

Valley campers venture into Susquehanna River



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Nineteen CSIU STEM Campers participated in the Susquehanna Valley Riverkeepers OTTERS Riverwalk Experience on Friday morning in the Susquehanna River near the Sunbury boat launch.

CSIU's Girls in STEM Camp participates in OTTERS program

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SUNBURY — Squeals of excitement echoed off the Susquehanna River water Friday morning during the final day of CSIU's Girls in STEM Camp, as 20 campers ventured into the water in the shadow of Veterans Memorial Bridge to marry STEM and the environment.

Pairing up with the Middle Susquehanna Riverkeeper, the STEM campers spent part of the morning taking short video clips of the ecosystem around the river as part of the OTTERS — Observational Tours To Explore River Systems — program.

"Our goal here is to protect this river and show that all critters, and creatures are all interconnected,"

Riverkeeper John Zaktansky told the campers as they prepared to enter the water at the Sunbury boat launch.

The weeklong STEM camp was put together by CSIU, with designs on putting the STEM world in front of girls in grades six through eight, while understanding it goes beyond the typical science, technology, engineering and math concepts. The camp was funded by a PA Smart Grant, Tanya Dynda of CSIU, said.

"Most people don't think of STEM living in the world around us," said Dynda, CSIU's Instruction and STEM specialist. "It's everything, not just science, not

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CSIU STEM Camp participant Ainslie Hollhan, 11, Mifflinburg, reacts to the cool water of the Susquehanna River while wading through it on Friday morning as she and her fellow campers participated in the Susquehanna Riverkeeper's OTTERS Riverwalk Experience.

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just math. They are getting a level of understanding of what their environment holds and the ecosystem that thrives here.”

Zaktansky said the goal was to give each team time to creatively explore the river on their own, pick up trash, identify creatures and film the experience with GoPro cameras,

recording short clips to share to social media.

“I’ve been in computer science for 20 years and this is a way for us to merge the environment and computers,” instructor Doug Fessler said. “We’re not going to get away from technology, so we’re using it as a way to get these kids exposed to nature, introducing the technology to create videos.”

For STEM campers Rachel

Roslevich, 12 of Turbotville, and 11-year-old Kennedy Moore, of Watsonstown, the river crossing was a bit out of their comfort zone.

“It’s a been a lot of fun getting into the water,” Roslevich said, who admitted she wasn’t quite ready to touch crayfish some were pulling out of the water. “I might be looking for a chance to do this more.”

“The bugs, they sort of annoy

me,” Moore said. “They keep getting on me; I’ve never seen bugs like these. But it’s been a lot of fun exploring the water and the wood. I’ve never got to go out and do stuff like this.”

Fessler and Dynda both said creating a level of environmental awareness for the next generation is critical, one of the goals of the camp.

“We need to get the next generation to the river to realize

how important it is,” Fessler said. “Clean water affects everyone. And we are trying to show these kids how other life depends on water and how it impacts their lives.”

“It’s amazing to watch their faces and their expressions,” Dynda said. “The excitement and energy is phenomenal. It’s great to see how they interact, especially those who don’t do this kind of thing.”