

■ Final exam for environmental science class involves field trip

BY ERIC LEWIS
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

Some came prepared in tall rubber boots, others wore flip flops. But after dousing themselves in insect repellent, students from Riverview High School were ready to explore nature. Pamela Fowler's environmental science class, along with students involved in an extracurricular bird study project, were bussed back to the old Mill Creek dam in east Riverview.

The dam was once the source of water for the old naval base in Riverview, but yesterday the beautiful forest it sits in became the subject of a science project — and final exam — for Riverview High students.

Some students were testing water quality under the watchful eye of Parks Canada's Dan Sinclair, who has worked with students throughout the semester. The samples will be compared to some taken last month at Fundy Park's Dixon Falls. The idea was to start with a "pristine" water sample and compare it with a sample taken from a municipal stream.

Others were learning about flora, fauna, land use and habitats in the area from Heather Hawker, forestry manager with the City of Moncton, and Department of Natural Resources forest rangers Burton Murray and Mike Brown. Students were shown how to check the age and health of trees and given tips on some of the plant life (wintergreen leaves, for example, can apparently be used to make a tea that is high in iron). On the way into the site, Greater Moncton Planning District Commission executive director Bill Budd filled the students in on the history of the area. It all made for a fun, informative and picturesque break from the classroom.

"If you really want to learn stuff, you've got to get out in the field," student Dan DeLong said, expressing the feelings of many of his classmates.

This semester, Dan and his classmates have learned how to test water, take tree samples and take a basic inventory of plant and wildlife. Dan is now actually considering minoring in environmental science next year while majoring in English at Mount Allison University in Sackville.

Pamela Fowler, the environmental science teacher, was beaming, watching her students mill about in nature, learning from experts in different fields. From the planning commission to the forestry experts, she said everyone has been supportive of the program. Codiac Transit even pitched in yesterday, driving

the students as far back into the site as a bus could go.

When all is said and done, the students will have to prepare a presentation discussing the ecological value of the Mill Creek dam area and come up with an argument supporting why the area could serve as a nature park.

While yesterday's adventure in the forest served as a final exam for many of the students, it may also one day help shape the future of Riverview.

With the guidance of the planning commission, the students will be preparing a presentation for Riverview council on the possibility of turning the entire area into a nature park and interpretive centre.

The idea has actually been floating about for years, and Bill Budd says the town has acquired about 160 hectares of land, but with so much residential development in Riverview, the town could decide to sell some of the land to a developer if it chose to.

But Bill says there is a strong case for a nature park, with the large body of water, a loose trail system already in place and varied wildlife and plant species. The Riverview Cross-Country Ski Club's trails are nearby, and the waterway is actually quite a bit closer to civilization than some might realize. The naval base, Bridgedale and Carriage Hill Estates neighbourhoods are each only a short hike from the dam. The 30-acre site of the future kindergarten-Grade 8 east end Riverview school is nearby, and Bridgedale Boulevard, which will one day turn east off Gunningsville Boulevard and stretch to the town limits, will run near the waterway in the coming years.

Bill says there is a great opportunity to turn the dam and its surroundings into a sprawling nature park that is easily accessible through several neighbourhoods.

He would like the town to make moves in the near future to protect the land and draw up plans for a park.

"We're treating (the students) as consultants doing a master plan," Bill said.

Dan DeLong was all for it, saying, "It's nice to actually get involved in the community around you."

Alex Miller, a Grade 11 student and member of the bird grand project, said he's been interested in nature and wildlife his entire life and enjoys getting out of the classroom for some hands-on learning.

"The whole planning of a nature park is a good idea," he said.

Isaac Trail, a Grade 11 student who was performing water tests with Rachel Hudson, said, "Anybody can tell you, it's a world of difference to learn something in the classroom and to come out here and actually see it."



ERIC ADER/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Under the watchful eye of Parks Canada's Dan Sinclair, left, Kelsey Chevarie, Laura Crossman and Sarah Bueil perform a water velocity test as they and students from Riverview High's Grade 12 environmental science class headed to Mill Creek by the old reservoir in Riverview.