Q&A

It's not to late to be a scientist when you grow up.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GLENN NELSON BY JUSTIN CASEY

Glenn, tell us a bit about yourself.

I am the Educational Outreach and Workshop Coordinator for West Virginia Save Our Streams (WV SOS). Beyond that, I am a fisherman and outdoors-man. My passion is water, from wetlands to groundwater and from streams to rivers.

What exactly is the SOS program?

West Virginia Save Our Streams is a statewide volunteer monitoring program with the mission of promoting the preservation and restoration of our state's nearly 31,000 stream miles. Empowering West Virginians with the necessary skills to test for the integrity of our state's water quality gives ownership to our most precious resource. The program accomplishes this mission by teaching citizen scientists how to conduct their own stream-side surveys by observing chemical, habitat, and biological parameters.

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How many volunteers does SOS have?

WV has had at one time nearly 150 watershed associations, with 64 active watershed groups currently. Our state's watershed organizations range in size and focus. Many actively do stream clean ups, monitor water quality insults specific to their particular watershed, conduct water festivals and other outreach events, and stream restoration projects just to highlight a few great things being done statewide by volunteers. Not enough can be said about this dedicated group of individuals and subsequently they remain my first priority as the coordinator of SOS. However, the importance of the connectivity of water health to our own health is too important not to share with every one of our state's great people. Last year over 5,000 individuals participated in some form of the SOS program.

How long has SOS existed in WV?

Originally an Isaac Walton League Program, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection was able to adopt SOS in 1989 within what is now the Watershed Improvement Branch. The IWLA still has a strong national program.

Are there limitations on which bodies of water can be monitored?

WV SOS by protocol and for teaching purposes focuses on wade-able streams, however given the connectivity of our waters there are few limitations in what we can monitor.

How often are streams monitored?

That really depends on the group and what is being monitored. SOS recommends stream surveys be done at least once a year. Certainly more is better. Survey season technically runs from April to October regarding aquatic insect collection. Their life-cycle sees them in an aquatic phase for roughly 2 years and are great indicators of stream health. Other monitoring varies on the question being asked. Some chemical parameters may require daily measurements and the use of deployable meters to conduct them.

Are there any specific rivers set for future projects within the program?

SOS is a rapid biological assessment protocol that focuses on wade-able streams. However the Potomac, Tug, New, Shenandoah, and Tygart have been surveyed using SOS procedures where they are wade-able. Watershed groups schedule yearly monitoring throughout our state and I conduct at least 20 workshops a year so there is always an opportunity to for future projects.

Does SOS partner with any government or state agencies?

WV SOS is fortunate to partner with other DEP professionals from the Watershed Assessment Branch to Basin Coordinators, WV DNR, WVCA, US FWS, USFS, NRCS, and our state parks. There are also many non-profit groups in our state that I'm lucky to work with, including Trout Unlimited, The Mountain Institute, Gesundheit Institute, and Canaan Valley Institute.

How can we get involved?

SOS conducts workshops statewide for groups with the desire of learning how to test and monitor water quality. Individuals can become certified under the WV Water Pollution Control Act Chapter 22 Article 11 Section 13 should they seek to further their monitoring efforts.

What tools and training does SOS provide to volunteers?

Typically workshops are a day event and can be tailored to fit the needs of the group. We provide the necessary teaching materials and supplies. Commonly used equipment includes a chemical testing kit, kick nets, bug processing gear (trays, forceps, IDs), flow meters, sieves, measuring devices, and data sheets. All materials are provided by SOS. ■

*Visit the West Virginia Save Our Streams website at **www.dep.wv.gov/sos** for more information about the program, equipment, certification, and workshops. Persons or groups interested in scheduling a workshop or educational outreach event can email Glenn.R.Nelson@wv.gov or inquire through the SOS website.*