

USDA/NRCS
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We work with the people who work the land.



For More Information

Soil & Water Conservation District Offices (SWCD):

Shenandoah Valley SWCD: (540) 433-2853 (Rockingham County)
Lord Fairfax SWCD:(540) 465-2424 (Shenandoah County)

Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Field Offices:

Harrisonburg (540) 433-2853 (Rockingham County)
Strasburg (540) 465-2424 (Shenandoah County)

Smith Creek Coordinator:

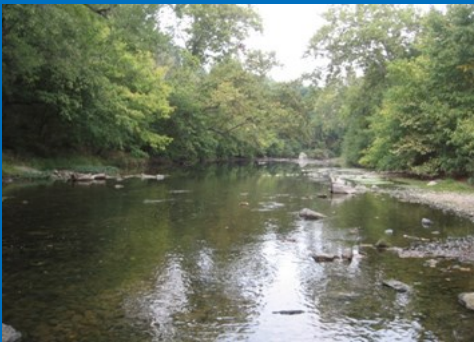
Kathy Holm (540) 434-1404 Ext. 114

The NRCS/USDA Smith Creek “Showcase Watershed” activities and the work of partners within the watershed can be accessed at: www.smithcreekwatershed.com or by contacting your local SWCD or NRCS 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 and Water Conservation District are continuing 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 educational opportunities available to Smith Creek residents. During our visit we also hope to learn more about your 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!



Smith Creek Connection

The connection to your watershed

March 2014

Mountain Run, War Branch, Dry Fork and Gap Creek Subwatersheds

Volunteers plant over 230 trees

On the mild, foggy morning of November 16, 2013 over 75 volunteers came together to plant trees on the farm of J. Owen Long, Jr. in the Melrose Caverns community of Rockingham County. The volunteers planted over 230 hardwood trees on approximately 2.25 acres of riparian buffer along Dry Fork, a tributary to Smith Creek. Following the hardwood planting, volunteers also helped over-seed a mixture of native grasses, legumes, and wildflowers on an additional 2.5 acres of riparian buffer along the stream. The hardwood trees, native grasses, legumes, and wildflowers that the volunteers helped plant on Mr. Long’s farm are part of a 5.8 acre riparian buffer area being established as a part of a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) project helping to filter runoff entering Dry Fork and creating early successional wildlife habitat.

Volunteers for the event included a large number of college students from James Madison University, citizens from the local community, and several conservation professionals from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, Virginia Outdoors Foundation, and Valley Conservation Council. In addition to these volunteers, professional tree planters from Conservation Services were onsite during the event to help teach the volunteers how to properly plant trees.

This event was a collaborative effort between the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the Shenandoah Valley Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Harrisonburg NRCS Field Office and exemplifies the continued strong partnership effort in implementing the Smith Creek Showcase Watershed Project. Volunteers contributed over 325 hours, making this event a huge success.



Event Stats

- 75 volunteers
- 2.25 acres of hardwood trees
- Over 230 trees planted
- 2.5 acres of native grasses, legumes and wildflowers
- 5.8 acres of newly established buffer area
- 325 hours of volunteer time



New Funding Available for Conservation Easements

Incentive payments of up to \$10,000 to help Smith Creek landowners place whole farm easements on their property through a Valley Conservation Council grant

Valley Conservation Council (VCC), a Shenandoah Valley based nonprofit citizens’ organization, is offering incentive payments of up to \$10,000 to Smith Creek landowners who donate a conservation easement within the next two years thanks to a grant awarded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. Easement donors can use the funds they receive through this program with no restrictions. These incentive payments are in addition to established, attractive tax benefits associated with donating an easement. A conservation easement is a voluntary, permanent agreement whereby a landowner retains ownership of his/her property but conveys certain specified development rights to the holder of the easement. The easement holder ensures the land remains in agricultural/forestal use and conforms to the restrictions agreed upon by the landowner and the holder in the easement.

VCC’s project, *Land & Water Connections: Perpetuating Healthy Streams*, will support the placement of whole farm conservation easements on lands within the Smith Creek watershed, as well as lands within Shenandoah River headwaters streams in Augusta County. To be eligible for this program, landowners must have applied (or be willing to apply) agricultural best management practices (BMPs) on their farm that improve water quality, such as livestock stream exclusion and riparian forested buffers. Additionally, eligible farms must contain a perennial stream that could support habitat for Eastern Brook Trout. Twelve landowners are expected to enroll in this program during the two year project period. The goal of the program is three-fold: conserve working lands, improve water quality for Eastern Brook Trout habitat, and enhance the farmer’s bottom line.

