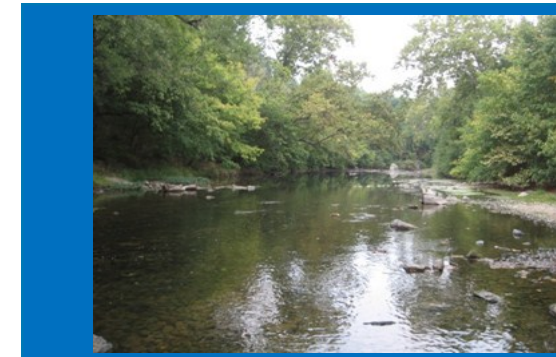




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# Smith Creek Connection

*The connection to your watershed*

March 2013

Mountain Run, War Branch, Dry Fork and Gap Creek Sub-watersheds

## Clean Water is Everyone's Responsibility

*Judy Okay, Virginia Department of Forestry Consultant*

On a daily basis not much thought is given to clean water. Out of habit, we turn on the tap, the water flows clear, we use it as needed, turn off the tap and walk away. Do you ever think about what makes water pure, clear and clean? Our ancestors just dipped a canteen or bucket into a stream and drank the water right there on the spot. Historically, if water looked, tasted and smelled good, the quality was not questioned.

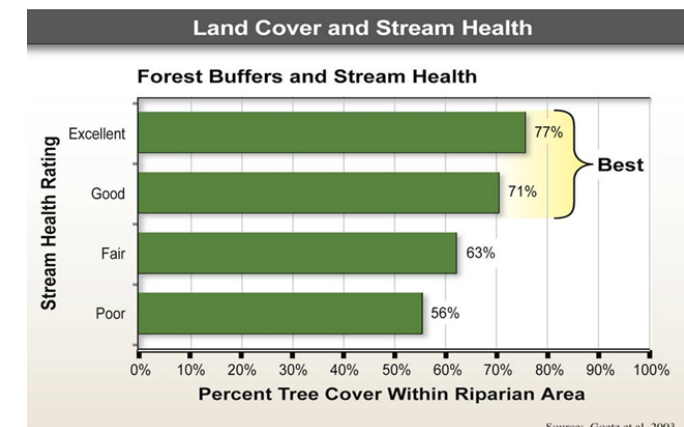
It was the invention of the microscope along with an outbreak of cholera spread by water pipes contaminated with sewage in the 1800s, that lead to the use of chlorine to kill bacteria in water. We have come a long way since then and now have water treatment plants for community water systems and sophisticated mineral filters and purification systems for our well water. What happened to the cleaner water of our ancestors? It's a complex matter brought about by population growth, land development and management, and the general activities of the human population. We fertilize lawns and crops; animals of all types defecate on the land and in the water. We pour oils, leftover pesticides, herbicides and pharmaceuticals into our sewer systems, ditches, storm drains, and into our streams.

Human beings are intelligent; we have been able to invent our way out of many of our social and environmental issues. It is nostalgic to think about the good old days, but no amount of nostalgia will take us back to the cleaner water of yesterday. But, we can reclaim our resources and restore our land and water systems. Healthy forest systems trap sediment and pollutants that enter our streams and drinking water sources. A 2003 study shows that healthy streams benefit from having at least 70% of their drainage area in forest cover. Most localities have between 40-55% forest cover. New York City has done one of the best jobs of planning and investing in clean water. They have committed more than \$1.5 billion in capital funds, plus significant annual expenses and countless staff hours, to protect forest cover and sustain the pristine quality of the source waters of the Catskill and Delaware watersheds. City water is waived from filtration requirements of the EPA's surface water treatment rule because it meets regulated standards. Remember, we have the ability to plan and to influence outcomes that enhance and protect our natural resources and our quality of life.

If being reckless with our resources got us where we are, then let's move forward to better days. **To improve water quality, we can:**

- manage land with less fertilizer
- use cover crops to prevent erosion
- manage manure and pet waste
- recycle to produce less garbage
- dispose of chemicals at hazardous waste collection sites
- plant more vegetation (native shrubs and trees)

If you are interested in the quality of your streams and drinking water, contact your local natural resource agencies for technical and financial assistance for land and resource management. There are funds for reducing erosion, planting trees, fencing livestock out of streams, planting cover crops and more conservation and resource protection practices. Whether you own a small plot or 500 acres, water quality is everyone's responsibility. We are intelligent, let's use what we know to make life even better!



### For More Information

#### Smith Creek Coordinator:

Kathy Holm (540) 434-1404 Ext. 114

#### NRCS Field Offices:

**Harrisonburg** (540) 433-9126  
(Rockingham County citizens)

**Strasburg** (540) 465-2424  
(Shenandoah County citizens)

#### Soil & Water Conservation District Offices (SWCD):

**Shenandoah Valley SWCD:**  
(540) 433-9126 (Rockingham County)

**Lord Fairfax SWCD:**  
(540) 465-2424 (Shenandoah County)

The NRCS/USDA Smith Creek "Showcase" activities and the work of our partners within the watershed can be accessed at: [www.SmithCreekWatershed.com](http://www.SmithCreekWatershed.com) or by contacting your local NRCS or SWCD office.

