

# Bigger, Better, Stronger

## Missouri Stream Team Reaches 3,000

By: Sherry Fischer, Fisheries

Streams are the lifeblood of Missouri landscapes. They link communities and lives together like the threads in a quilt. They are the root of recreation and enjoyment as well as disagreement and tragedy. Many of us have streams that are near and dear to our hearts. They hold memories of events with family and friends and sometimes our towns and livelihoods are built around them. They change naturally from day to day, but one thing remains the same: they are a part of us and we are a part of them.

Since 1989, Missourians have been signing on to improve and protect their lifeblood. These “Teams”; made up of individuals, families, friends, clubs, scouts, school groups, and kindred spirits allow people from all walks of life the chance to learn about streams, become their stewards, and speak out on their behalf through the Stream Team Program.

### We're Bigger

With 3,000 Teams on board, an estimated 60,000 members have contributed to improving our streams. Since the program began, an average of 200 Teams per year have registered. This was accomplished with very little recruitment effort and reveals just how much Missourians care about their stream resources. From the largest rivers in the state to the smallest backyard tributaries, groups have adopted nearly 15,000 miles of flowing water.

Stream Team projects include an assortment of activities that are chosen according to the Team's interests and the needs around them. Some pick up trash, plant trees, or stencil storm drains while others monitor water quality or help educate their community. The level of involvement is determined by the amount of time the volunteers have to commit and how deep they want to dig in. The Teams call the shots; biologists trained in stream management and water quality are available to provide guidance and answer questions.

The program is sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri. These three groups bring together different strengths and areas of expertise to give participating volunteers the widest range of resources at their disposal.

Not only has the program grown bigger, but the projects that Teams complete have grown as well. It is no longer uncommon for stream cleanups to involve hundreds of citizens removing many tons of trash in a day's time. In 2004 alone, 13,500 volunteers removed over 650 tons of trash from Missouri streams! They also planted over 7,000 trees and made over 1,300 trips to their adopted sites to monitor water quality. Stream Team volunteers aren't satisfied with the ordinary, but aim for extraordinary accomplishments with each outing.

Missouri proudly leads the nation in volunteer stream organizations. Every year, other states look to Missouri for guidance as they establish their own unique stream adoption programs. We are happy and honored to share our experiences, materials, and guidance with these groups so that no one has to “reinvent the wheel.” Missouri is lucky to have the support of its state natural resource agencies and professionals dedicated to empowering concerned citizens.

### We're Better

Stream Teams are in no way limited in the types of projects they tackle. Program sponsors have made it a priority to periodically add new activities to the smorgasbord of choices available. Many of the activities are guided by the interests of the volunteers themselves. Water quality monitoring is a great example of just that. In the program's early days, volunteers were clamoring to do more than just pick up trash and write letters to their local officials. They wanted to take an active role in monitoring the stream miles they adopted. In 1993, water quality monitoring was added with supporting workshops, equipment, and expertise. Other activities have been added including storm drain stenciling, adopt-an-access, photo point monitoring, and mentoring. Whether you like to get your hands dirty or not, there is something available for everyone.

Stream Team volunteers have a variety of technical resources at their fingertips. The *Stream Team Academy* is the program's “university without walls” and offers a continuous flow of facts to quench the thirst for knowledge. Academy workshops are held periodically on a variety of topics. Workshops have been held on understanding streams, fish identification, crayfish, herpetology, mussels, hellbenders, tree planting, and groundwater. Our bimonthly newsletter, *Channels*, is chucked full of information for and about Stream Teams. Also included with the newsletter are occasional “Fact Sheets” that give background and information on a variety of stream-related topics. These resources make it possible for Stream Team volunteers to couple technical information with their passion for stream improvement and protection.

It's not uncommon for these informed and educated Stream Team volunteers to become an integral part of the decision-making process in their watershed or community. They serve on task forces, boards, and even testify at hearings and council meetings. We can all be proud of the work they're doing in the name of our stream resources.

### We're Stronger

Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has”. Networking is one of the biggest strengths of the Stream Team program. Through our workshops and special events, members have the opportunity to hook up with other groups in their watershed. It doesn't usually take long for them to realize that by working together, goals that once seemed a bit lofty, now suddenly look much more feasible. When Teams really get serious about joining forces, they form Stream Team Associations. Several successful Associations exist throughout the state. Some apply for not-for-profit status, making them eligible for grants and special funding to help them reach their goals. When two Teams put their heads together, they usually find that they have complementing

specialties. Stream Team Associations are one of the best ways to make Stream Team dreams a reality.

Stream Teams never stop looking down the road for new opportunities and even greater challenges. Perhaps this is what led them to develop the Missouri Watershed Coalition (MWC). The MWC is a statewide group made up of representatives from Associations. Although they are a newly formed group, their hope is to help oversee the Stream Team program and offer one-on-one advice and services to Teams and newly forming Associations. The volunteers who make up the MWC have years of experience under their belts and are poised to help new members learn from their mistakes and their successes.

Stream Team began because a few individuals had a vision. It has been a success because the many who have signed on have their own vision . . . clean, healthy streams we can all enjoy. It may take us awhile to get there, but Stream Teams are a tenacious lot, they'll stick to the task until it's accomplished. As we now look beyond 3,000 Teams, there may be no limit to what they can achieve.

### Stream Team Timeline

1988 – First Rivers and Streams Conference – public gathering where citizens express an interest in a Stream Team Program.

1989 – Stream Teams start signing on. Stream Team #1 is the Roubidoux Flyfishers.

1990 – 1<sup>st</sup> Blue River Rescue Cleanup event in Kansas City.

1990 – St. Louis area Stream Teams get involved with Operation Clean Stream in the Meramec River basin.

1993 – Missouri Department of Natural Resources sponsorship begins and Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring takes off.

1994 – First Stream Team Association begins – Scenic Rivers Stream Team Association made up of Stream Team from West Plains, Willow Springs, and Mountain View is chartered.

1996 – Stream Team takes on Storm Draining Stenciling.

1997 – Stream Team 1000 signs on!

1997 – First Stream Team Academy workshop held.

1998 – Missouri Watershed Coalition starts.

1999 – Stream Team Program sponsors the “Stash Your Trash” Program and distributes trash bags to canoe liveries and other outlets.

1999 – Annual value of Stream Team activity accomplishments reach \$1 million for the first time.

2001 – Adopt-An-Access activities begin.

2001 - First Missouri River Relief event is held.

2002 – Stream Team 2000 signs on!

2002 – 100,000<sup>th</sup> streamside tree is planted.

2002 - Regional Stream Team Conferences begin.

2002 - Stream Teams start naming unnamed tributaries.

2004 – Arnold establishes fines for littering within the Meramec watershed within city limits.

2005 – One dedicated water quality monitor reaches a decade of monthly sampling.

2005 – 3,500<sup>th</sup> ton of trash is collected.

2005 – Monofilament recycling efforts begin.

2006 – Stream Team 3000 signs on!