

President's Report to the Annual Meeting
Warm Springs Watershed Association
April 15, 2015

As has been the case since 2009, members of the WSWA stream monitoring team have used the WV Save-Our-Stream protocol in an effort to determine water quality in the Run. Between April and August of 2014, seven sites were monitored. Macroinvertebrates are classified to family level. Each year, the overall "scores" are lower than before. We cannot pinpoint the exact causes of decline in the variety or overall number of macroinvertebrates. Because we suspect the problem is increased sedimentation due to deforestation and development in the watershed, we have adopted a less subjective method for determining embeddedness in the Run. In the period under consideration WSWA has sponsored three efforts to mobilize the community to pick up trash along the Run.

We also survey and destroy purple loosestrife on an annual basis.

In September of this year, WSWA used Stream Partners funds to plant more than 80 trees in an area where there was no riparian buffer along the Run.

One of the first goals of the watershed association when it was formed in 2008 was to make the community more aware of the existence of the Run, which suffers from an "out of sight, out of mind" condition. This year we advanced that goal by creating a t-shirt that shows a beautiful image of the Run. The shirts have sold well, and are often seen on members of the community, not all of whom are active in WSWA. We also adopted a new logo this year. It was felt that the old logo, which showed an image of the gazebo in Berkeley Springs State Park gave more publicity to the park than to the Run. (The Run does flow through the park, which is why the gazebo was initially chosen.) The new logo shows that the Run flows through an urban watershed, which in many ways defines what happens to the Run.

This year saw a 170% increase in the number of members of the watershed association. This feat was accomplished by having tables at the Morgan County Master Gardeners' Plant Fair and at the Morgan County Fair. In addition to selling newly minted t-shirts and holding a raffle for various field guides, at the Plant Fair we offered potential investors a small serving of cattail salad, made with the edible portion of cattails found in the Widmyer wetlands. Serving cattail salad also gave us an opportunity to talk about the ecological importance of the wetlands to the area downstream.

An activity that has been simmering on a back burner for several years was finally brought to completion this year. In 2009 the Eastern Panhandle Conservation District used 319 funds to restore a wetlands area south of one of the local elementary schools. However, the school district and conservation district boards were unable to come to a maintenance agreement for the area. Once WSWA agreed to be responsible for coordinating maintenance efforts and enlisting the help of students and other volunteers to do such tasks as weeding, picking up trash, and keeping an eye on the extent to which cattails may be spreading out of control, both parties were willing to sign the maintenance agreement.

A highlight of our year was the installation of five educational kiosks in the wetlands area, a project jointly undertaken by WSWA and the EPCD. WSWA secured a grant from the Two Rivers Giving Foundation to pay for our share of this project. The public had not been generally thrilled with restoration wetlands area due to several misconceptions. These kiosks give accurate information about issues of concern. Based upon input from students about what information needed to be disseminated in the community, WSWA and EPCD hired a professional artist to create the images on the kiosks. The kiosks were installed in October, and the ribbon was finally cut to officially open the wetlands. The track just north of the wetlands is heavily used by members of the community as well as by students, and hardly a day goes by that we don't see people venturing off the track to wander through the wetlands to read the five signs.

WSWA has also held a well-attended fall and spring wildflower tour to further bring people into the wetlands in order to reinforce the message of the value of the wetlands to the entire community.

For a small (if growing) watershed association, WSWA has accomplished much more than might be expected, in large part because we form coalitions with many other community groups that have related goals. Over the past year, three partnerships have yielded exceptional results.

Based upon a shared goal of increasing tree canopy in the watershed, WSWA joined the Town of Bath Tree Board to do a "feet on the ground" inventory of every street tree in the municipality. A second tree-by-tree inventory was done in Greenway Cemetery. Comprehensive management plans were created by the Cacapon Institute to guide the Tree Board and WSWA in strategically planting trees in areas that will most benefit due to the installation of green stormwater BMPS. Based upon the comprehensive plan, in 2014 another 90 trees were planted in town and elsewhere in the watershed. Next year we will be able to report that another 100 trees were planted, including 80 trees in Greenway Cemetery, a hilly, mostly treeless area especially prone to erosion. Funds for the tree inventories, management plans and trees were provided by Chesapeake Bay grants from the Division of Forestry.

In addition to holding workshops on how to conduct a tree inventory and how to do winter tree inventory (the cemetery tree inventory was done in February), two workshops were held on effective eradication of Tree of Heaven, an invasive species widely found in the watershed. Attention was given to Tree of Heaven with native trees in order to provide ongoing stormwater management as well as food and shelter for birds and animals.

In January, when it appeared that one member of the County Commission wanted to derail a long-planned rail trail, members of WSWA were included in an ad hoc task force dedicated to seeing the plan through to completion. Much of the proposed trail will parallel the course of the Run.

Finally, WSWA has been an integral part of a consortium of organizations dedicated to installing more green stormwater best management practices in the town and watershed. The study, which was funded by another Chesapeake Bay grant, has created a list of projects along with basic design features and cost estimates of green BMPs that could be installed when other construction

is done, as well as projects where green BMPs could be retrofitted. This plan will guide many of WSWA's efforts in the future.

Kate Lehman, President