

ELK CREEKS WATERSHED ASSOCIATION CHANNEL

OXFORD, PA

SPRING, 2002



Justin DeFrank and Conor Hesse help Justin's father, Kevin, unload a cartload of woodchips onto fabric covered pathways between the Elk Ridge and Nottingham Schools. They were among 30 volunteers who helped to finish Phase I of the Oxford Wetlands Project on March 23. Story on page 2.

MAY, 2002: The Elk Creeks Channel is a periodic newsletter of the Elk Creeks Watershed Association. Its purpose is to keep you informed of what is going on in and around our watershed. Our newsletters and other pertinent watershed information are posted on our website at www.elkwatershed.org.

We welcome your comments and input. If you have any tales of the watershed to share, any tidbits of streamway knowledge, or if you would like membership and activity information, please contact us at:



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Rivers Conservation Plan Finalized

Over the past two years, the Elk Creek Watershed Association has worked with the Brandywine Conservancy to complete a River Conservation Plan for the Elk Creeks. The River Conservation Plan program funds a study deal to identify issues within the watershed. The program is supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). Together with DCNR and the Brandywine Conservancy, we have just finalized the River Conservation Plan for the Elk Creeks Watershed. Our plan addresses preservation of our streams and groundwater. It contains recommendations to:

- Protect and restore water quality,
- Preserve open space and farmland,
- Preserve and enhance natural and cultural resources,
- Increase recreational opportunities for area residents, and
- Minimize the impacts of new residential and commercial development.

As reported in the local papers, two public meetings were recently held to finalize our plan, one in November 2001 and one in January 2002. If you missed those, you may view the plan, including study data, maps, and final recommendations at our web site, www.elkwatershed.org.

INSIDE:

ECWA builds Oxford Wetlands Project
Native Garden installed at Lincoln U.
Enhancing a wet spot
Garden to improve water ... but choose wisely
Drought situation continues



Current Projects

ECWA Builds Oxford Wetlands Project

Site will offer schools educational paths

On Saturday, February 16 and again on March 23, dedicated friends and members of the Elk Creeks Watershed Association (ECWA) hand-cleared paths, laid weed-suppressing fabric and spread wood chips in the wetlands area between Elk Ridge and Nottingham Schools, creating more than 1200 linear feet of six-foot wide paths and "learning circles." It is the beginning of their vision to provide environmental outdoor paths and classrooms for students of the school district throughout the 20-acre wetlands site.

The woodchips were generously donated to the project by Asplundh, Matlack Tree Service, and Lower Oxford Township. The Watershed Association hopes to continue to stockpile woodchips throughout the spring.

With the professional expertise of ECWA's design consultant, LandStudies, Inc., a firm specializing in wetland design, the Association has been working with the Oxford Area School District (OASD), teachers and students to design outdoor education opportunities in multiple phases. In the end, the plan envisions providing access to a variety of habitat areas, water monitoring stations, interpretive signs, and specific study stations along the way. There may also be bench areas to accommodate an entire class of students.

There's more to this project than restoring a wetland area. The OASD teachers have been developing a curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12 to utilize this new natural educational resource. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is providing the teachers with supplies and literature, and teachers have visited other districts in the state that have created natural areas and integrated curricula. Educational opportunities will not be limited to the natural sciences, but will incorporate the arts and humanities as well.

Funding for this project is being provided by a Growing Greener Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental (DEP) Protection, as well as a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The success of such programs depends upon the tireless efforts of dedicated ECWA members and supporters who welcome the involvement of all those who are interested in contributing. These are wonderful opportunities to become involved in environmental stewardship at a local level. Email us at ecwa@elkwatershed.org to learn how you can become involved in this project.



Teachers from the Oxford Area School District are seen during a break from their labors to create educational nature trails through wetlands between the Elk Ridge and Nottingham Schools. They are Kim Kulesza, LouAnn Miller (with Australian sheepdog, Fizz) and Debbie Vendricks. Volunteers donated time and equipment to construct 1,200 linear feet of paths and learning areas.

Lincoln University Native Garden Installed

On April 16 and 17th a section of a Lincoln University residential quadrangle was refurbished with new gravel walkways and native plants, thanks to the combined efforts of ECWA, the Octoraro Watershed Association, Lincoln University and the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay with support from the U.S. EPA. Most of the plants were installed by Lincoln University students. Soil, compost and important site preparation was donated by Lincoln University.

