The Texas Conservation Alliance is working with the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University to expand the number of “stream teams” on East Texas rivers.

These citizen scientists carry out monthly water quality testing at a designated spot along the Sabine, Sulphur or Neches Rivers. Janice Bezanson, executive director of the Texas Conservation Alliance, says the volunteers test temperature, pH, and other variables. The data is then sent to the Meadows Center at San Marcos.

“The state does quite a bit of water quality testing, but it simply can’t reach enough places to have as much data as it would like. So, having the Texas Stream Team in place vastly increases the number of sites that are tested,” Bezanson said.

The Stream Team program began more than 20 years ago and 8,000 people have been trained, according to Travis Tidwell, Stream Team training coordinator at the Meadows Center.

“We’re kind of like the brain of the operation. All of the data flows to us and we manage it, store it, and analyze it," Tidwell said.

Tidwell estimates 500 citizen scientists across Texas are currently involved in monthly water
quality monitoring on rivers, streams and lakes. He's found the number of volunteers has dropped off in East Texas, so the Meadows Center is working with other environmental agencies to beef up recruitment in these parts.

“Just by having these hundreds of people going out and collecting water quality samples, it's more eyes out on the water, so that they can identify pollution events -- pipe breaks, sewage spills or illegal dumping," Tidwell said.

But first, the volunteers must go through a six-hour training program to learn how to operate the equipment and gather the data correctly. One was recently held at the Ellen Trout Zoo in Lufkin. Janice Bezanson hopes to organize another training day in the future as volunteers come forward.

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Texas Stream Teams piece

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