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Local group monitors water quality at Watson Mill State Park

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Drago Tesanovich and Annie Simpson collect macroinvertebrate samples.

The Madison-Oglethorpe Stream Team (MOST) has adopted Watson Mill State Park as a water-quality monitoring site.

“We are thrilled to adopt the Watson Mill State Park as our second water quality monitoring site,” said MOST team leader Ruth Ann Tesanovich. “The South Fork of the Broad, which flows through the park, is the county line between Madison and Oglethorpe counties. Many families and children use the park for swimming and recreation. We feel that our volunteerism along with the water quality data we collect and submit to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) will contribute to protecting and preserving our waterways.”

MOST team members John Robertson, Dave Ramsey, Ruth Ann and Drago Tesanovich, assisted by UGA grad student Annie Simpson, met July 10 to monitor water quality at their newly adopted S. Fork Broad River site, where they collected macroinvertebrate specimens – to assess what life is sustained in the water, an indicator of water quality – and encountered a large non-venomous brown water snake coiled on a tree stump.

“After the initial shock passed, ‘Mr. No-Shoulders’ was given some space and rather than slithering and disappearing into the water, thankfully he went on enjoying his sunny stump retreat,” said Tesanovich.

Leaders of the Madison County Clean Power Coalition (MCCPC) learned about the Adopt-A-Stream program at the time that Georgia Renewable Power Plant (GRP) sought an NPDES permit from the EPD to dump on average 273,000 gallons of industrial wastewater per day into the already impaired Beaverdam Creek. The creek empties into the South Fork of the Broad just upstream from Watson Mill State Park and then into the Savannah River Basin.

A decision on that permit is still pending and there is no timeframe for a decision. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has asked GRP for more information.

“We asked the GRP Madison facility to revise their antidegradation analysis to include all facilities which have been able to accept the wastewater from GRP Madison for treatment,” an EPD spokesperson said. “Correspondence with GRP Madison following the public notice indicated that additional treatment facilities had been identified which may be able to accept wastewater from GRP Madison. We also asked for further evaluation of any potential downstream impacts to robust redhorse fish or its habitat. They have not yet completed and submitted this analysis for EPD review.”

The robust redhorse is listed as an endangered species in Georgia. Threats to the species include water quality deterioration due to pollution.

In a letter to the EPD, Savannah Riverkeeper Science Advisor, Dr. Frank Carl, expressed concerns about pollutants in the GRP wastewater that might be harmful to aquatic life and users downstream such as phosphorous, nitrogen, chlorine, cyanide and chloroform. MCCPC learned from Dr. Carl that streams in Oglethorpe and Madison Counties were not being monitored for water quality. Dr. Carl, also a certified AAS trainer, offered to conduct an Adopt-A-Stream training class for those interested. Georgia Adopt-A-Stream (AAS) is the

state's volunteer water quality monitoring program and is administered by the EPD. The program engages citizen scientists all across Georgia and beyond in water protection activities through a series of educational workshops, training individuals on the physical, chemical and biological health of their waterways. Seven MCCPC members from Oglethorpe and Madison County were trained and certified in March and formed the MOST team. The MOST team immediately adopted a tributary to Beaverdam Creek, which is close to the GRP plant, as their first monitoring site.

“When we adopt a site we commit to testing the water quality every month so it is accumulation of data over time, not just at a given moment,” said Robertson of Smithonia. “Today was our first monitoring event at Watson Mill so as more data is collected, we’ll have a better picture of the stream health but today it looks fairly good. We are working on this so we can give Watson Mill and the Broad to our great grandchildren.”

For further information on the MOST AAS team, contact rtesanovich@outlook.com or watch for updates on the MCCPC website: www.madisoncleanpowercoalition.com. Volunteers are welcome to assist with stream monitoring. No training is required.

“Donations for testing supplies would also be very helpful,” said Tesanovich. “Please specify ‘MOST’ in the comments field of the donation box on the website.