

Business of clean water is satisfying work

TEENS: Volunteers help monitor condition of Anchorage streams.

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We, as Anchorage dwellers, are lucky enough to have an extensive system of creeks running through our city. In fact, we're blessed with so many creeks that it's easy to take them for granted. After all, if you see something enough, it can slip into the realm of the mundane.

On the other hand, Anchorage can be a rough place for creeks. All sorts of pollutants from fertilizer to motor oil can cause trouble when they get into streams. And Anchorage's many paved surfaces can lead to a lot of runoff. Naturally, then, our streams need more than just acknowledgement -- they need some looking after.

To that end, our creeks have no further to look than the Anchorage Waterways Council (a nonprofit organization) -- and its crew of volunteer stream monitors.

As key players in the AWC Citizens Environmental Monitoring Program, they perform regular tests on streams all across the city, rain or shine, during all seasons of the year. They monitor such factors as temperature, acidity and dissolved oxygen, and their data help assure that we can detect and fix deviations in water quality.

Indeed, the CEMP's volunteers are the main source of information on the condition of Anchorage streams, and the hours they've put in have provided a good picture of water quality over the past 10 years. It's not always glamorous work (there's a fair amount of waiting involved), but it sure is useful.

On a personal note, my mother and I are members of the CEMP, and we enjoy it immensely. Twice a month (once a month during the winter), we toss a few buckets full of testing apparatus into the van and drive out to our testing site at Campbell Creek near Dimond Boulevard and the new Blockbuster.

We take temperature and pH readings, note our surroundings, set up bacteria samples and work a bit of chemical magic so we can measure dissolved oxygen. Often, passers-by will ask about our work, and it's refreshing to note that many of them take great pride in the local stream system.

Overall, the CEMP is a great way of helping out the Anchorage environment. Creeks do quite a lot to liven up the city, and it's awfully satisfying to help keep them in good order. For a minimal investment of time (two days of training and several hours per testing session), you can be an instrumental part of the effort to maintain a precious city resource.

David Mills is a rising senior at West High.

clean creeks:

For more information on the Anchorage Waterways Council, visit the site below. To work alone, Citizens Environmental Monitoring Program volunteers must be at least 18 years old, but parent-teen pairs are welcome. Happy testing!

anchoragecreeks.org

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