

MORE KIDS IN THE WOODS 2016: The Young Scientist: The Next Generation

By Sal Steinberg, Community Coordinator Friends of the Van Duzen River

Friends of the Van Duzen River (FOVDR), in collaboration with the Eel River Recovery Project (ERRP), Trees Foundation, Six Rivers National Forest, Barbara A. Domanchuk Media, and the McLean Foundation are completing a federal grant working with four elementary schools in the Van Duzen Watershed in summer and fall 2016. Students were selected for their scientific curiosity and a written essay entitled, "Why I want to become a watershed steward for the Van Duzen River."



Bridgeville Elementary School students study aquatic insects at Grizzly Creek. June 24, 2016.

The More Kids in the Woods project of 2016 is the second one awarded with a larger scale 2013 project preceding it that allowed 500 students to visit and study the river. This past summer habitat studies in the Van Duzen watershed were conducted based on proximity to schools and included excursions on property managed by the California State Parks, Humboldt County Parks, and Six Rivers National Forest. Students from four schools were accompanied by natural resource professionals and provided with sketch pads, field notebooks, and the opportunity to use scientific instruments to conduct real life scientific investigations.

For the past four years, FOVDR and the ERRP in cooperation with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board have been studying temperature in the Van Duzen watershed using automated water temperature sensors that take hourly measurements for months at a time. Students in the More Kids in the Woods project helped install and retrieve temperature probes in 12 of 24 locations.

Dr. Paul Trichilo, GIS analyst for FOVDR and ERRP, and Matt Dicks of the Trees Foundation, produced a phenomenal map of the study area with pictures of the young scientists at work. Special thanks to Trees for the use of their plotter and their donation to the project. A 20 minutes feature video about the project was also produced by Barbara A. Domanchuk Media, which is available on the FOVDR and ERRP websites.

Following in the footsteps of the first More Kids in the Woods grant, FOVDR was able to hire Fortuna High School student, Mason Rush, as a contractor to assist with field activities. Working with Pat Higgins as a mentor, Mason learned to conduct habitat studies, be the lead on several temperature probe teams, take underwater photography, and study aquatic species. He was an inspirational presence for the younger elementary school students. At the Swimmers Delight habitat survey, he was able to study a native western pond turtle and gently share it with other students.



Mason Rush holds up western pond turtle at Swimmers Delight County Park on the Van Duzen River. August 17, 2016.

The More Kids in the Woods grant was able to secure two high level Phantom 3 drones. These are intended to teach students the new technological tools available to study our environment as well as for use in the annual salmon counts conducted by ERRP. Special thanks to our consultant, Rowdy Kelley, who advised us on our purchase, and who conducted drone demonstrations for our habitat study at Swimmers Delight.



Mason also came into the project with prior quadcopter (drone) experience, and trained all of the More Kids in the Woods students as well as some of their parents in August and September. One interesting note was that I taught Mason in elementary school in Scotia and now he was teaching me how to fly a drone. It is wonderful when the teacher becomes the student!

The Six Rivers National Forest (SRNF) staff helped arrange for the More Kids in the Woods grants and participated in this outreach and education project. Students learn about the importance of public lands and the importance of good stewardship on them to protect clean water supplies and to support biodiversity. SRNF manages the headwaters of the Van Duzen River, including the Lassics Wilderness Area, and portions of the North Fork Eel River watershed, including some of the North Fork Eel River Wilderness Area.



Six Rivers National Forest biologist Krista Smith looks on as Sal Steinberg leads students in sediment study on the West Fork Van Duzen River. September 15, 2016.

For more information see www.fovd.org or <http://www.eelriverrecovery.org/education.html>