Long Tom Watershed Council

Have you ever wondered how clean the Long Tom River and its tributaries are? Is it safe for our kids to play and swim in local waterways? Is water quality good enough to support native fish and wildlife? The Long Tom Watershed Council is discovering some answers to these questions.

Last fall, the council began a two-year water quality monitoring program. Each month council volunteers go out to 17 sites around the watershed to measure water temperatures, stream flow, dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity and turbidity. The program also includes measuring E.coli levels and concentrations of nitrates and phosphates in streams at several times throughout the year.

Why are we monitoring? The council has a diverse membership, including urban residents, ranchers, timber producers and loggers, farmers, rural residential landowners and local governmental agency representatives. Not surprisingly, there is a wide range of reasons for members to be interested in water quality.

Many council members are concerned about water quality for fish and other aquatic species. Others have children who swim in Fern Ridge Reservoir or the Long Tom River in the summer. Still others are concerned that water quality issues might bring about more land-use regulations.

In the past, water quality problems have been identified and dealt with by state and federal agencies. The council's monitoring program allows information on water quality to be shared with local residents first. This provides education on water quality and gives us the opportunity to address any identified water quality problems at a local level. This could mean fewer regulations down the road and more flexibility for local residents to solve water quality problems.

Who's paying for it? The monitoring program is supported with local matching funds and services and a grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). The board's funding comes partially from moneys appropriated by the legislature and from lottery moneys provided under Ballot Measure 66.

How will the data be used? Water quality data collected by council volunteers is available to everyone. The information will be used by the council to understand water quality throughout the watershed and help shape the council's action plans. None of the information collected is linked to specific properties.

Look for more information and results of our water quality monitoring in future issues. Next month we will discuss macro invertebrates (what are those?) and their roles in watershed health.

At their June meeting, which is held the last week of the month, council members will explore a stream in forested land in the upper Long Tom. Watch for details in the News. For more information the council can be contacted at 683-6578 or e-mail longtom@efn.org.

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