World Water Day organizers need volunteers

Who is monitoring the water quality in your local creeks, rivers, lakes and ponds? Don’t know? It could be you.

The World Water Monitoring Challenge kicks off March 22, coinciding with the United Nations’ World Water Day, and runs through Dec. 31.

The Challenge is designed to build public awareness and involvement in protecting water resources around the world by engaging citizens in the monitoring of their local water bodies.

Participants sample local rivers, creeks, lakes, ponds and reservoirs, and test them for four key water quality indicators: dissolved oxygen acidity level, temperature and turbidity. Sampling kits are available online.

For about $21 including shipping, or $15 if 10 or more kits are ordered. Classroom kits are available for about $60.

Water Environment Federation and the International Water Association are the coordinators of the event. Major sponsors include Xylem Inc., Smithfield Foods and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Last year, groups and individuals from 66 countries from Albania to Zimbabwe participated, monitoring 5,978 sites, including 2,971 sites in the United States. In California, 105 sites were monitored, ranking the state sixth among the 50 states.

There is plenty of opportunity to monitor water in California, noted Erick Burres, who coordinates the state Water Resources Control Board’s volunteer water monitoring program, called the

Clean Water Team. The Clean Water Team is a more formal program of water monitoring that relies on non-profit groups and individuals to regularly sample and test California water bodies. The state Water Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program provides training and support for the volunteers, whose work helps state scientists track the health of California's water resources.

The primary goal of the World Water Monitoring Challenge is to educate and engage citizens in the protection of the world's water resources. Conducting simple monitoring tests teaches participants about some of the most common indicators of water health, and encourages further participation in more formal citizen monitoring efforts.

For more information about the World Water Monitoring Challenge, go online.