The project was planned by representatives of each group including a contingent of L.U. students representing campus fraternities and sororities. The design was made more challenging by the fact that the area was shady and dry because of large American elms trees and was heavily trafficked by students leaving and returning to their dormitories. In addition, memorial areas and fraternity displays needed to be respected, retained and expanded. In conjunction with the planting project a curriculum introducing the students, who are mostly urban, to the concept of local ecology and "bayscaping," - landscaping with native materials to produce both aesthetic and environmentally sensitive results, is being developed.

Spotlight on Nature

Enhancing a Wet Spot

A common complaint from homeowners is wet spots in the yard. These soggy places may stay wet for extended periods after it rains, making mowing difficult or gardening a challenge. While these spots eventually dry out, many plant species do not thrive in these locations during extended periods of moisture. However, if you are lucky enough to have one of these spots, you have the unique opportunity to grow many beautiful plants that are tolerant of wet conditions and are enjoyed by a wide variety of wildlife as well as people.

Rather than trying to make a wet spot dry, accept the fact that it will be wet much of the growing season. You may want to enhance the area to increase the amount of moisture that stays there. Small depression areas can be scooped out to make them slightly deeper or, on the other hand, a small berm—which is a narrow ledge or small mound of soil—can be built around the edges of the area to retain more water in the low-lying spot. The use of small berms, only a foot or two high, also will add interest in the landscape by providing variations in elevation and will support the growth of plants requiring better drainage. Drainage ditches, often difficult to mow, also can be turned into sites of beautiful wetland plantings with the proper choice of plants.

Some things you should consider when enhancing a wet area: Is the site away from your home's foundation or other areas that may be damaged by excessive moisture? How will the site be integrated into the rest of your landscaping? If the area is a wetland, check with your local conservation district before making any changes. Unless you completely own a ditch, check with local authorities before altering the area. Thoroughly evaluate the impacts of any changes, particularly if you put in a berm—you wouldn't want to flood your neighbor's property.



Depending on the size of your wet area, you may want to grow a mixture of shrubs and flowering plants. Many native species are tolerant of wet conditions. The following plants do well in wet, sunny locations and are attractive to many species of butterflies or hummingbirds.

Red osier dogwood—This plant has bright red twigs that add interest to your yard in the winter. The berries provide food for birds and the twigs are a source of food for other wildlife, including rabbits.

Winterberry a native holly plant—The red berries last into the winter and offer food for birds. Hollies have male and female plants. Berries are only produced on female plants, but a male plant is required for pollination and the development of the berries.

Pussy willow—This plant is one of the first to blossom in early spring, producing fuzzy gray catkins, or flowers, that are often used in flower arrangements.

Cardinal flower—This bright red plant is attractive to hummingbirds and grows well in moist to wet soils.

The next time you look at that wet spot in your yard—don't change it, enjoy it!

For more information on Backyard Conservation practices, contact your local conservation district, ECWA, or call 1-888-LANDCARE (toll free) for a free colorful Backyard Conservation booklet and tip sheets.

Coming UP

ECWA has a lot of work to do on existing projects, but that doesn't stop us from making plans for new activities! Some projects under consideration include:

- ≡ A nature lecture on the fish of the Elk Creeks.
- ≡ Completion of the first phase of the Oxford Schools Wetland Project, including the retrofit of an existing detention basin. Please visit our systems of trails and outdoor learning centers within the Oxford schools campus.
- ≡ The erection of Elk Creeks watershed identification signs on area roads.
- ≡ A geological field trip to look at the weird and very unique rocks and minerals of our area.
- ≡ The establishment of an Elk Creeks chapter of the Senior Environmental Corps. We need the help of all of our community citizens.

Please watch your local newspapers for more information about these events as details are finalized! Or, for email notification, please drop us a line at ecwa@elkwatershed.org with your email address. If you have a good idea for activities, projects or lectures, please let us know.

Smart Gardening

Garden to Improve Water Quality... But Make Smart Choices

Do you love to garden, or do you just want to add landscaping to your property? Not only can additional landscaping benefit you, it can be good for the watershed too. Knowing about what to plant and what to avoid, can do a lot to improve the total environment in the Elk Creeks Watershed.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, almost anything you can do to decrease lawn and increase planted area is good. Luckily, deciding what plants “get the most bang for your buck” follows a logical order and is easy to remember. First, trees do the most to improve water and air quality (a woodland or forest being best of all), then shrubs, and then herbaceous plants in masses. The order has to do with the plant’s size, its root mass, the amount of cool shade it provides, its ability to create “mulch,” and how much it photosynthesizes/respire to produce clean air and water. Lawn is not much better than pavement as far as water and air quality are concerned.

