

# The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program Flows to Mono County

by Bartshé Miller

**G**ot dissolved oxygen? In the Mono Basin, just above the County Road culvert on Mill Creek, students determined they did—to the tune of nine parts per million, an amount that can sustain populations of trout and macroinvertebrates.

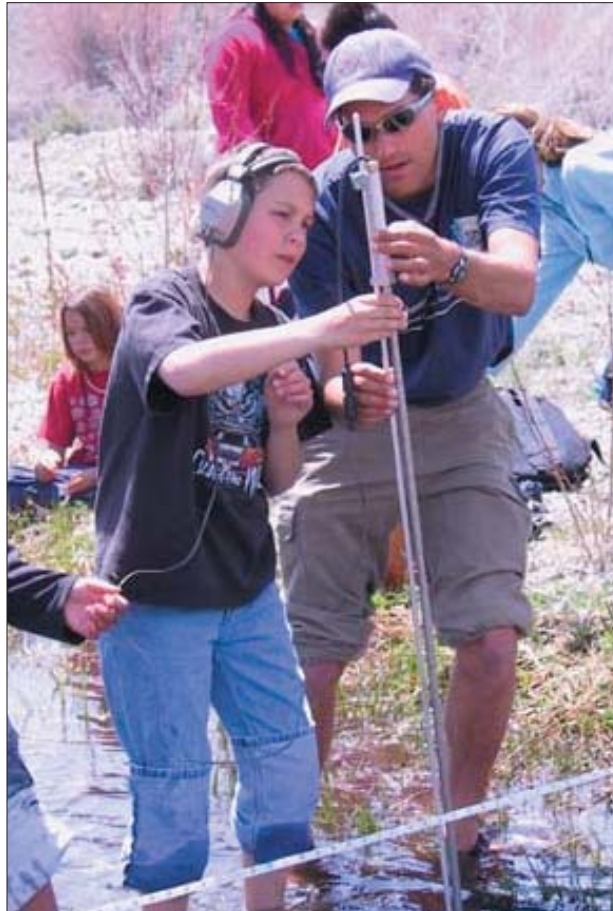
These students were part of the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program's formal launch in Mono County, which took place May 3 with the help of volunteer docents and Mono Lake Committee staff.

The goal of the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program is to familiarize students with their local streams by using hands-on science to determine the relative health of the ecosystem. In fast-paced and fun testing stations, students learn in-depth lessons about water acidity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, total dissolved solids, hardness, turbidity, and nitrates. They also learn about the role of macroinvertebrates, fish, streamflow, and riparian vegetation in stream ecosystems, creating an introduction to the concept of assessing stream health in their own backyard.

## **Launching the 2005 Watershed Program Season in the Mono Basin**

With new equipment and recently trained staff and docents, the first day of the spring 2005 program began on Mill Creek—an easily accessible tributary of Mono Lake. Students from Lee Vining and Mammoth began exploring the creeks through six water quality testing stations.

After lunch in the field, staff from the California Department of Fish & Game



*Mono Lake Committee Information Specialist Greg Reis teaches students about stream flow on Mill Creek during the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program in the Mono Basin.*

arrived to demonstrate fish sampling via electrofishing. Students weighed, measured, and identified brown trout before returning them to the creek.

At three afternoon stations the students focused on streamflow measurements, macroinvertebrate identification, and a survey technique for quantifying riparian vegetation.

## **What Is A Healthy Creek and How Do We Know?**

Water quality is key in determining the health of a creek and a watershed. Understanding the relationships between water quality, fish, macroinvertebrates,

riparian vegetation, and the physical make-up of a watershed helps the students determine the state of a creek's health.

The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program also extends beyond the Mono Basin, and on May 18, Mammoth Elementary 6th graders walked to Mammoth Creek and investigated their local creek.

In its first year the Eastern Sierra Watershed Program completed two field days in Mono County before spending more time developing pre- and post-classroom activities which make California State Science Education Standards relevant to our local creeks. This is a dynamic, hands-on program with room to expand its relevant curriculums and activities to 7th and 8th graders as well.

The Eastern Sierra Watershed Program is a partnership effort made possible through a grant from the California Native Plant Society, Bristlecone Chapter. Additional funding and volunteer effort has come from the Sierra Club Toiyabe Chapter, Range of Light Group, and Mono Lake Committee staff

and members. Thanks to the US Forest Service for loaning the flow meter. Special thanks go to California Fish & Game, Patricia Schlichting with the Mono County Office of Education, and Leigh Parmenter with the successful parent ESWP program in Inyo County. ❖

*Bartshé Miller is the Committee's Education Director. He spent a good portion of the spring runoff period making sure the peak flows didn't take off with his driveway.*