

# Hamilton County Soil & Water Conservation District's Conservation Corner

Highlighting the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District's projects, programs, and events.

June 2011

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*Working to manage and  
promote the wise use of  
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## Little Critter, Big Problem for Sacandaga Lake

Even though the Spiny Water Flea tops out at half an inch in length, it could cause big problems for the recently invaded Sacandaga Lake. Native to Eurasia, this invasive crustacean hitchhikes to new lakes when eggs and adults stick to fishing and boating equipment. Anglers beware because the flea can devastate our fisheries by devouring important food sources that fish depend on.

Spiny Water Flea has invaded Great Sacandaga Lake, Peck Lake, Stewarts Bridge Reservoir, and now Sacandaga Lake. The fleas are not harmful to humans or pets,

however, they eat zooplankton that fish rely on for food. They spread to new lakes via down rigging cables, fishing line, bait buckets, anchor ropes, live wells, bilge water, and watercraft.

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Spiny Water Fleas make fishing unenjoyable. They collect on trolling lines by the hundreds, and the heavy build-up makes reeling impossible. They also clog fishing rod eyelets, inhibiting fish from being landed.

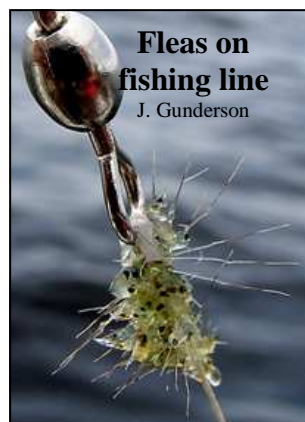
Tail spines prevent smaller fish from swallowing the fleas, and puncture the mouths and stomach linings of larger fish who do eat it. Infestations result in declines in the populations of perch,

smelt, and young fish. Rapid reproduction via sexual or asexual reproduction results in explosive populations. Eggs withstand freezing, drying, and being eaten by predators; are hardy enough to overwinter; and may lie dormant for a few years before they hatch.

### Help Stop The Spread

- \* **Check** your fishing line, anchor ropes, nets, canoes, kayaks, watercraft and trailers for plants, mud, and organisms and remove.
- \* **Drain** all water from watercraft and bait containers.
- \* **Clean** down rigging cables, fishing line, and anchor ropes with hot water or a 5% bleach solution.
- \* **Report** sightings to the District.

For more info on this and other invasive species, visit our website.



**Fleas on  
fishing line**  
J. Gunderson

## Students Battle for First Place at the Hamilton County

Stakes were high for the six local high school teams competing at the District's Envirothon held on May 5. Students completed tough exams in Aquatics, Soils, Forestry, Wildlife, and this year's Current Issue Fresh and Salt Water Estuaries. "Some young adults spend less and less time outdoors, and this competition not only increases awareness of natural resource issues for our future environmental stewards, but also allows students to spend a glorious day hiking the District's nature trail to each

testing station," said Elizabeth Mangle, the District's Director.

For the fourth year in a row, Indian Lake Central School placed first overall, and the Cougars received an engraved plaque and traveled to Geneva, N.Y. to compete in the New York State Envirothon on May 25-26. Only one point separated second and third place, with Wells Central School's Dayota Hawks receiving second. Long Lake's new Envirothon adviser Wendy Donahue prepped her students well, and Somnang and the Technicolored Gnomes were

awarded third place. The Cougars also took home first in Aquatics and Current Issues, and the Dayota Hawks were awarded first place in Forestry, Soils, and Wildlife.



The Indian Lake Cougars received first place.

## Students Uncover Clues to Stream Health

"We've got worms!" exclaimed Daniel O'Connor as he and his 6th grade classmates sorted through the gunk in a kicknet in hot pursuit for stream bugs collected from the Sacandaga River. Mr. Cook's class of Wells Central School spent a day in early June with the District's Conservation Educator Caitlin Stewart learning about benthic macroinvertebrates, or bottom dwelling aquatic organisms whose presence is used to

indicate stream health.

"Each aquatic critter plays a vital role in stream ecology and the aquatic food web," explained Caitlin. "Some species are much less tolerant of pollution than others, and their presence is used to monitor water quality so we can protect and improve stream health when necessary."

Working collaboratively in teams, one student held a kicknet in a riffle while the others scuffed and scraped the stream bottom with their hands and feet, dislodging bugs clinging to rocks, vegetation, and logs. The organisms floated downstream into the net, and students picked through the sample, placing living invertebrates into wide mouth jars for later examination.

Back in the lab, identification keys and microscopes were used to identify and categorize



Bug identification.



Students collect aquatic bugs from the kick net.

macroinvertebrates into pollution tolerant and pollution intolerant categories. Students learned how different types of pollution impact our streams, and how this pollution magnifies up the food chain, eventually impacting humans. They concluded that because their samples were dominated by pollution intolerant species such as mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies, good water quality persisted in that section of the river.