

MELISSA AND REGINA BEHNKE – HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT AND MOTHER



Melissa Behnke (high school student) and mother Regina Behnke

Melissa Behnke attended the first MO DIRT soil health survey training in October of 2015 in St. Louis. At the time, she was a sophomore in the Parkway South High School in St. Louis County. She just had moved to St. Louis and her biology teacher, Julie Jaus, suggested she join the soil health monitoring for extra credit in her biology class. Melissa was very enthusiastic about this opportunity and with the help of her mother, Regina Behnke, they started the soil health surveys in a woodland habitat in Queeny Park. Two years later, Melissa continues monitoring this site with her mother. They are our first beta testers of the MO DIRT soil health survey methodology. Their commitment to MO DIRT has been invaluable. Up to now, they have conducted 22 soil health surveys. Melissa has been in touch continuously attending all our requests and recommendations and providing precious input that has made the MO DIRT manual and training more clear and complete.

Melissa's long-time participation in MO DIRT will end in June 2018 when she graduates from high school. She has plans to study biology and is looking for college opportunities at MIT, George Washington University, Washington University, and Missouri University of Science and Technology.

She shared with us the following notes on her experience with MO DIRT:

"MO-DIRT has been a great opportunity for me to do some scientific work outside of a classroom setting and I feel it has helped prepare me for a future in the sciences. I relish the hands-on experience; it makes me feel like I am actually doing something to further others' research."

Training: October 29, 2015

Surveys start date: December 2015

Surveys end date: June 2018 (High school graduation)

Team members: Melissa Behnke, Regina Behnke (high school student and mother)

Habitat: Woodland

Location: Queeny Park, St. Louis

Institution: Parkway South High School

RON AND LORELY LATHER – MASTER NATURALISTS



Ron and Lorely Lather attended a MO DIRT soil health survey training in Sedalia in September of 2016. This training was offered to Missouri Master Naturalists as part of their advanced training event “Where the Ozarks Meet the Prairies”. Ron and Lorely joined MO DIRT right away and started monitoring a woodland site on their property near St. James. They continue to monitor their site and plan to be with MO DIRT through 2018.

The Lathers have made great contributions to MO DIRT not only by sharing their experience monitoring soil health but promoting this citizen science project. They hosted a soil health survey training in Rolla for the Master Naturalists of their chapter, the Meramec Hills in March of 2017. Because of their dedication, MO DIRT has nine more monitoring sites in the area around Rolla.

Below are some notes they shared with us about their experience with MO DIRT:

“Our experience with MODIRT has been excellent, from the very great teachers of the classes by Sandra & Terry, to the understanding that came from the class. I was afraid it was going to be difficult, but once we started, we found it was just as Sandra & Terry had instructed us. Sandra is very quick to respond to any questions that may arise, and she gave another class in Rolla after there were enough people interested. We love to be outdoors, so this study works well for us and fits right in with our Master Naturalist volunteer work and also our tree monitoring for Forest Keepers. It is a great learning experience and we enjoy it.”

Training: September 17, 2016, Sedalia

Surveys start date: October 2016

Surveys end date: November 2018

Team members: Husband and wife (Master Naturalists-Meramec Hills Chapter)

Habitat: Woodland

Location: St. James

Training hosts: Rolla, March 17, 2017

Institution: Missouri Master Naturalists

ANDREA AND BAKR BERRY (MOTHER AND SON)



Andrea and Bakr are members of a homeschool family based in Illinois. They attended a MO DIRT training in September of 2016 and started monitoring a site in January of 2017. Their site is a prairie at the Audubon Riverland Bird Sanctuary in West Alton. They have been so excited about MO DIRT that they cross the state line once a month to monitor their site. Andrea is very much interested in science and gives her son plenty of opportunities to explore the wonders of nature. They have been very active with MO DIRT. They conducted one year cycle of soil monitoring and will share the soil kit with other homeschool families.

Training: September 27, 2016

Surveys start date: January 2017

Surveys end date: November 2017

Team members: Mother and son (Home school family)

Habitat: Prairie

Location: Audubon Riverland Bird Sanctuary, West Alton

DAVID HENDEL – LANDOWNER



David Hendel is very active on his 257 acre farm in southeast Missouri, where he has grown corn, soybean, winter wheat, brassicas, sunflowers, milo and pumpkin (some of which he dedicates to feeding wildlife). He also grows sugar maple trees, which he uses to make syrup, and bottle gourds, which he fashions into bird houses. David was very interested in the opportunity to learn about the soil health of his land. He attended a MO DIRT training in February of 2016 and started monitoring a grassland in his farm the same month. With the help of his wife, David has conducted 20 surveys and plans to continue the monitoring through 2018. David has been very committed to MO DIRT. He has been a beta tester of the data entry portal and his input has helped us improving the manual and the training.

Below, David shares some of his experiences with MO DIRT:

“The soil surveys have been interesting to see the results, and how the power of the sun affects the soil temperature. By collecting the soil core samples throughout the year, you can see the increase in root growth, and in insect usage. The site that I have been collecting is an old cattle pasture that has not had cattle for 15 years. In the past two years that I have been performing the surveys, I have noticed how the plants have reacted to the moisture, and the passage of time. By concentrating on a specific site, you can detect changes at a micro level. It has been fun to do the science with my family also!”

Attended training: February 5, 2016

Surveys start date: February 2016

Surveys end date: Continue surveys through 2018

Team members: Ellen Hendel (wife)

Habitat: Grassland

Location: Farm close to Zalma, southeast Missouri.