

Prairie Partner Update

A publication for and about Blackland Prairie Texas Master Naturalists



Newly Formed Stream Team Monitors Local Waterways

by Jerri Lipple



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With 191,000 miles of waterways in Texas, the state is unable to monitor them all. This is where volunteers with the Texas Stream Team (TST) play an important role. The Texas Stream Team (formerly known as Texas Watch) is an environmental education and monitoring program funded by a grant from the EPA as part of the Federal Clean Water Act. The program began more than 20 years ago. It brings together community members, students, educators, academic researchers, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, river authorities, regional councils, businesses and other agencies to conduct scientific research and to promote environmental stewardship. Volunteers monitor a wide variety of habitats from rivers, creeks, ponds, and lakes to bays, bayous and estuaries. Volunteers range from school age to senior citizens, from individuals to organized groups like master naturalists.

The goal of the TST is to protect the environment, specifically the quality of our water. Volunteers are citizen scientists who carry out monthly water quality

testing at a designated spot along a stream, lake, or river. Volunteers test temperature, pH and other variables. The data is then sent to the Meadows Center at San Marcus. The Meadows Center manages, stores and analyzes all of the data. The state does quite a bit of water quality testing, but it simply cannot reach enough places to have as much data as it would like. Having the TST in place vastly increases the number of sites that are tested. By having volunteers go out and collect water quality data, there are more eyes on the water. Volunteers can identify pollution events—pipe breaks, sewage spills or illegal dumping.

Identifying a pollution event is exactly what citizen scientists at the Richardson Environmental Center did. When the Richardson Environmental Center first implemented TST testing, it was part of their educational program for sixth graders. The students did the testing. In the 1990s, TST testers at the Richardson Environmental Center discovered a fish kill through their testing. When the TST reported the issue to the City of Richardson, the city was able to trace it back to a person who was illegally dumping chemicals into the stream which fed into the water at the Environmental Center. The person didn't have anywhere else to dispose of the chemicals at that time—they thought the streams were a safe place to dump them. Through the efforts of TST volunteers, the city was able to locate this person, educate him about the harm he was doing, and he agreed not to dump chemicals into the streams anymore. This is just one example of how the efforts of TST volunteers have made a difference.

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