

Rum River benefits from 1,200+ St. Francis High School student volunteers

Science teacher DC Randle declares, “this, they really remember,” referring to his students. Why? It’s outdoors, catching critters most have never seen, and the work products get used beyond the classroom. When St. Francis science classes assist with long-term Rum River monitoring near the school, they get memorable lessons in biology and math, while working alongside professionals. Watershed managers are happy too; the school’s curriculum produces data they use.



Each spring and fall, students use nets to collect macroinvertebrates – mostly aquatic insects. These small critters serve as a gauge of the river’s health. Some types are only found where water quality and habitat is good. Others tolerate poorer conditions. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has developed mathematical ways to translate invertebrate samplings into rankings of river health, and made it an official part of state water quality standards.



Over the last 12 years, 1,200+ students have donned waders and captured thousands of invertebrates. They are accompanied by biologists from the Anoka Conservation District who provide instructions on methodology. Their captures are identified and students calculate indices of river health. Then, everything goes to the Anoka Conservation District for quality checks and reporting.



Students have found a rich invertebrate community and many sensitive kinds like stoneflies and mayflies. The Rum River is in great shape. It’s invertebrates reflect a river system that has good water quality, has a plentiful fishery, and is used by an assortment of wildlife.

One agency paying special attention to water quality is the Upper Rum River Watershed Management Organization (URRWMO). They provide funding for the equipment, professional guidance, and final analyses. The URRWMO is a special purpose unit of government covering St. Francis, Nowthen, Oak Grove, Bethel, and parts of East Bethel and Ham Lake.

To see a video about St. Francis High School and Rum River monitoring, and learn more about the URRWMO visit their website – www.AnokaNaturalResources.com/URRWMO.

Invertebrate photo source: Hennepin Conservation District