Most garden centers sell plants that are invasive. Invasive plants are those that get out of control, usually through seeds or berries dispersed by wind, water, or birds. Invasive plants take over healthy natural areas beyond your property and can disrupt the ecology of our native mixed deciduous forest.

Some commonly used ornamental plants are also the most invasive and damaging. Unfortunately many of them are available at garden centers. Avoid purchasing the following plants:

NORWAY MAPLES

Norway maples are known for their heavy shade and rounded canopy. They have been the shade tree of choice for homeowners. They are a dangerous, aggressive plant. Norway Maples produce numerous seeds that blow into local forests and germinate readily. Norway Maple shade kills off everything under it. Don’t plant this. If you have one, you may seriously consider cutting it down.

Native Alternatives: Almost any other deciduous tree is a better choice. Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) and Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*) are lovely native trees that should replace Norway Maple.

“Red” or Purple varieties: If you ask for a red or purple maple, you might get a Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides* ‘Crimson King,’ ‘Crimson Sentry,’ or ‘Goldsworth’ Purple Maple). There are varieties of other trees that have red or purple leaves that can replace Norway Maple: Japanese Maples (*Acer palmatum*) are not native but are not invasive. Our native Red Maple is green in summer but has beautiful red fall color. Another alternative tall tree for purple leaf color is the Purple Plum (*Prunus cerasifera*

‘Atropurpurea’ or ‘Thundercloud’). They are not native but are not invasive and have lovely spring flowers.

HONEYSUCKLE

Japanese honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica* or *Lonicera mackii* (a.k.a. “Halls” or ‘Purpleleaf’ Honeysuckle) has taken over in almost every natural area in our watershed except portions of deep forest. Never plant this. If you see it, yank it out!

Native Alternatives: Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*, *Lonicera x heckrottii* or *Lonicera x brownii*). Other native vines include *Parthenocissus trifoliata*, Boston ivy.

RUSSIAN OLIVE

Russian Olive (*Eleagnus umbellata*) is the fragrant blue-gray shrub we see everywhere within the watershed, particularly along our roads. Like honeysuckle it is taking over natural areas that get sun. Don’t plant this: if you have it, remove it.

Native Alternative: Blue False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*).

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is the perennial flower seen with spikes of purple/fuchsia flowers in wet areas. It takes over and destroys native wetlands. It is illegal to plant this in Pennsylvania but despite this, it is still available in some nurseries and catalogs.

Native Alternatives: Blue Lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*) or Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*).

PAWLONIA, “LILAC OR PRINCESS TREE”

This quickly growing tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*, has candelabra-like lavender flowers. Although it is not as invasive as Norway Maples, its saplings can be seen popping up in moderate numbers throughout our native woodlands. It’s best not to plant this.

Native Alternatives: Eastern Redbud Tree (*Cercis canadensis*) or a real lilac, a *Syringa* species – they’re not invasive.

BAMBOO

Although this grows quickly into a dense screen it continuously spreads by runners underground. You must control this by pruning the roots. Do yourself and our environment a favor and don’t plant this unless you select a clumping, more confined form.

Screening Alternatives: Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), Arborvitae (*Thuja occidentalis*), Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis* or *caroliniana*), or Spruce (*Picea* species). Spruce are not native, but are not invasive.

Some Wonderful Native Garden Plants

Trees/Flowering Trees

Red Maple/Acer rubrum
White Oak/
Quercus alba Or Quercus bicolor

Scarlet Oak/Quercus coccinea

Pin Oak/Quercus palustris

Red Oak/Quercus rubra
Tulip Tree (Tulip Poplar)/
Liriodendron tulipifera
Heritage River Birch/
Betula nigra 'Heritage'
Flowering Dogwood/ Cornus florida
Eastern Redbud/Cercis canadensis
Serviceberry (Shadbush)/
Amelanchier Canadensis
Ironwood/Ostrya virginiana
Sweetbay/Magnolia virginiana

Shrubs

Winterberry/Ilex verticillata

Mountain Laurel/Kalmia latifolia

Pinxterbloom Azalea/
Rhododendron periclymenoides
Rosebay Rhododendron/
Rhododendron maximum
Spicebush/Lindera benzoin

Red Twig Dogwood/ Cornus stolonifera

Lowbush Blueberry/ Vaccinium angustifolium
Inkberry Holly/Ilex glabra
Oakleaf Hydrangea/ Hydrangea quercifolia

Witch Hazel/Hamamelis virginiana
Arrowwood Viburnum/Viburnum dentatum
Sweetspire/Itea virginica

