Volunteers and Their Data – What We Know About Blue Thumb Streams
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*Blue Thumb* is the water pollution education program of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission’s Water Quality Division. Volunteer monitoring is a fundamental component of *Blue Thumb*, which requires participants to complete a rigorous training to become certified volunteers. Data collected includes: water chemistry, benthic macroinvertebrates, fish, and instream habitat information. Volunteers who monitor with Oklahoma’s *Blue Thumb* water pollution education program have been active for almost seventeen years.

With the determination of regional reference conditions by OCC staff in 2006, *Blue Thumb* volunteers realized a new opportunity to explore and utilize the biological data they had been working so diligently to collect. With assistance from OCC technical staff, *Blue Thumb* staff members work with volunteers to analyze their data in light of regional averages for the high quality sites. Being able to compare the streams with this high quality average within an ecoregion simplifies the understanding of stream health for the average citizen, that person who is not a scientist. Dependable “metrics” allow staff to work with volunteers to come up with comparisons that result in an understandable ranking for the volunteer monitored streams.

Once volunteers sit down and experience a data interpretation with a *Blue Thumb* staff member, the volunteers create a draft data report. Some reports are very simple and short, some are a little longer and more detailed. The reports are very representative of their authors – some are going to be scientific, and some a little less so. Volunteers are encouraged to perform additional research to supplement the information. The principle result is that each report contains invaluable information that is presented in a way that most citizens can understand it.

In summary, this presentation will cover:
- *Blue Thumb* stream monitoring program
- Volunteers using their own data
- The value of pulling data together within a concise report
- Volunteers adding the “personality” and motivation to care
- Cost effectiveness – volunteers promoting the message of stream protection