



# Reclaiming Catoctin Creek

Local

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**It's easy to bring a creek to the brink of devastation: Let the cows tromp right up to the banks, kill off the trees and bushes that lined the edges. Add a good dose of construction upstream to add silt.**

Nearly 50 volunteers put on work clothes and waders and went to work March 1 trying to coax a small stretch of Catoctin Creek in Waterford back to something approaching normal. The raw red earth of the nearly vertical banks attests to its abuse.

"This is a pilot project, the first of what we hope will be many along the south fork of Catoctin Creek on the Phillips Farm," said Joe Coleman of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, which supplied a lot of volunteers and the 36 mature shrubs and 400 rootless cuttings.

Consulting ecologist Jeff Wolinski, of Lovettsville, stepped in as project manager.

The first step, he said, was to control some of the alien vegetation that has pushed the natives out. He pointed to a solid mass of sticky yellow vegetation hanging from a tree not far from the creek bank.

"That's Asiatic tearthumb," he said. "It just came into Virginia recently, in the last 20 years." It got into the U.S. with a shipment of azaleas from Japan to Pennsylvania in the 1930s. It's not called mile-a-minute vine for nothing. Other invaders to be rooted out included English ivy, multiflora rose, privet and barberry.

With some work, Wolinski said, in a few years the main meadow of the farm still will be open but will be covered with native grasses and wildflowers. The water in the streambed slowed down by normal vegetation, will stay within the banks. The water in the Potomac will be healthier, and the oysters will breathe easier in the Chesapeake Bay.

Teen volunteers from the Roots & Shoots Environmental Stewardship Club of the Bethel United Methodist Church on Stumptown Road pitched in to plant silky dogwood and buttonbush right down at water's edge. When the bushes root and thrive, they will slow the water down and stabilize the banks. Grasses and flowers and shrubs will cover the bare, red banks and hold the soil back.