



HEALTHY LAND. CLEAN WATER. VIBRANT COMMUNITY.

For Immediate Release – June 15, 2021

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Title: Mad River Watch Season is Here!

Volunteers in the field

This past Sunday and Monday, June 13th and 14th, eighteen teams of volunteers spread out to 16 field sites across the Mad River watershed as part of Friends of the Mad River's (FMR) reimagined Mad River Watch program, sponsored this year by Lawson's Finest Liquids. Volunteers were trained on the new methods for testing water quality, the importance of observations as a foundation for good community science, the ins and outs of the new mobile data collection app, and strategies for stewardship before they took to their sites at the water's edge. Of the 20 of volunteers, 7 are returning to Mad River Watch after years of dedication and knowledge and 13 are bringing new energy and enthusiasm to the program. "I really enjoyed discovering a place that I'd never been to before, and didn't even know it existed," said Mad River Watch volunteer Ruth Lacey.

2021 upgrades

Mad River Watch volunteers are using methods that allow them to test water quality parameters like temperature, nitrate/nitrite, phosphate, and conductivity in the field, instead of sending them off for lab analysis. This enables volunteers and FMR to better identify pollutant sources and respond to changing conditions as they arise.

With an eye towards a changing climate, FMR volunteers are now measuring conductivity. "With more freeze thaw cycles, we anticipate more road salt application," said Corrie Miller, Executive Director. "Road salt is good for people getting where they want to go in winter, but it's not great for freshwater ecosystems. Measuring conductivity can give us a sense of where road salt is getting into our streams and rivers."

The new MRW program is built around observation as the basis for sound scientific inquiry. "Focusing on observation makes a nice addition to the science," said Julie Westervelt who volunteers with her daughter Ingrid. "It is not just about the numbers, but the overall picture of a healthy ecosystem." "And then we can share that story with the community," said Lisa Koitzsch, MRW Coordinator. "Painting a picture of change over time, hearing what matters to people, and guiding the questions Friends asks next."

Another big change this year is that FMR won't be measuring *E. coli*. "The community came to see the *E. coli* data Mad River Watch collected as important for public health awareness, and we believe that they were," said Miller. "However, our methods were teaching us the same lessons without adding to our learning. One critical trend we observed through the decades is that if it has been dry and then rains, the *E. coli* levels in the river increase, along with turbidity. It is predictable and now that we have learned this, we don't need to collect new

data to know that the best way you can protect yourself is by avoiding swimming 1-2 days after a rain or when the water is silty.”

FMR has been a core partner in developing the stewardMRV program that aims at improving the valley’s stewardship ethic and is encouraging volunteers to sign up as site stewards. In support of this collaborative Valley-wide effort, FMR has added a stewardship component to the MRW protocol and volunteers are serving as site stewards. Now, MRW volunteers’ experience as keen observers and ambassadors for the river add value as they track problematic use at river sites and pitch in to clean up.

As part of a second phase of the program’s changes, *E. coli* testing will return next year with the establishment of a handful of “sentinel” sites along the main stem, but it will not be tied to swimholes. Analysis of sentinel sites will be done at a professional lab and will be used to track change in the Mad River over time.

Highlights from the field

This week, MRW volunteers made observations that include wildlife, vegetation, and human usage. “As we were walking back to the car we were discussing that we really didn’t see any wildlife, when seconds later a deer bounded out of the tall grass, but disappeared before I could get a photo,” shared one MRW volunteer. Another discovered a killdeer nest and yet another crafted a haiku about her peaceful time by the water. Over the summer, FMR will compile data and observations and share key findings and highlights in the Valley Reporter and online at friendsofthemadriver.org/madriverwatch.

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3 Photos:

- 1. Caption:** *Even small creatures, like this snail, play an important role in watershed.* **Credit:** Peter White



2. **Caption:** Observations of wildlife, like this Garter Snake photographed at Warren Falls Monday morning, offer important data about the ecological health of the watershed. **Credit:** Mike Ware



3. **Caption:** *MRW volunteers are also capturing evidence of human use and impact to inform stewardship.*
Credit: Annie and Jula Fender

