

**Final Project Report
The Little Forks Conservancy
Midland, Michigan
Cedar River Watershed Monitoring Project**

The Little Forks Conservancy has successfully completed the MiCorps Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program Grant. The \$10,000 grant was awarded to The Little Forks Conservancy (the Conservancy) in spring of 2015 to implement a volunteer stream monitoring program for the Cedar River Watershed.

Monitoring Program

The primary goal for this project is to create a sustainable strategic monitoring plan that spans the Cedar River Watershed. By creating collaborations between various conservation organizations in the area, we hope to ensure long-term success and consistent data collection by developing procedures and targeting locations of interest. By recruiting volunteers for water quality monitoring, we hope to build local support for protecting this important community resource. In addition, we looked to build project support through collaborations with local educational institutions.

The specific objectives to implement a volunteer stream monitoring program included: training all volunteers in collection and basic identification; getting assistance from local experts in macroinvertebrate identification; sampling at least six sites in the watershed; promoting the volunteer stream monitoring program through events, social media, news releases and through partnerships; and expanding the program to other watersheds.

Sampling and Identification

The Conservancy developed an approved Quality Assurance Program Plan (QAPP) which lays out the framework for the volunteer stream monitoring program into the future. We had to refine our sampling locations after additional site visits to make sure adequate access existed. Two sites identified in our initial proposal were unsuitable due to high water and severe erosion. This required us to identify new sampling locations. We successfully completed all the necessary habitat assessments and stream samplings for six sites in the Cedar Watershed with all the information entered in the MiCorps database.

We successfully completed all the identification events with a mix of experienced and non-experienced volunteers. It was exciting to see the non-experienced volunteers so enthusiastically helping. We were very consistent in having the same experienced volunteers at all of our identification events.

Volunteers, Education and Outreach

The Conservancy's Conservation Outreach Coordinator was essential in volunteer recruitment and management throughout the grant. In addition, staff provided all the necessary recognition for volunteers and provided them with report cards of the results of the fall samplings. We promoted MiCorps at numerous events in Gladwin, Clare and Midland counties. This allowed us to increase the amount of time spent recruiting volunteers at various events through our service area. This has resulted in seventy five volunteers spending 529 hours helping with the program.

In addition, we used numerous outreach tools to promote our stream monitoring program. This included press releases to local media, Conservancy newsletters both electronic and print, and social media posts. In addition, our partners, the Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited, posted information in their newsletter.

Training and Collaboration

The Conservancy completed a training for stream leaders which had twelve attendees. In addition, The Conservancy's Director of Land Conservation, AmeriCorps Land Steward, Conservation Outreach Coordinator, and two key volunteers attended MiCorps training hosted by the Huron River Watershed Council over the duration of the grant period. In 2016, the Conservancy's Director of Land Conservation and Conservation Outreach Coordinator presented at the Fall MiCorps conference on the Cedar River Watershed monitoring program.

Capacity

The Conservancy utilized grant funds to obtain supplies to assist with the development of a macroinvertebrate monitoring program. We created supplies for four sampling teams, acquired a wide variety of waders, and necessary storage equipment for long term storage. We used information from other successful monitoring programs for our sampling supplies.

Overall, all of the tasks in the work plan were met with limited barriers. As with any volunteer project, we will need to continue to work on recruiting new volunteers and retaining existing volunteers. We did not expand our program to other watersheds as we wanted to focus our attention on the Cedar River watershed.

Project Benefits

The key benefit has been getting information on the Cedar River watershed to help assess the health of the watershed. This data can also be useful when used in conjunction with other watershed habitat improvement projects such as replacing road stream crossing or repairing erosion. Another key benefit has been engaging new volunteers to get them excited about volunteer sampling. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our volunteers on our sampling events.

Stakeholder Input

The Conservancy participates in the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee. The committee was provided regular updates on the project. We also surveyed volunteers after sampling events to get their feedback.

Existing Project Partners

- The Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited: Board members participated in stream leader training, sampling and identification events. They also promoted the sampling events in their newsletter.
- The Clare Conservation District: They participate in the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee and participated in stream leader training, sampling and identification events.
- The Gladwin Conservation District: They participate in the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee and provided input on the project.

- United State Fish and Wildlife Service: They participated in the Cedar River Watershed Steering Committee and provided input on the project.
- Gladwin High School Biology Class: They were provided information on the program and provided a student to help with sampling and identification.
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources-Gladwin Office: The MDNR's AmeriCorps member helped with sampling and identification events.

New Project Partners

- Huron Pines: Provides an AmeriCorps member to serve at the Conservancy who is responsible for assisting with the volunteer stream monitoring program.

Sustainability

We will continue to monitor our existing sites in the Cedar River watershed and provide all of the data to MiCorps. The Conservancy has obtained supplies through the grant to help with monitoring for the next few years. We will be seeking other funding sources to assist with the project including possible sponsorship or donations from local stores. We have committed existing donor funds to underwrite staff time and expenses for the upcoming monitoring season.