Grasses/Perennials

Columbine/Aquilegia Canadensis

Blackeyed (Browneyed) Susan/
Rudbeckia triloba, fulgida, hirta

Coneflower/Echinacea purpurea

Lance-leaved Coreopsis/ Coreopsis lanceolata
New England Aster/ Aster novae-angliae

Butterfly Weed/Asclepias tuberosa

Joe Pye Weed/ Eupatorium purpureum
Switch Grass/Panicum virgatum
Little Bluestem Grass/ Schizachyrium scoparium

Sedge Grasses/Carex species
Goldenrod/Solidago species
Hardy Ageratum/Eupatorium coelestinum

There are many more interesting, hardy and commercially available native plants for you to learn about and use.
***** Check out our website, <http://www.elkwatershed.org> for links to this information. *****

ECWA Membership Form

The Elk Creeks Watershed Association (ECWA)

is a nonprofit organization committed to maintaining and improving the quality of the Big Elk and Little Elk Creek watersheds. We ask you to begin or renew your support of ECWA so that we may continue the good works we have started. Each membership sends a strong and necessary message that the preservation and protection of the water quality and habitats within the Big and Little Elk Creeks are important to you and your families.

Your annual tax-deductible financial support is important to us, but so is your time. ECWA consists of a diverse group of neighbors with the strong common goal of preserving the integrity of the watershed during this unprecedented period of growth and threat. If you are interested in participating in our important work in any way, from planting stream buffers to drafting our newsletters, from graphic design to stream watching, please indicate your interests on the membership form.

Once again, we are offering guest memberships at no additional cost to you. Guest members will receive our newsletters and will be informed of our projects, meeting and lecture dates.

Yes! Count me in. As a member of the ECWA I want to help preserve and protect the stream environment and drinking water in southern Chester County, Cecil County and the Chesapeake Bay.

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution of \$_____ for the category I've checked:

- Student or Senior Citizen—\$10
- Individual - \$15
- Family - \$20
- Sponsor - \$50
- Corporate Membership—\$150

Name _____

Address _____

Township/Borough _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Interests _____

Please send a guest membership to:

Name _____

Address _____

Township/Borough _____

**Thank you for your tax deductible membership contribution. Please mail this completed form to the:
Elk Creeks Watershed Association**

P.O. Box 111, Oxford, PA 19363

Watershed Stewardship

Drought Emergency in Elk Creeks Basin

On February 20, 2002, Governor Mark Schweiker declared a drought emergency for 24 counties in Pennsylvania. Chester County is part of the emergency declaration. The Elk Creeks Watershed Association has recognized the deteriorating rainfall condition for sometime. The first four months of 2002 continued low rain levels after the second lowest recorded rainfall year of 2001. Long-term relief is not forecasted and it may be that we are in for a long-term change in rainfall patterns. Such a change could have serious effects upon our streams, and the wetlands and ground water that feed them.

It is essential that individuals, water purveyors, farmers, and industries engage in serious water conservation practices, **NOW**. Households supplied by individual wells are particularly vulnerable because the aquifers of the Elk Creeks area are not good producers even in times of adequate rainfall. These aquifers are collections of small cracks and crevices in the surrounding rocks, and

these rocks, being mostly solid masses, do not hold much water to begin with. This means that our ground water, never a really abundant amount, is now declining at an increasing rate. Many wells have simply stopped producing water as the fractures become "de-watered." Homeowners that are in cluster developments served by single community wells should on a cooperative basis conserve water with a community-wide plan. Do not use water unnecessarily, including lawnwatering, patio spraying and car washing. Remember, it is far more "water-wise" to wash your car at a commercial car wash where high-pressure reduces water use and all water is recycled.

The Chester County Water resources Authority has some water conservation tips for home owners on its website, <http://www.chesco.org/water>. More comprehensive information concerning the drought emergency can be obtained at Pennsylvania's website, <http://www.state.pa.us>. To get to the information type in the key word "DROUGHT" on the box at the top of the page.

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This newsletter was prepared by members of the Elk Creeks Watershed Association and its Board of Directors: Melanie Hesse, President; Walter M. Leis, Secretary; Jeffrey Bryant, Treasurer; Joy Compher, Robert Fox, Ariana Langford; Denis Newbold; Martha Straus and Jim Subach. For this issue of the CHANNEL, particular thanks go to Gordon Hesse, Walter Leis, Joy Compher, Melanie Hesse, and Martha Straus. Questions or comments? Please email us at: ecwa@elkwatershed.org.