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Buoy Near Bill Emerson Memorial Bridge Tests Water Quality

APRIL 04TH 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Cape Girardeau, Missouri - As people stroll along the riverfront in Cape Girardeau, they may notice a yellow buoy that arrived this week. It looks like a small boat floating near the Bill Emerson Memorial Bridge. According to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), the buoy is part of the MDC's cooperative effort with the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center's (Great Rivers Ecological Observatory Network (GREON) project to monitor water quality.

The local buoy is one of seven buoys placed in various places along the Mississippi River housing water quality and weather monitoring equipment. The Cape Girardeau buoy is monitored by Molly Sobotka, MDC resource scientist.

“This buoy allows us to monitor the water for oxygen, temperature, nutrients, and clarity and collects data on wind and sunlight,” Sobotka said. “All of this information helps us understand the water quality in the river, regional differences in river reaches, and how sediments and nitrogen flow through the system.”

Sobotka said data from the buoy will help scientists understand how major events like floods impact the river in real time.

“It takes hourly water quality and weather data and transmits it to the project server,” she said. “By using the buoy, we can collect data during floods or storms when we would

otherwise have trouble collecting it ourselves.”

Ultimately, the GREON project has a goal of establishing a network of identical water quality monitoring buoys in great rivers around the world. The work in Cape Girardeau is an important preliminary step in establishing this network.

The monitoring station is marked with reflective tape and lights for nighttime visibility. The monitoring equipment is fragile and difficult to replace and the scientists request that boaters, anglers and hunters avoid disturbing this equipment.

For further information, contact Sobotka at the Big Rivers and Wetlands Field Station, at Molly.Sobotka@mdc.mo.gov or (573) 243-2659, extension 1048.

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