### Have you been contacted by our conservation team?

One of the main goals of the Smith Creek Showcase watershed project is outreach. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Shenandoah Valley Soil & Water Conservation District are currently working to contact every agricultural landowner within the Smith Creek watershed. This effort is designed to offer landowners the opportunity to learn more about technical and financial assistance and education opportunities available to Smith Creek residents. During our visit we also hope to learn more about your farming operation. The expectation is that by gathering information from landowners we can gain a more complete picture of the what is going on in the watershed.

**If you are a Smith Creek agricultural landowner and haven't met with anyone to learn about opportunities and share information, please call to schedule a visit!**

USDA/NRCS  
1934 Deyerle Avenue, Suite A  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801



### Partnership Allows Focus on Grazing Initiatives in the Shenandoah Valley

A partnership of federal and state agencies, conservation groups, and agricultural organizations is working to promote and enhance rotational grazing throughout the Shenandoah Valley. Partners have been focusing efforts on outreach and education over the past several months and continue to plan, organize and promote a variety of grazing related tools, events, and conservation programs.

The formation of a Graziers’ Network is one of several goals of the Virginia and Upper Potomac Agricultural Stewardship Program, a partnership project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) that includes the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF), the Virginia Forage and Grassland Council (VFGC), and other partners. The purpose of the project is to encourage agricultural landowners to adopt innovative practices to improve water quality, increase farm productivity and enhance wildlife habitat. This network seeks to engage local famers on the benefits of rotational grazing to improve pasture efficiency and to improve water quality in streams.

The partnership produced the 2013 Virginia Graziers’ Planner which offers monthly tips to farmers to improve their rotational grazing system. The Planner gives conservation and herd management suggestions and provides a convenient way to document rotational grazing information such as when animals are moved in the rotation, herd numbers, etc. This tool allows farmers to easily meet NRCS documentation requirements and provides farmers with good records for future planning.

Recently several partners held events highlighting a variety of grazing topics.



#### 2013 VFCG Winter Forage Conferences

- How to extend the grazing season and improve profitability
- Planning & developing farm infrastructure to support grazing systems
- Technical/financial assistance available for graziers’

#### Stockpiled Tall Fescue Field Demonstrations

NRCS, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and VFGC

- Fundamentals of stockpiling
- Forage quality & quantity vs. stored hay and their nutritional values
- How to effectively strip graze

In addition, the partnership will work with farmers to transition 100 acres to rotational grazing over the next two years. Additional demonstration sites and tours will allow producers and interested

citizens to learn about rotational grazing and how it can effectively boost farm productivity. Focus topics will include stocking management, soil fertility, weed control, fencing and watering systems, animal health and nutrition and marketing strategies.

Future plans include a two-day Grazing School, a 2014 edition of the Graziers’ Planner, a website with grazing information and resources and a goal to exclude livestock from streams in the Smith Creek, Hawksbill Creek, Lower Middle River, and Linville Creek watersheds. Special project funding is available to augment federal and state incentives to assist landowners with stream exclusion. The partnership is also planning a trip to Virginia’s Eastern Shore to exchange ideas between farmers and landowners within the two regions.

To learn more about these topics and other opportunities or more information about the Virginia Graziers’ Network, contact Alston Horn at (540) 487-9060 or ahorn@cbf.org.



### Smith Creek Volunteer Event

Help Plant Trees to Create a Forested Riparian Buffer

**When:** Saturday, March 16, 2013; 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**Where:** Shipp Farm-3316 Fridleys Gap Road, Harrisonburg

- *Volunteers should bring a sun hat, sun screen, bug spray, and shovels and work gloves (if possible). Wear layered outerwear, long pants, and sturdy shoes that can get wet and muddy.*
- *Volunteers are also asked to bring a packed lunch. Light refreshments will be provided.*
- *The event is suitable for children closely supervised by adults.*



#### For more information & to RSVP (by March 12):

Contact Robert Jennings  
(484) 888-2966  
RJennings@cbf.org

### Technical and Financial Assistance Available for Conservation Practices

Assistance is available for water quality improvement projects.

♦ **Residential Conservation Practices:** (Smith Creek Watershed only!)

- ◊ At least 50% cost-share funding is available for septic tank pump-outs, repairs or replacements

For more information contact Megan O’Gorek of the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District at (540) 433-2853 ext. 120 or megan.ogorek@svswcd.org.

♦ **Agricultural Conservation Practices**

- ◊ Funding available for: stream exclusion and livestock watering systems, animal waste management, cover crops and more
- ◊ Technical assistance and farm planning
- ◊ Grazing management planning

For more information contact your local Conservation office, see the back of this newsletter for specific contact information.

#### Warning Signs of a Failing Septic System

- ♦ Slow draining toilets or drains
- ♦ Lush green growth over the drainfield
- ♦ Sewage back-ups in the house
- ♦ Sewage odors
- ♦ Sewage surfacing over the drainfield (especially after storms)



### Check out the NEW Smith Creek Website

[www.SmithCreekWatershed.com](http://www.SmithCreekWatershed.com)

To learn more about the Smith Creek Showcase Watershed Project or for information about partner activities, programs and events check out the **NEW** website.

