

## Conservation Club Fun

-John Smucker  
Leader of the Frederick County Conservation Club

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On June 10th the Frederick County Conservation Club kicked off its new water quality educational program. Just off Montevue Avenue at the rear of the Cooperative Extension Service's parking lot overlooking a forested buffer area, Club founder, John Smucker delivered the lesson "Trees the Trappers" to scouts from the Urbana area. Kids acted out how a riparian buffer keeps streams healthy. The kids' feet act as the tree roots. Different colored pieces of paper represent soil, water and toxins heading for the stream.

You would think "Mr. John", as they call him, would be relaxing the day after school lets out (he works as a Middle School teacher at Northwest Middle School in Carroll County). Instead he is at the Extension office teaching kids about the environment. "It never gets old - teaching kids about nature. It's easy because nature is so engaging, and kids just gravitate to it."

In a few weeks, the Conservation Club will partner with Volunteer Frederick. A small group of High School students will participate in a thirty-hour water quality unit called "All the Way to the Bay." The program includes a stream bank restoration component, utilizing coir logs, and trees, shrubs and grasses, appropriate for riparian environments. Informal lessons will be conducted at the stream site, like macro-invertebrate sampling as well as simulations similar to "Trees the Trappers". The conservation youth group will also visit locations around the county to see how Best Management Practices are being implemented for improving local water quality. On their agenda is a farm that uses a slurry tank, grass buffer area and has fenced the cows out of its stream. The group will also travel to a residential location where private citizens have created a rain garden and use rain barrels as their BMP. Last, they will tour BP Solar to see how a manufacturing operation minimizes its environmental impact.

The mission of the Frederick Conservation Club is to improve water quality through restoration and education. "So far it has been a challenge and at times intimidating," John said. Last year John participated in the Stream Symposium at Carroll Community College, attending a variety of lectures. "There were more graphs that I didn't understand than did!" John went on to explain that he came away from the Symposium with the idea of focusing on education for youth combined with restoration at less technical sites like first and second order streams.

John is currently seeking a more permanent home for his programs. His future plans include focusing on one stream to have a measurable impact on its health. He will accomplish this by rotating scouts and other volunteers through a half-day program, where restoration will follow a water quality lesson. He has his eye on an unnamed

tributary of Carroll Creek. “It’s perfect,” John said. “There is a real wild quality to it! In the first minute I set foot there, I saw two red tailed hawks.”

John’s philosophy is that if people have a good restoration experience, they will be more willing to take positive action. Like installing a rain barrel, using organic cleaners or using fewer chemicals and less fertilizer on their lawns. “What really inspires people is being out in nature and doing something good for the environment.” John concludes observing that he just organizes the where and when for the projects. Nature provides the rest.