

READY, SET, CHECK YOUR WATERSHED: A UNIQUE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY BASED STREAM MONITORING TO ASSESS WATERSHED HEALTH.

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ABSTRACT

Whether upstream or downstream, everyone lives in a watershed. However, because a watershed's stream networks stretch across a large area, often governed by geology rather than political boundaries, it can be difficult to visualize and understand as a landscape unit. This difficulty is a challenge to community-based monitoring.

Another challenge is the long-term commitment required by volunteers. Monitoring often requires continued sampling over years and long turnaround times for assessments. This means that the fieldwork is often completed by a small group of highly dedicated volunteers.

Check Your Watershed Day is a unique and innovative community-based project that addresses these difficulties primarily by scaling down to scale up. By dividing the watershed into manageable sampling zones and focusing on small streams at stream crossings (e.g. culverts), volunteers are able to actively engage in stream flow assessment using low-tech methods to monitor their watershed. As well, monitoring is done in a social setting and is completed within a span of four hours.

This project design enables 1) increased community understanding and appreciation of watersheds, 2) increased community capacity by building social networks and by training volunteers in stream assessment protocols, and 3) the compilation of important information on the stream condition on a watershed-basis. Since the stream data is collected on the same day, it describes the aquatic health of the entire watershed. The information will be used to inform the future management of the watershed.

The successes and challenges from this new project will be discussed as well as its potential for growth across multiple watersheds.

KEYWORDS

Watershed, Community-based monitoring, Stream monitoring, Stream crossings.