Introduction

The Susquehanna River has been the center of water quality assessment studies for over a decade. The river spans 747 kilometers and acts as the “mother” river to the Chesapeake Bay. Benthic macroinvertebrate communities have long served as biological indicators of the health of large rivers, but can be sensitive to sharp increases in water discharge levels. (Song 2007, Metcalfe 1989).

In July 2015, the water discharge levels at the USGS gauge by Sunbury, PA rose nearly threefold from the monthly average. (USGS 01554000 Susquehanna River at Sunbury, PA) Passive sampling methods (eg. rock baskets, Hester-Dendy multiple samplers) serve as artificial substrates on which local macroinvertebrate communities can colonize and be assessed at the family level.

The purpose of this project is to assess the main stem of the Susquehanna River using macroinvertebrate communities utilizing passive methods and multiple metrics (e.g. Bray-Curtis Proportional Similarity, Shannon Diversity Index, Hilsenhoff Index) in comparison to assessments completed in years of average water discharge.

Site Description:

- All sites are below the Adam T. Bower inflatable dam, with sites 1-4 below low head dams.
- Sites 1-4 are accessible through Shady Nook boat launch in Selinsgrove, PA, which lies approximately seven kilometers below the confluence of the North and West branches of the Susquehanna River.
- Site 5 is located above the Sunbury Generation Power Plant in Shamokin Dam, PA approximately two kilometers away from Shady Nook.
- Site 1 and 5 receive water from the West branch.
- Sites 2, 3 and 4 receive water from the North branch.
- Site 3 frequently experiences periods of low water flow.
- Site 4 is impacted by acid mine drainage from Shamokin Creek.

Results:

The methods used were adapted from the EPA protocol for assessments of non-wadeable streams (Flotemersch et al. 2006).

Passive sampling (Rock Baskets & Hester Dendy samplers) Rock Baskets and Hester-Dendy samplers were arranged in diamond formation.

Rock baskets were placed on cinder blocks to elevated them from the riverbed.

Site one and two had 2 extra rock baskets laid directly on the substrate.

Five total sites (Twenty-one subsites)

Time Frame: Seven weeks.

Metrics Used: Hilsenhoff Biotic Index, Shannon Diversity Index, %EPT, Bray-Curtis Similarity Index

Discussion:

The most common EPT taxa collected were Heptageniidae and Isonychiidae mayflies, along with Hydropsychid caddisflies. Hilsenhoff Biotic Indexes were approximately 3.5 for each site, Site 4 bearing the highest biotic index (Figure 7).

Heightened discharge levels may have lowered %EPT from last year’s analysis, possibly better conditions for Amphipod survival (Holomuzki & Hoyle 1990).

Sites 3 and 4 possess lowest SDIs, Site 3 typically low water level, Site 4 affected by acid-mine drainage (Tables 1 and 2).

Hilsenhoff Biotic Index comparable to previous analysis performed at sites, but ratios of taxa present different permutation (Figure 2).

Hester Dendy samplers are being processed, will likely present more Oligochaeta, Gastropoda, and Chironomidae.

Acknowledgements:

This research was made possible by funds provided by the Susquehanna River Heartland Coalition for Environmental Studies, the Degenstein Foundation, and Susquehanna University. Also we would like to acknowledge Brian Rothbard, Amir Alwall, and Grace O’ Malley for assisting with collections.

References available upon request.