

Photo Caption: Whitten Tonko, of Northfield, identifies some of the creatures in his river “aquarium”

Families take “Insect Safari” to Learn About the Cannon River

By Cannon River Watershed Partnership

Recently, about 20 children and parents took an "Insect Safari" at Riverside Park in Northfield, to see what insects were living in the Cannon River. Children, and their parent helpers, used long-handled nets to scoop bugs, tadpoles, and crayfish out of the water and then put them in a basin aquarium.

“This was such a fun way for our whole family to learn about the bugs and tadpoles that live right here in the Cannon River,” said parent Jennifer Tonko. “It’s great to learn more about the place where we live and be out in nature at the same time!”

After they caught some insects, tadpoles, snails, and other aquatic creatures, Cannon River Watershed Partnership (CRWP) educator Kevin Strauss helped families to identify what they caught. They also learned how to use a scoring sheet to determine what the insects tell us about how clean the water is in the Cannon River in Northfield.

Researchers use an insect life scoring scale from 0-20 to determine how clean a river or lake is based on the insects living there. Water is "clean" (high water quality) if it scores 15 or higher. It is "sort of clean" (fair water quality) if it scores 9-14 and it's ranked "dirty" (poor water quality) if it scores less than 9. While this wasn't a research-level sampling activity, families filling out their worksheets scored the river as "fair water quality" with a score of 9.

If we translated that to school grades, that would be a C-, not terrible, but below average and with lots of room for improvement.

"It's important to remember that water quality is a reflection on how we are taking care of our land," said Strauss. "Keeping oil, grass, and fertilizers out of the street in cities, and using conservation practices like no-till farming and cover crops in rural areas are great ways to keep our rivers and lakes cleaner and safer here in Northfield and across the region."

For more information about CRWP’s upcoming family-friendly activities, visit www.crowp.net