.
- **Rocky River:** Site #1, border of Cass and St. Joseph Counties. Site #2 Fabius township and site #3 Downtown Three Rivers. Once again, the watershed management plan was the driving force for the choices. The plan was 12 years old and this data was going to help in the writing of the new update of the Rocky River Watershed Management Plan. It is in progress.

Monitoring Activities and Results:

Collection Sites	FALL 2016	score	volunteers	Spring 2017	Score	volunteers	FALL 2017	Score	volunteers	Spring 2018	Score	volunteers
Portage Site 1	excellent	59	6	good	44	3	good	40	3	good	47	3
Portage Site 2	good	41	7	good	48	4	good	46	3	good	46	3
Portage Site 3	Excellent	61	6	good	43	3	excellent	57	6	good	35	6
Prairie Site 1	fair	22	5	good	37	3	poor	19	4	good	36	4
Prairie Site 2	good	38	4	Good	35	5	good	41	3	good	43	4
Prairie Site 3	good	38	5	good	37	5	good	40	4	good	40	3
Rocky Site 1	fair	29	6	good	34	0 not done	fair	32	3	good	36	5
Rocky Site 2	fair	33	5	fair	28	5	fair	31	4	N/A		
Rocky Site 3	good	36	4	Fair	30	8	fair	28	8	good	36	5

Project successes, benefits and lessons learned:

Successes that turned into benefits:

- Information to the public at Fair: outcome: 15 people volunteered
- 15 presentations at meetings in the community: outcome 40 volunteers
- Demonstration to students in three different schools, outcome: 282 students learned about aquatic animals
- 7 Partnerships formed and growing, outcome: a new set of volunteers to be part of the District data base
- Newsletters, Facebook Page formation and Website posts. Outcome up to 8,000 passive interactions with our community members. Shares, likes and smiles were given to our posts.
- Data collection: Outcome: farmers, business owners and Community members learning about our programs and why the Conservation District is important in their community.
- Environmental involvement: Outcome: people who attended learned a great deal from Denny Stelzer and they shared the information with family member and other community members.

Lessons Learned:

- Choosing sites that have easy access in and out of the river is very important. Just picking a site without data to back it up may be time wasted. We had one site that was an important site, however, very difficult for people to enter and exit the river. This site then became the one only employees collected from.
- Carefully choose collection date. We choose the week of spring break and many families, students and volunteers could not attend.
- Two sites to monitor per group, not three. We found that when we tried to drive, collect and return to the office for picking, three sites took way to long. People left before everything was completed.

Project Partner List:

- Fawn River Kayak, Volunteer hours to see what water quality is like on the Prairie and Fawn Rivers
- Southwestern Michigan College, Department of Environmental Science
- Branch County Conservation District, materials
- Cass County Conservation District, materials and volunteers
- Denny Stelzer, expert identification
- St. Joseph County Conservation District, Lead, volunteers, match
- Portage Lake Association, volunteers

Project Sustainability:

It is the belief of the District that we will continue to grow and sustain our monitoring in the Prairie, Rocky and Portage Rivers and in the fall of 2018, expand to the Fawn River, with three new sites. The county commissioners have awarded the district \$2,000.00 to continue the program into 2019.

They feel that the Prairie Watershed management plan, written through the District should implement some of the best management practices. The monitoring of the macroinvertebrates is just one of the ways to complete the plan written by the watershed management teams.

The district has a strong volunteer base and with continued press releases, Facebook posts and the newly developed Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) in the district, more volunteers will be participating in our current programs and the new programs.

Partnerships that were formed with other Districts include Branch and Cass County. We hope to continue working with the Districts on either side of ours. They each started to monitor and have stopped. I hope to get them involved again. At Cass county the college is very involved, and they would like to start monitoring streams in their home community. Working with the Cass CD will be beneficial.

In conclusion, this has been a wonderful project that I hope to continue with as many groups of volunteers as possible. I appreciate the team that trained me and I hope their funding continues so that other groups may become involved.