Citizen scientists submit water quality data to DEQ

VOLUNTEER Andrew Bryden takes a variety of water quality readings for the Hood River at Tucker Bridge

Submitted photo

Hood River resident Andrew Bryden walked below Tucker Bridge and threw a line in the water. It wasn't steelhead he was after; he was fishing for data. Bryden is one of Columbia Riverkeeper's 75 volunteers who monitor the health of our rivers.

Since 2006, Riverkeeper volunteers have monitored sites Oregon and Washington, collecting valuable water quality data. From teachers to students to local water enthusiasts, Riverkeeper's volunteers are trained to use water quality monitoring equipment and collect data throughout the Columbia River basin.

"It is important that the tributaries and the Columbia are clean for humans and fish. I swim at Tucker Bridge about 5 times a week in the summer, so I want to make sure that it is the clean mountain water it should be," says Bryden.

Riverkeeper partners with local citizens as well as community and student groups including Columbia Gorge Community College. Jules Burton a faculty member at the community college says, "This Volunteer Monitoring project is important to Columbia Gorge Community College, because it provides quality training and relevant field experience to the students we serve and also provides important data that influences future clean up and restoration projects."

Water quality tests measure temperature, PH, Conductivity, turbidity, dissolved oxygen and E. Coli levels. Last week, Columbia Riverkeeper volunteers submitted data to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality from 77 sites on the Columbia River and tributaries. Forty-one of the sites monitored (53%) had at least one violation of the state water quality standards.

Riverkeeper submitted this information in response to DEQ's "call for data", and the state of Oregon will use it to conduct a statewide assessment of whether water bodies are meeting safety limits for swimming, fishing, and threatened salmon species.

Commenting on Riverkeeper's volunteer program Steve Hanson with DEQ states, "The CRK program has developed into a high quality monitoring program that links a large number of volunteers together over a long stretch of the river. That in itself is valuable, but the volunteers also do an excellent job of documenting the quality of the data they collect thereby providing useful data at a resolution the DEQ would never be able achieve alone. Some of this data has already identified opportunities to improve water quality." Riverkeeper's Water Quality Monitoring Program is lead by Lorri Epstein. "Our team of volunteers is committed to the river and to collecting high quality data. This kind of ongoing monitoring is critical to understanding the health of the river and to ensure a rapid response when problems arise", says Epstein. "It's also a great excuse to spend some time on the river."

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do occur at any time. All that is needed for an avalanche to occur is suitable steep terrain, unstable snow structure and something to tip the balance. Often the balance is tipped by anyone merely venturing out into the snow.

People attending the avalanche awareness session should expect to learn about how terrain, snow cover, weather and human factors all contribute to avalanche danger. Clues which indicate probabilities of avalanches, characteristics of relatively safe winter travel routes and essential gear needed on winter outings are just some of the topics discussed. Information on what to do if caught in an avalanche will also be presented.

The program is free.