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Volunteers count crane flies in Stoney Creek

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*SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press
Zach Kelly, 17, left, and Steven Salia, 16, wade through Stoney Creek in Washington Township on Tuesday. The Romeo High students were looking for organisms to get an idea of how clean or dirty the water is.*

Adam Rhein trudged through a murky branch of Stoney Creek in Washington Township in chest-high rubber waders on Tuesday and lowered a long net into the gentle water.

Back at the bank a few minutes later, the 17-year-old inspected the net and spied a spindly insect with wings.

"Oh, that's good news!" said Michelle Arquette-Palermo, director of watershed education for the Clinton River Watershed Council. "That's a crane fly."

Because crane flies generally can't tolerate pollution, their presence in the creek is an indication the water is clean, Arquette-Palermo said.

Rhein and more than a dozen other juniors from Romeo High School joined the council's effort to collaborate with communities, schools and businesses in order to test for pollution in the river and more than 1,000 miles of creeks. The rivers and streams meander through Oakland and Macomb counties then spill into Lake St. Clair, a major source of drinking water and recreation.

"This helps us understand the impact humans have on the environment," Rhein said.

The idea behind the teamwork is to give up-to-date pollution data to the state's Department of Environmental Quality, which can help clean up problem areas.

Tuesday's discovery: The Washington Township branch of the river is clean.

After years of pollution from suburban sprawl and factories, environmentalists say the watershed is making a comeback. Fish -- such as trout -- are more plentiful.

John Redash, co-owner of Giffels-Webster Engineers in Washington Township, bought the equipment for Tuesday's testing.

"It's a great way to teach our kids while protecting our water," he said.

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