

Final Project
Friends of the Shiawassee River
Owosso, Michigan
Shiawassee River Watershed Benthic Macroinvertebrate Monitoring Program

Friends of the Shiawassee River has successfully completed the MiCorps Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program Grant. The \$8,500 grant was awarded to Friends of the Shiawassee River in the summer of 2015 to enhance and fund our stream monitoring program throughout the Shiawassee Watershed.

The overall goals of the project were to hire and train a staff member who could set up a sustainable stream monitoring program for the Friends of the Shiawassee River and to expand our collection sites within the Shiawassee Watershed.

The objectives of the stream monitoring program included: training volunteer teams throughout the watershed; expanding our sampling sites to the outreaches of the watershed; seeking assistance from local experts in macroinvertebrate identification to train staff members; promoting the volunteer stream monitoring program through events, social media, news releases, and partnerships; and expanding the program to other watersheds.

The Friends of the Shiawassee River updated our past Quality Assurance Program Plan (QAPP) which gives specific information on our volunteer stream monitoring program, which is in accordance to the MiCorps guidelines. Throughout our grant period we established two new sites in the headwaters of the Shiawassee River.

We successfully implemented separate identification events and were fortunate to have an aquatic biologist, John Matousek from the MDEQ, train staff and volunteers on macroinvertebrate identification. We gave a short presentation at each “Bug Identification” event to discuss our long term data, the importance of our stream monitoring program, as well as how volunteers can get further involved.

The Program Coordinator staff personnel hired through the grant was essential in volunteer recruitment, public outreach, and management throughout the grant. We promoted MiCorps and the importance of stream monitoring at many of our events throughout the watershed, on social media, in newsletters, and flyers. We found a way to allow school groups to participate in our program while still following the guidelines given by MiCorps. We did so by having trained adult volunteers do the timed collection while the students helped with the various other jobs. Our Program Coordinator would work with students along the shoreline to pick through materials collected to insure macroinvertebrates were not overlooked. After completing the timed portions, we would allow the students the opportunity to learn the collection techniques (without counting what they collected in our data). This proved to be a very popular event for school groups. It gave us an opportunity to educate the youth in our area and to spread the word about our stream monitoring program and the health of our river systems to a much

larger audience, all while collecting reliable data. We worked with seven school groups in total at seven different collection sites. Teachers were presented with documentation about our program prior to the events so that the students would have an idea of the importance of the sampling. We also sent the results to each teacher and adult volunteer after our Bug Identification event so they would know how they site they collected at ranked. During the grant period we had over 300 volunteers participate in stream monitoring between the twelve sites with collections in both May and October each year (this includes the school groups).

Overall, all of the tasks in the work plan were met quite successfully. As with most volunteer programs, we will need to continue to work on recruiting new adult volunteers and retaining existing volunteers. Our greatest struggle is finding adult volunteers willing to commit and train for the “Leader” role. Because of this we have to rely on staff to be at almost all of the collections. We did expand our program by adding two additional sites and recruited local volunteers in an area we hadn’t previously done sampling.

The key benefit has been the consistent reliable data that was obtained to help assess the health of the Shiawassee watershed. This data can be shared with local stakeholders and community members to encourage them to take pride in the Shiawassee River and to support organizations such as Friends in the work that we are doing throughout the watershed. Sampling events are a great tool to engage community members to learn and care for our river. We have had a great response from volunteers and stakeholders throughout the Shiawassee River because of stream monitoring program.

Our project partners have been a key component in the success of our program. They include the following:

- New Lothrop Science Club, Owosso Environmental Club, Chesaning Fisheries and Wildlife class, Byron Science Class, Holly Science Class, and St. Charles Science Class. They were provided information on the program and provided students to help with our sampling events.
- Chesaning Township: Trustees helped with sampling events in their area
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality: Aquatic Biologist, John Matousek, helped with sampling and all identification events.
- The Nature Conservancy: Ecologist Matt Herbert helped us map out new sampling sites

We will continue to monitor as many of our existing sites in the Shiawassee River watershed as possible and provide all of the data to MiCorps. We will be seeking other funding sources to assist with the project in the future. We believe that work being done with the stream monitoring program is a very important component to reaching our mission to Share, Care, and Enjoy the Shiawassee River. Therefore, keeping this program funded is very important to us.