

## Volunteers Restore Waterford Stream Bank

By Margaret Morton

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About 40 volunteers turned out on a chilly Saturday morning last weekend to join Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy stream monitor Meg Findley and ecology consultant Jeff Wolinski as they led a riparian restoration project on Catoctin Creek on the Phillips Farm west of Waterford.

Findley, who is newly arrived at the conservancy, led the water quality assessment part of the project. Wolinski was hired by the Waterford Foundation, which owns the farm, to provide design and oversight services. The group also removed invasive plants from along the stream banks, planted new trees and installed live sapling stakes into the bank to root.

Conservancy co-founder and Vice President Joe Coleman said his organization is interested in the south fork of the Catoctin because of significant downstream erosion problems caused by development in the Purcellville area. He was pleased by Saturday's first small demonstration, which he hoped would be the first of many. The project was a year in the making. "It will take a long time to figure out what's best" for the stream renovation and wetlands preservation, Coleman said, noting that the conservancy's focus was in preserving riparian buffers which are "critical for water quality."

Among the many volunteers who turned out to help were Bronwen and John Souders, Waterford area residents and historians. It was John Souders who put in the walking trail set back from the east bank of Catoctin Creek at the Phillips Farm, which was purchased three years ago by the Waterford Foundation to prevent development of the 144-acre farm.

The farm is part of Waterford's history and the trail starts at the Waterford Mill and heads south along the east bank of the Catoctin, crossing Ball's Run until it ends at "the dam," a favorite spot for Waterford youth for many years. A huge oak was known as Old John, a surveyor along with Amos Janney in the 1700s. The mill race was in use by 1762.

Both Souders and resident Mimi Westervelt did the research on the mill and mill race, installing signs along the trail referencing information in a brochure for visitors' use. Having been part of the trail endeavor, the Souders wanted to see how the riparian restoration was being handled.

"We had a thoroughly good time," Bronwen Souders said. She was impressed to see the 36 non-Waterford stream volunteers who showed up for the four-hour project and pitched in to plant 37 gray dogwoods and 100 willows and remove briar rose bushes and noxious plants.

What impressed her the most was to see the various types of growth, including water flowers, birds and insects, as well as wild mint growing freely in the meadow along the stream.

Despite the chilly conditions, once the volunteers began shoveling they soon warmed up, according to Dan Biggs, who is an engineer with Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc. and a member of the wildlife conservancy's advisory committee on habitat restoration. Kimley-Horn supports local groups for various projects through its charitable foundation, which donated funds to the conservancy for plant acquisition, including those installed Saturday, according to Biggs.

The project came about as part of the work of the Waterford Foundation's Land Use Committee, which formed an ad hoc group to put together a strategic plan for the property-both to meet the terms of the conservation easement placed on the farm and to develop education programs for local schools, according to Foundation President Kathleen Hughes. The committee is headed by Ann Goode and Patti Psaris.

Westervelt is also a member of the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, as well as a Loudoun County Public School system employee, so the involvement of all three entities was not surprising. She serves on the

foundation's ad hoc committee, and was charged with formulating proposals for the natural resources part of the plan.

The strategic plan for Phillips Farm also includes components on agriculture and historic preservation. Education on all three components is key, Westervelt said. Through her efforts, a number of school groups have already visited the farm.

The Waterford Elementary School was the first to use it, for nature journaling and bird watching, according to Westervelt. Then, the foundation invited Loudoun Valley High School science teacher John DeMary to do a project at the farm last year, followed by a butterfly count in August conducted by the North American Butterfly Association. At the end of last year, the Loudoun Audubon Society used the farm for one of its measuring sites for the annual Christmas bird count. After finishing up, went all interconnects.

The partnership with the conservancy is producing good results, including an agreement to help with invasive species removal, planting and riparian restoration, Westervelt said.

Hughes said various other projects are planned at the Phillips Farm, including a model yard of 12 bee colonies to be installed by the Loudoun Beekeepers, intended to repopulate the county's fast-vanishing bees and to train future beekeepers. Other projects are planned, including wetlands restoration.

"It's an outside classroom and a wonderful resource," Souders said.

The public is welcome to walk the trail and learn about the natural and historic nature of the farm, but they are asked to contact the Waterford Foundation first at 540-882-3018.

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