Grand Portage National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

170 Mile Creek Road
Grand Portage, MN 55605

oboodashkwaanishiinh (dragonfly)

Who loves dragonflies? Do you love to watch them – their colorful bodies and lacey wings darting around while they eat mosquitoes? Yay!! Less mosquitoes!

In addition to watching an oboodashkwaanishiinh (dragonfly) eat mosquitoes, did you know that observing dragonflies gives us a great measuring tool? Dragonflies spend their lives in streams, wetlands, lakes, and other water bodies, so their larvae (young) can tell us about mercury in the environment. Mercury comes from air pollution carried on the wind from places like smokestacks and tail pipes. It attaches to dust and water particles that fall as rain into our waterways where it is ingested by tiny insects and fish.

Dragonfly juveniles live below the surface, on rocks, plants, and in the mud, eating smaller insects and even small fish, making them high on the food chain. Each time a predator like a dragonfly larva eats prey with mercury inside, it takes up that toxin too. In turn, it becomes food for many fish and birds. Those fish and birds are then eaten by other fish, birds, and mammals, which are then eaten by larger animals and humans. Therefore, examining these larvae for mercury can tell us the condition of the water where they live and if there is a risk to humans and other animals.

Learn more: https://www.nps.gov/subjects/citizenscience/dragonfly-mercury-project.htm