CREEK CONNECTIONS
LINK
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Have a Creeky Summer!

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Super Symposia!

Above: Richard Zinn of Trout Unlimited shows off his flies.
Below: The crowd gathers for a few words at Camp Kon-O-Kwee.

Above: Linda Armstrong of Pymatuning State Park interacts with students of all ages.

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The student research symposium held at Allegheny College provides students, teachers, and the community the opportunity to learn about some hot topics in environmental science, test their creek knowledge, and see what kinds of studies neighboring schools are participating in. This year’s event was no exception. Students from across northwestern Pennsylvania and New York kicked-off the event by meeting Allegheny College administrators and staff bright and early to hear the opening remarks and set-up their presentations. Project Director Dr. Jim Palmer delivered an inspirational speech to get everyone going before the groups dispersed to their stations. Creek Connections veteran teacher Tom Hayden from Meadville Area Middle School talked about his eleven-year involvement in the project. Enjoy your retirement Mr. Hayden! Dr. Eric Pallant discussed water issues in the Middle East and really gave everyone a feeling of the different issues they deal with there compared to Northwestern PA. During the morning activities students were able to show off their hard work, ask questions about other displays, and present their research in Shafer Auditorium. This year’s projects ranged from Butterflies in Watersheds (Maplewood High School) to I Love French Creek (Findley Lake Homeschoolers). Some participants even invented games such as “Name That Macro” and “Creek Geek Tic-Tac-Toe” (Fort LeBoeuf High School). General McLane students even treated the crowd to a “skillful” dance.

After a quick lunch break everyone was ready to get back to the fun and participate in focus group activities led by Allegheny project assistants and several environmental agency/organization employees. Activities featured a variety of topics ranging from topography to ecosystems and wildlife. Participants were able to explore habitats, learn about animal tracks, investigate changes in the region’s topography, and much more. Everyone had a great time interacting with students and getting some hands-on experience. All of the project assistants had a great day working with students and learning a few new creek facts themselves. Creek Connections staff and administrators were really excited about the turnout and look forward to everyone’s participation and support in the upcoming years.

Above: students take part in a focus group activity run by Doug Krings of Bayer—Material Science Division. The activity investigated water pollution using chemistry.

Above: students check out the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection’s interactive display.
Another Great Day at Camp Kon-O-Kwee

The Pittsburgh Area Student Research Symposium took place Friday, April 21, 2006 at YMCA Camp Kon-O-Kwee. The forecast of all day did not dampen spirits. Over 350 students and teachers met with about 40 environmental professionals and the Creek Connections Staff for a celebration of another awesome Creek year. The student oral presentations included “Animal Interviews” and a talk about leeches that included some live specimens. In addition to the student lead presentations were an informative session from Steve Arnold from the School of Field Studies and a video about the Bass Masters Tournament from the PA Fish & Boat Commission. The poster displays were very impressive and interactive. Some of the titles this year were: “What You “Otter” Know”, “TDS Testing Deer and Low Grade Creek” and “The Wheel of Minnows”.

Fortunately the weather forecast was a bit off and we had a warm rain-free day and the perfect setting for the focus group activities. Students were escorted to the far reaches of the camp to take part in a wide variety of activities. Some were trained on the use of high tech Global Positioning System units while others were fishing. The reptile and amphibian activity even had a visit some local fauna. One lucky group got to make and take home their own t-shirts.

We had a great day celebrating our creeks and learning about others work and new ideas!

Above: students learn about and use Global Positioning System units with Allegheny County GIS employees.

Above: Ms. McMurray from Seneca Valley Intermediate HS leads the fish printing focus group activity. Its messy but fun!
Out of the Creek and into the Classroom: West Mifflin Students Explore the Wonderful World of Macroinvertebrates.

by Melissa Harlan, Allegheny College Graduate

What do you do when you can’t take your students to the creek? You bring the creek to the students, of course! This is just what Ms. O’Lare from West Mifflin High School did for her students to help them learn about macroinvertebrates. Let’s take a look at how she accomplished this task.

First, leaf packs were placed in various spots in their creek. Then, after several weeks, they retrieved the leaf pack and brought them into the classroom. After this, the group took on the messy but fun job of spreading the leafy mixture into trays and rifling through it in search of aquatic macroinvertebrates. By the end of the project they found several scuds and sowbugs, which are somewhat sensitive to pollution, and many tolerant aquatic worms, leeches, and midge larvae. One student, Shawenc’e Bethea commented, “My group and I found 12 thread worms and 3 isopods or aquatic sowbugs….”

What did the students think of all this? Well, at first some had reservations about taking on the project but by the end they were thankful for the chance to get involved. Participant Crystal Martin noted this in her remark “This lab was actually fun. When I heard we were going to be examining bugs, I thought it would be gross. But it was fun to see all the different species.” The activity was also educational and experiential, as described by students Billy Bendgen who realized “If you swim in a creek, you get to see what you might be swimming in.” and Elisha Sharik who thought “The leaf bag experience had to be the coolest thing we did. I’ve seen new bugs that I haven’t seen before. I liked looking at all the ones I haven’t seen. I like how the bugs wiggled.” Overall, students gave a wide variety of responses to the activity, but all agreed that in the end sorting through the grit and grime proved to be a great way to explore creek life.

Above: These West Mifflin students know they have to have good eyes to spot some of these tiny creatures.

Above: This group understands the importance of teamwork and has a nice system worked out.
Hats off to Crawford County Schools For Successfully Completing 5 Riparian Projects

by Melissa Harlan, Allegheny College Graduate

If you haven’t already noticed, the pleasant spring weather in Meadville has afforded residents the ability to complete their spring planting projects with little difficulty. As usual, Crawford County Schools were more than willing to team up with the Crawford County Conservation District with the help of several groups including Creek Connections, the Department Conservation and Natural Resources, and Penn DOT to take advantage of this weather and dig their way through 5 great planting projects.

Planting began at the Torjorbson Farm near Cambridge Springs where about 60 students from Saegertown High School, accompanied by their teacher Mr. Greco, flooded the area with buckets of trees, shovels, and determined minds. Even though the day started out a little cool, everyone warmed up at the site of the 1,200 freshly planted trees. One of the next stops on the list was Jones Farm near Titusville. For this project, Titusville High School teacher Mrs. McKellop joined her classes in planting hundreds of conifers and hardwoods. This group was not about to let a few little rocky patches stop them and tackled the job with enthusiasm. The Creekers saw this same motivation from Mrs. Dobson, Ms. Aurand and Mr. Stevenson’s Linesville High School students who assisted with a riparian project at the Dickey Farm near Espyville. In addition to hundreds of trees being planted, students assisted a fencing crew that installed a new fence to keep the livestock from entering the stream and newly planted riparian area.

The following week teams wrapped up the season with the Cambridge Springs and I-79 projects. Conneaut Lake High School teacher Mrs. Spellman just had to join in the fun as her students shoveled away at the Torjorbson Farm. By the end of the project, numerous saplings had found a new home. And last but certainly not least, Maplewood High School teachers Mr. Drake and Mrs. Gafner helped lead their 120 students along I-79 between the Saegertown and Edinboro exits.

Congratulations everyone for a job well done! Creek Connections looks forward to another successful season in 2006-2007!

Above: DCNR staff member Mark Lewis talks to Maplewood High School Students about the proper way to plant saplings.
THANKS FOR A GREAT YEAR! THE CREEK CONNECTIONS STAFF HAS ENJOYING SHARING ANOTHER YEAR WITH YOU AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO MANY MORE!