



# Local High School Students Participate in Multi-State River Program

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Photo by Louise Jett | L&C and NGRREC Environmental Educator Natalie Marioni facilitates a group Skype session between Alton and Edison High School students Sept. 24.

Alton - Thanks to the newly developed Mississippi River XChange (MRX) program, local students are making upstream connections along the Mississippi River.

Students from Alton High School (AHS) and Edison High School (EHS) in Minneapolis, Minn., are participating in the multi-state program, which aims to link high school students within the Mississippi River Basin to the river in very tangible ways by providing a learning platform for them to discover the river's differences and similarities together.

The MRX program, which is currently in its pilot year, is partially funded through an environmental education grant awarded by Illinois American Water. It was developed by staff at the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC) and Lewis and Clark Community College, with input and review from others, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers St. Louis District Rivers Project Office, the Audubon Missouri Center at Riverlands, Audubon Mississippi, the University of Minnesota STEM, and Alton High School teachers Sondra Zerow and Dan Pettus.

"We are excited about this innovative program," said Natalie Marioni, environmental educator at L&C and NGRREC. "Participating students are encouraged to view the river as a whole, and not just study the portion that runs through their backyards. Our hope is to influence young adults to engage in environmental stewardship and to be empowered members of society, helping make our communities more sustainable for generations to come."

Both AHS and EHS students recently experienced separate canoe excursions during which they collected water quality data through sampling. Students explored the chemical properties of the water and the invertebrates present. Both schools came to the same conclusion: the water samples taken from the Mississippi River and surrounding creeks were of poor quality.

Observations and experiences, which occurred during the canoe excursions, were discussed between the two classes and Marioni during a group Skype (internet video chat) session held Sept. 24. The students agreed that the excursions were educational and interesting, and they discussed similarities and differences between the upper and middle parts of the river. For instance, both schools observed similar macroinvertebrates, but the widths of the river at the two locations varied tremendously, with Alton's portion of the Mississippi being much wider than Minneapolis'.

Eventually, the students will design and conduct stewardship projects geared towards watershed protection, for example, the implementation of a stream cleanup program or flood plain restoration through invasive species removal.

"We're looking at the bigger picture," Marioni said. "The river as a system is important locally and nationally. This program is geared towards creating river stewards who can take what they learn and extend it out into the community."

For more information about NGRREC visit [www.ngrrec.org](http://www.ngrrec.org).