

## Outreach project puts bay tributaries on display

*Center for the Inland Bays takes residents out on waterways*

By Ron MacArthur | Jun 09, 2014



*Photo by: Ron MacArthur* After kayaking for more than two hours on Love Creek, Your Creek team members and Center for the Inland Bays staff prepare to get out of the water near the Route 24 bridge.

Paddling a kayak on a sunny, late spring afternoon on Love Creek is an ideal way to help people learn about the creek that flows near their homes. That's the objective of the Center for the Inland Bay's three-year project called Your Creek.

It begins with Love Creek, a primary tributary to Rehoboth Bay and one of the 14 major Inland Bays tributaries in the Cape Region. Earlier this month, center staff led a group of volunteers on a kayak trip on Love Creek.

Most residents' only view of the creek occurs when they ride over Love Creek bridge on Route 24, said Sally Boswell, the center's education and outreach coordinator. "A lot of people who live here now didn't grow up here and don't know about the creeks," she said.

She's hoping that changes in a dramatic way. It's hard for her to contain her enthusiasm for the initiative and the Love Creek pilot project. "We see huge potential with this," Boswell said. "It can be a transformational kind of project. It's a home-run to get people to feel a real relationship with the Inland Bays and with the creek where they live."

As part of the initiative, citizen teams will be established for each creek. Team members will access a data already assembled on the creeks thanks to long-standing volunteer water monitoring system coordinated under the University of Delaware Sea Grant program. "We want to share that information in a user-friendly way, creek by creek by creek," she said.

Since 1991, a corps of citizen scientist volunteers has collected water samples at assigned sites around the Inland Bays and along its tributaries to measure a range of water quality characteristics such as dissolved oxygen, water clarity, harmful algae and bacteria levels.

Boswell said the center hopes that from the Your Creek project, citizens will form their own groups similar to Adopt a Watershed groups.

The team and staff will reach out to communities along Love Creek to not only educate residents, but also conduct a survey and establish a baseline on the status of the creek. "We want to see what the level of interest is and what the concerns are," she said. "We also want to know what the misunderstandings and perceptions are. We know a lot of people are very concerned about potential development projects on Love Creek."

Already proposed in the Love Creek area are new housing projects, the 600-site Love Creek RV Park and Campground, a new Delaware State Police barracks and a new Cape Henlopen School District elementary school, recently approved in a district referendum.

Boswell said each team would develop a snapshot in time of Love Creek to establish current conditions and possible threats to the watershed.

Boswell said they will take what they learn from the Love Creek pilot project and apply it to other creeks. To start, projects are planned for Vine's Creek and Pepper's Creek, which both empty into Indian River Bay and Dirickson Creek, which empties into Little Assawoman Bay. The ultimate goal of the project would be to have Your Creek initiatives on all major tributaries of the three Inland Bays.

Boswell said education and involvement will lead Love Creek-area residents to understand the current state of the creek and what's needed to prepare for the future. "Residents can be well positioned to be able to address concerns with one voice," she said.



There is still plenty of kayaking left after Love Creek narrows. *(Photo by: Ron MacArthur)*



Most of the shoreline of the upper reaches of Love Creek looks like this with thick woodlands. *(Photo by: Sally Boswell)*



Near sunset, CIB staffer Sally Boswell paddles on Love Creek. *(Photo by: Ron MacArthur)*



Eric Buehl, CIB's land protection and restoration coordinator, prepares his kayak. *(Photo by: Ron MacArthur)*