

[Water Quality Sampling on the Henrys Fork](#)

<http://www.marineventures.org/blog/>



Maddie and Annemarie count aquatic bugs downstream from Island Park Dam.

On July 23rd I participated in water quality testing on the Henry's Fork with Marine Ventures and Henry's Fork Foundation. I have a strong interest in water quality from an internship I took on last spring with the [BioSITE program](#) at the Children's Discovery Museum in San Jose. There I learned about river health and used the excellent [Streamkeeper's Field Guide](#) to teach elementary school students how to do basic water quality tests in the nearby Guadalupe River.

I had heard about the Henry's Fork area in Idaho and how the fish populations there were disappearing, and how no one really knows why. I wondered if water quality had something to do with it. I was very surprised to learn that there hadn't been any real water quality testing in the area in 15 years! I brought my Streamkeeper's Field Guide to Idaho and worked with Marine Ventures and Henry's Fork Foundation to design a sampling program. We surveyed six different sites and collected water samples from each. The sites sampled were all along the upper Henry's Fork sub-basin and included Last Chance Canal, Island Park Dam, Blue Springs Creek, Fish Creek,

Osborne Bridge, and Thurmond Creek. The water quality testing fit in perfectly with Marine Ventures' aerial photography of the area, because we could pair the pictures with water testing results. These water samples were sent to a lab in Twin Falls, Idaho, and we're waiting for results soon.

After spending all day testing water, we don't yet have an exact reason for the fish deaths. Each site had a different problem. For example, Thurmond Creek was very hot and had a pH of over 9.5, which is far too high, and Island Park Dam had a very low dissolved oxygen level. All together? None of the sites were as healthy as we'd like them to be, and they could all stand to lower their pH levels. We will know more when the samples are done being tested for other pollutants at the lab.

It's hard to believe that water quality testing hasn't been done in 15 years. Coming from California, where water is in shorter supply, it was like entering a whole different world. People didn't seem to be worried about water pollution or supply around the Henry's Fork. In Idaho there are few regulations or laws for water or septic systems. Thus, lack of water and contamination by septic systems has been a big problem for fish and even people, since the local newspaper reports that people have had to [boil their drinking water](#) due to leaky septic. More study is needed, and I hope I can continue to be part of that.

Maddie Sheehan Perkins is an intern with the [California Coastkeeper Alliance](#) and a junior at Laurel Springs High School.