

## **Dr. Bill Earl Youth Fishing Events A Huge Success**

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“My two kids had never fished before, but since they participated in the Bill Earl youth fishing program, they are now fishing fanatics!”

“What an amazing experience we all had at the fishing class a few weeks ago. You have put together a truly amazing opportunity for so many kids. The packets they each received in the mail were extraordinary as well. It was a great day and wonderful memory.”

“I wanted to pass along my gratitude for hosting my son and daughter at the Bill Earl Fishing Event earlier this month. Prior to attending, my kids have inquired about fishing but since no one in the family fishes we really didn't pursue this activity. That all changed when we attended your event. Since then we have already been fishing a couple more times. My daughter Carolyn has become an expert at changing hooks and experimenting with different baits. Enclosed is a picture I took yesterday at Sleepy Hollow State Park. It was a great morning of just sitting on the dock and spending quiet time with my kids. Bill Earl would be proud.”

“Thank you for organizing the Bill Earl Fishing Program. My daughter and I had a wonderful time together at the event. The program was very well organized, extremely informative and we both had a blast! Thank you for the fishing pole and tackle box also. Lexi is now sure to have many fond memories of fishing in her life. We appreciate your time, efforts, and generosity to encourage a love of nature in young people.”

These are among the comments received from parents of kids who participated in the second annual Bill Earl Youth Fishing Program hosted by the Mid-Michigan Steelheaders, a local sport fishing club. John Hesse, an adjunct Faculty member in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, and a member of the Steelheaders, established the program in honor of Dr. Bill Earl who passed away in July 2010. Dr. Earl was a retired physician from Howell who loved helping kids learn about the outdoors.

The program brings Mid-Michigan area youth and their parents/guardians to fishing workshops on three consecutive Saturdays each May. In 2012, the events were held May 5<sup>th</sup> at Lake Lansing Park South, May 12<sup>th</sup> at Motz Park near St. Johns, and May 19<sup>th</sup> at Hawk Island Park.

A goal was set to have approximately 50 youth per event. With some nasty weather when we began in 2012, we got off to a slow start with only 39 kids showing up. But WOW, when the weather finally cleared, the program closed with a bang! We had 62 kids and about an equal number of parents for our last event and one could really feel the excitement in the air!

A total of 146 youth participated over the three events. Like last year, the kids learned basic fishing skills such as tackle rigging, casting, regulations and ethics. Then they got to apply those skills and knowledge with the assistance of trained volunteers. Nearly all of the kids caught fish, for many the first fish of their life. Each kid took home a high quality rod and reel, a nice tackle box with a supply of basic tackle, a bait storage box, a tape measure from DNR, and a bag of “goodies” with extra lures, bobbers, and educational booklets.

This year, we added displays of live macro-invertebrates from local waters to teach kids about indicators of good water quality, and we also had live sea lampreys to help youth begin to understand the threats and impacts from invasive species. Youth and adults alike enjoyed seeing and handling these organisms up close.

Within just a few days after each event, a package was mailed to each youth, personally congratulating the kids with a formal “Certificate of Participation”, and also including a map showing 30 fishing locations in the

immediate Lansing area, pictures of the youth member taken during the event, a \$2.00 voluntary youth fishing license and a \$1.00 Sports ID Card.

Pictures like these below offer just a glimpse of the kids enjoying their experience. These memories and the skills they learned will last forever.



Much of the success of the program can be attributed to the terrific partnerships with 12 other organizations, nearly 40 donors, and dozens of volunteers who worked at one or more of the events. Partners included the MSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Michigan DNR Fisheries and Law Divisions, Ingham County Parks and Recreation, Clinton County Parks and Green Spaces, Eaton County Parks, Eaton Conservation District, Fenner Nature Center, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Project F.I.S.H., Margaret Holtschlag's Big Lesson Programs, Trout Unlimited, and the Retired and Senior Retirees Program (RSVP).

In addition to being a major donor, the MSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife had several students and faculty who participated as volunteers in 2012: Carson Prichard (M.S. candidate), Kellylynne Donahue (undergrad student), Dr. Lois Wolfson (faculty), and Ted Batterson (retired faculty). Live sea lampreys were provided each week by Yu-Wen Chung-Davidson (faculty). Mark Stephens, Project FISH now in CARRS, was also a key partner, member of the planning committee, and volunteer for the program.

Hesse heard numerous parents commenting about the quality of help their children received from the volunteers. Both years the program averaged 34 volunteers per event - a ratio of one volunteer for every 1.4 kids, truly amazing and the kids and parents obviously appreciated it.

After a successful program in 2011, the Steelheaders prepared and widely distributed a Guidance Document to encourage similar new programs in other communities. That document can be viewed at <http://midmichigansteelheaders.clubspaces.com>. Hesse is pleased that this document inspired new programs in at least two other Michigan cities this year.

In addition, this year one of our young volunteers, Dan Stephens (Mark Stephen's son), produced a You-Tube video about the program. It can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfrunPq8BNE&sns=em>.

This youth fishing program shows what can be done through collaboration among numerous organizations and a commitment from those involved in helping youth learn new skills and sharing their love for the environment. Hesse thanks the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and all the partners for their ongoing support, active participation, and encouragement.

Dr. Lois Wolfson (not pictured) served as a photographer at two of the events.



Kellylynne Donahue, a MSU Fisheries and Wildlife undergrad student, teaching youth about the perils of invasive species.



Sea lamprey provided by researcher Dr. Yu-Wen Chung-Davidson



Mark Stephens of Project FISH showing how organisms that live in a body of water are a reflection of water quality.



Dr. Ted Batterson giving assistance to one of the youth.



Dr. Ted Batterson letting kids experience what a sea lamprey feels like to touch or hold.



Carson Prichard helping a young participant learn how to properly bait a hook.



Kellylynne assisting kids how to rig their lines properly.