Many Smith Creek and Shenandoah Valley farmers and landowners have made significant investments in agricultural BMPs aimed at improving soil health, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat on their land. A majority of these BMPs are installed through cost share programs offered by state and federal government agencies that typically require a contract period of fifteen years or less. There is no guarantee that these practices will be sustained after the contract term expires. The *Land & Water Connections* project ensures that the investments and efforts contributed to implementing BMPs will continue to benefit our land, water, and agricultural heritage through a permanent conservation easement.



VCC staff can help assist Smith Creek landowners through the easement process if they qualify. Please contact Faye Cooper or Ben Craig with VCC at (540) 886-3541 or faye@valleyconservation.org to learn more about land protection options and the *Land & Water Connections* project.

Mountain Run and War Branch Area Eligible for Special BMP Funding
Special Financial Assistance Available for Farm Improvements that Benefit Water Quality

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is currently taking applications from farmers and landowners in the Mountain Run and War Branch sub-watersheds of Smith Creek for the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). The NWQI is part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and provides financial assistance for the installation of conservation practices that have a direct benefit to water quality. Examples of some of the many conservation practices that are eligible for the NWQI include animal waste management systems, livestock stream exclusion systems, pasture improvement systems, enhanced nutrient management on crop and hayland, hardwood tree planting on marginal agricultural lands, riparian buffer establishment, and systems that improve soil health on cropland. To request more information or to sign-up for financial assistance through the NWQI, please contact Cory Guilliams, District Conservationist, at the Harrisonburg NRCS Field Office at (540) 433-2853 ext. 118. or cory.guilliams@va.usda.gov.

Smith Creek Septic Program Continues to Gain Interest

The Shenandoah Valley Soil & Water Conservation District is beginning its third year administering the Smith Creek Residential and Urban Implementation Program. This Program focuses on septic system maintenance and repairs and in some cases assists with the installation of a septic system to replace a straight pipe. The goal of the Program is to help address bacteria loads in the Smith Creek watershed ultimately helping to improve the water quality in Smith Creek. Another component of the Program is urban best management practices (BMPs), which help to reduce sediment and control and filter runoff entering Smith Creek. Since the inception of the Program in January 2012, there have been 63 pumpouts completed, 8 repairs made to existing systems and 2 alternative septic systems installed to completely replace malfunctioning systems.

Over 65 people have participated in the Program so far. Weldon Armentrout was one of those program participants. He said he received a postcard in the mail and it got him thinking... “When was the last time I had my septic system checked out?” He read on and the postcard stated there were funds available in the Smith Creek watershed. He applied for cost share assistance with the Conservation District and got his system pumped out and inspected, sure enough, there was old pipe that was deteriorating and was potentially allowing partially treated sewage to enter into the groundwater system. He also found out through the inspection that he needed his distribution box replaced as well. He took advantage of the cost share funds and got these components replaced. Now he can rest easy knowing that he fixed a potentially harmful problem that he otherwise would not have realized was happening. When asked about his experience with the cost share program, Mr. Armentrout said “The cost share incentive helped me decide to go a step further and repair and upgrade the system. The technician made the whole process so easy, from the application to the payment. She answered all my questions and helped me every step of the way.”

Funding is still available for a limited time to assist Smith Creek landowners with septic pumpouts and repairs. There is no income requirement to participate in the Program.

The Town of New Market is the focus of several urban BMPs that are being installed through the Shenandoah Valley Soil & Water Conservation District’s Smith Creek Residential and Urban Implementation Program. In May of 2012, two pet waste stations were installed in the Town Park. Plans are also underway to construct a wet meadow buffer along a swale near the Shenvalee golf course in New Market. This wet meadow buffer would filter excess nutrients (fertilizers) coming from nearby lawns and the golf course and help slow down the surface runoff from large storm events. This project is expected to begin this summer.

For more information about this Program, contact Megan O’Gorek at (540) 433-2853 ext. 120 or megan.ogorek@svswcd.org. Check your mailboxes soon for a blue postcard advertising the Septic Cost Share Program!



What is This Picture ?

Hard to believe but this old rusted out 55 gallon metal barrel was used as the septic tank . This landowner participated in the Smith Creek Septic Cost Share Program and was able to replace this septic tank (barrel) with a Virginia Department of Health (VDH) approved concrete septic tank.

Do you know of situations and systems like this? Contact the Conservation District to learn more about the Septic Cost Share Program.