Wade into wildlife monitoring as Metro's program kicks off its eighth year

Metro volunteers are amazing people. Willingly, and often with big smiles, wildlife monitoring volunteers suit up in chest waders and step out into chilly February wetland ponds on an amphibian treasure hunt. They search for jelly-like egg masses to collect information about the distribution and abundance of native pond-breeding amphibians such as the state sensitive Northern red-legged frog. Other species tracked include the Northwestern salamander, the long-toed salamander and the Pacific chorus frog. Monitors also provide very useful information about the invasive American bullfrog.

Volunteer spotlight

Photo by volunteer Jim Morton

Amphibian egg mass volunteer Judy Morton smiles while completing one of her surveys at Metro's Coffee Lake Bottoms. 2007 was Judy's third year as a wildlife monitor, but she has been part of Metro's volunteer family since 2002. She has contributed more than 75 hours surveying for frogs and salamanders, and been a member of restoration work crews on other natural areas.

Judy and her husband Jim make an impressive team at Coffee Lake. Using an inflatable kayak, they cover the entire natural area over the course of the frog and salamander breeding season, paddling through very cold water with a terrific attitude and an excellent sense of humor. They have surveyed this natural area for the past two years, submitting some of the most detailed and valuable data Metro natural resource scientists have ever seen.

Program coordinator Katy Weil remembers running into Jim and Judy several times at Coffee Lake. "Seeing them suit up in the corporate parking lot near our site access and head off into the woods with paddles under one arm and large bamboo poles in the other was a wonderful sight, and affirmed, once again, just how amazing our volunteers are."

In the past decade, Metro has initiated several floodplain restoration projects. By keeping a close eye on key amphibian species, wildlife monitors help gauge the effectiveness of these projects.

In 2006, 49 volunteers contributed more than 300 hours of their time. Along with other amphibians surveyed, they counted more than 359 Northern red-legged frog masses (one egg mass holds between 500 and 1,500 eggs – that's quite a few frogs!).

Thanks to the passage of the 2006 natural areas bond measure, additional fish and wildlife habitat will be protected. As more native frogs and salamanders settle into these newly restored natural areas, Metro's wildlife monitors will be there – with big smiles and high waders – to count them.

Continued

Helping frogs has a happy side effect at Multnomah Channel

Northern red-legged frog

Photo by volunteer Tim Donner

This photo of a Northern red-legged frog was taken by a Metro volunteer at Multnomah Channel. Two water control structures installed there have helped to restore a semblance of the seasonal water flow that existed before development changed it many years ago. In the past few years, Metro's natural resource scientists have let the water drain from the site in early June. Through a graduate research project completed by one of Metro's veteran wildlife monitors, Tierra Curry (who volunteered more than 500 hours over the past five years), Metro scientists learned that this sensitive species of frog was metamorphosing later than previously thought. By retaining water on the site longer than usual, they allowed the rare frog tadpoles a better chance to metamorphose.

Helping the frogs had an incredible side effect: there has been an amazing transformation in the vegetation at the site. An area previously dominated by the aggressively invasive reed canary grass is now almost completely inhabited by native rushes and sedges. The longer flooding helped suppress the invading reed canary grass, which doesn't like to get its feet wet, and allow the native vegetation to flourish.

Volunteer amphibian monitors use bamboo poles to mark the location of egg masses.

Photo by volunteer Jim Morton

Help wanted: wildlife monitors

Wildlife interns needed for 2008 field season

Are you looking for an internship opportunity? Each year Metro recruits volunteer interns to help coordinate the wildlife monitoring program. Interns assist with field season planning, site visits, volunteer coordination, surveys and data management. Interns need to be available for approximately 5-10 hours per week during field season. Preference is given to college and graduate students (service learning is an option), but school affiliation is not mandatory. For more information, call Katy Weil at 503-797-1688 or send e-mail to weilk@metro.dst.or.us.

Amphibian monitors needed for 2008

Metro has been very lucky to have veteran amphibian egg mass monitors these past years, but is always looking to expand its survey crew. The new season begins in February and continues through the beginning of April. Volunteers are asked to commit to a minimum of three surveys, at least every other week, at one site. Orientation consists of classroom training in January and field training in February. Prior experience identifying egg masses is not required, though a scientific interest is appreciated. Waders and necessary equipment will be provided; volunteers will need to dress for the weather. For more information, call Katy Weil at 503-797-1688 or send e-mail to weilk@metro.dst.or.us.

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