

Pocket Water

NEWS BITS AND BYTES



TROUT IN THE
CLASSROOM
IN ACTION

“Girls of Six” Group Focused on TU Mission

When one peers into Richard Gongaware’s classroom at James Madison High School (JMHS) in Vienna, Va., they are greeted by the sight of well-loved textbooks and students hard at work. It is a pleasant surprise when they also see a large fish tank full of lively trout in the corner. That belongs to the members of a new club, Students for Environmental Action (SEA Club), founded by Katrina White during the 2013-14 school year.

Katrina and her friends, Nicole Audia, Joyce Cheng, Casey Grage, Jodie Lee, and Marissa Marsh, have always had a passion for helping environmental causes. Marsh explained: “I became involved with SEA because I wanted to be part of a group that would take initiative and follow through with all goals set. I would like to see the club influence the JMHS student body to become more environmentally conscious in the community.”

Last year, this group of teenage girls participated in Trout in the Classroom (TIC) and were sponsored by their sci-

ence teacher, Mr. Gongaware. “TIC is enjoyable because it involves hands-on activities and is an educational tool that helps students learn about environmental sustainability and natural ecosystems,” commented Cheng.

Northern Virginia’s Trout Unlimited chapter (nvatu.org) supports the program. In addition to raising brook trout in the classroom from eggs to fingerlings, students conduct watershed assessments and water quality analysis in hopes of identifying suitable locations for releasing the fish. Various high schools take part in TIC, but SEA is one-of-a-kind in that it incorporated a watershed assessment method developed by Smith and Sklarew (2012, 2013). The method

is best described as a discriminant analysis model that allows one to choose between ideal brook trout streams and streams that are less than suitable. The group managed to coordinate with local and state government agencies before beginning assessments to target potential watersheds. While in the field, SEA assessed for unique in-stream qualities, such as riffle run quality, dissolved oxygen levels, and temperatures. SEA partnered with Rick Ayers of ESRI who piloted GIS/GPS computer software to record “real time” data during stream testing.

Practices developed by SEA members, in addition to the information shared by Virginia’s Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, not only produced an initial watershed assessment, but also provided information for TU sponsored TIC officials to utilize in their attempts to identify fingerling release locations. SEA plans to continue TIC in the coming school year with expectations to expand into other environmental conservation projects.

The entire program would not have been possible if it weren’t for the vision and enthusiastic support of NVATU Chapter president, Jay Lovering. The chapter’s vice president, Kathleen “Kiki” Galvin said: “(SEA) is an all female group and that promotes the National TU initiative of getting more women involved with TU’s mission.”

—By the SEA Club, James Madison High School

