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Tuesday, June 7, 2016

Reflections on the Little Miami River Paddle



We kicked off our summer team with a trip through our second favorite watershed: the Little Miami Watershed. With all five members of the summer team finally together, we, along with Leslie and Jeff, spent two days paddling down the river learning about the Little Miami River and water ecology while growing as a unit.

On this paddle, we were joined by Aaron Rourke of Rivers Unlimited, and were supported by Mike Schumacher and Bill Schieman of Little Miami Watershed Network. One of the most valuable takeaways of this trip were the discussions we shared about civic engagement and the challenges we may face as leaders in the community.

As members of the Rivers Institute and Fitz Center, civic engagement is at the heart of what we do. We want to develop community around rivers and preserve and value Dayton's rivers as the asset they are to the Dayton community. But we recognize that it is all too easy to get pulled into the efforts of everyday life—our school work, careers, and personal relationships—and neglect to engage with our broader communities in meaningful ways. Bill Schieman brought up how valuable it is for citizens to commit to lifelong engagement in their communities. By becoming involved in initiatives as simple as cleaning up trash from the river or serving at a local soup kitchen, to larger commitments like serving on a local zoning or school board or working with a conservation agency, we can stay connected to the people and resources in our community. And all the work that people do, large and small, coalesces to create a vibrant community.



A vital part of the summer team's effectiveness of coordinating programs is our interaction with children. It is a true blessing to be able to interact with children and young adults. Whenever an opportunity arises to work with kids, excitement immediately follows. However, there are certain challenges that present themselves when working with adolescents. Not following directions, making inappropriate remarks and not paying attention all hinder the educational experience. Unfortunately, these are situations naturally present themselves when working with younger audiences.

When discussing with Bill about these difficulties, he voiced his advice to us young educators. Maintaining composure and giving the children your focus and attention shows them that you care and they are valued, and sometimes that attention and love is all that they need. One of the most important things to keep in mind is that, although the children may not show an interest in the discussion or activity at the moment, they do indeed reflect on the experience and remember it. Engaging with children does have an impact, and that is important to remember when it seems like nothing is sinking in.



Both days of the trip, we had some very thought provoking discussions with Aaron, Mike, and Bill on some of the challenges of sustainability and food issues in the world. Our conversations, both days, focused on food and climate change. We discussed the problems with not taking action until we directly feel the effects of unsustainable behavior. We talked about how often this conversation comes up in day to day dialogue but our generation and future generations need to focus on taking action. Sustainability has become more of a of an idealistic aspiration in our society rather than an actionable paradigm. Now is the time to actually act upon this ideal and work towards a more sustainable future.



On a more lighthearted note, we saw a lot of wildlife that made the trip that much more exciting. We saw 148 turtles and caught three of them. Disclaimer: we let all turtles free. Their names were Graham, Lucas, and Squirt (Gimme some fin. Noggin'. Duuude.) We also saw a bald eagle, a beaver, an otter, and green heron among other animals.

All in all we grew a lot as individuals and are looking forward to an fun and impactful summer!

