

Routine Water Quality Monitoring Exposes a Crisis ~ A Watershed Stewards' Tale

Each quarter, Watershed Stewards and other volunteers test the water quality on streams throughout Clark County. Using a protocol developed by Clark County Watershed Resources staff, they test the physical, chemical, and biological health of several creeks every quarter. This baseline data is incorporated into the county's database to paint a picture of the health of the county's watersheds.

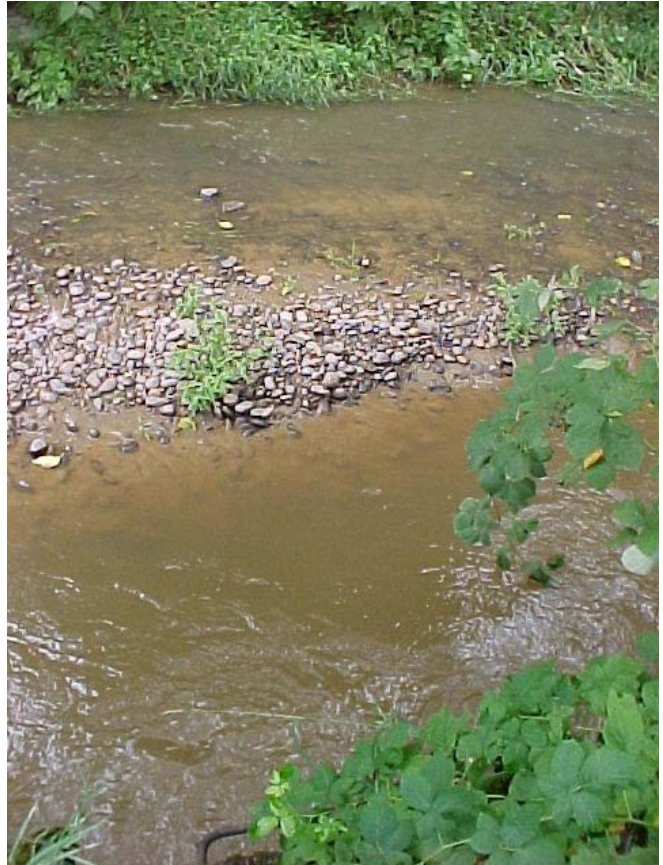
Monitoring work is usually routine, but that changed for three Stewards on the "Kingfisher Team" in August of 2004. The Team was monitoring salmon spawning habitat on Gee Creek in Ridgefield after several days of August rain, an uncommon event during normally dry summers. Upon arriving at the monitoring site at Abrams Park in Ridgefield, the team was surprised to find the creek looking more like chocolate milk than a clear, salmon-bearing stream. Obviously, soil was eroding into the creek upstream.

Ron Wierenga, Clark County Water Resources, led the team as they collected the usual samples and habitat data. After discussion, the team felt land development activities upstream could be responsible for the problem. Using cell phones to stay in touch, Ron and the other team members worked their way upstream to find the source of the pollution.

Despite continuing rain and mud upstream, the team found two housing developments on two separate branches of the creek where erosion control efforts had failed. In some cases the rain had created five foot deep gullies in soils exposed by development activity. Silt fences failed in many places and silt poured into Gee Creek. Stretches upstream of development activity were flowing clear despite the rainfall.

The Washington State Department of Ecology was notified and a team from Olympia responded to examine the problem and consult with local officials and developers. Ecology is still working to resolve this case, which may result in fines for those responsible.

Without the efforts of the Watershed Stewards and other citizen volunteers willing to dedicate some free time to the health of Clark County's watersheds, situations like this might never be discovered.



Some of the silt that poured into Gee Creek in August 2004.

Although most of our efforts are simply part of the routine of being a Watershed Steward, it is gratifying when we can help find solutions to complex problems.

For more information or to get involved in Watershed Stewards projects contact:

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