

Watershed Stewards: Betty and Bob Eyer

-Submitted by Mike Kay
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Betty and Bob Eyer decided to plant a riparian forest buffer along both sides of a 5,000 foot stream flowing through their property. This stream empties into Linganore Creek a short distance to the south. Seventeen acres were deemed eligible for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program "CREP", while the remaining seven were not, and the Eylers chose to reforest this section without any financial assistance. The Eyer's farm is located in eastern Frederick County just south of Libertytown. They are part of the Lower Monocacy Watershed district.

Once the decision was made to plant, a reforestation plan was drawn up calling for the planting of large growing deciduous trees nearest the stream, shrubs on the exterior of the site, and evergreens on the steep sloped sections. The Eylers took an active role in determining which trees and shrubs to plant since they are experienced tree people, having grown trees and operated tree nurseries over the years. Nearly 11,000 seedlings were planted during the spring of 2001 by a professional tree planter. A variety of tree shelters were also installed on most of the deciduous species.

Large growing trees were planted next to the stream feathering out to shrubs on the exterior. Evergreen trees were planted in the steep, upland sections.

The Eylers undertook the large task caring for 11,000 seedlings and they have done a fantastic job nurturing these trees. Both Betty and Bob enjoy the periodic maintenance involved since it gives them an opportunity to get some fresh air, exercise, and view the diverse wildlife which abounds. Mowing, tree shelter maintenance, and some insect control practices have been completed over the years; and, this dedicated maintenance has resulted in terrific growth and a 90%+ survival rate.

Bob and Betty quickly realized that the grass cover in the planting site was a real magnet for mice and voles after they observed localized tree damage and mortality. The solution to this problem was to conduct a comprehensive mowing schedule, the most crucial time being in the fall so that little cover is available for the mice and voles during the winter when they inflict most of the damage. Bob relayed that numerous owls have moved into the surrounding area and he thinks they are keeping the rodents in check. Bob mentioned that the tree shelters protect the seedlings well from deer but they can serve as homes for the meadow mice that build their nest in them and kill the young seedling. Once the trees grow beyond the reach of deer, Betty and Bob remove the shelter and most have now been removed. The unsheltered trees can be damaged by buck rubbing, but at this stage of the game the deer are less of a problem than the mice and voles. The Eylers removed most of the shelters from the shrubs after the first year to permit the plants to develop into their natural appearance. Bob also relayed how he has observed fox excavating trenches around the shelter in an effort to snag a mouse or two. Despite the damage this caused

the tree roots Bob got a kick out of watching the fox root around kicking up a cloud of dust in their determination. The Eylers also had to deal with localized outbreaks of bagworms and sawflies on some of their evergreens.

With their knowledge of trees, Betty and Bob realized that there would be some mortality in the 11,000 trees they planted, and made the decision to conduct re-enforcement plantings every year since the inception of the planting. For the first 2-3 years after the planting, the Eylers replanted about 600 trees each spring. That number has decreased during the last couple years so now they germinate some of the thousands of walnuts that fall in their yard and grow them to seedlings transplanting them in the spring. Both Bob and Betty stressed how their periodic monitoring helped them determine what was occurring in the planting and how to direct their maintenance activities to help the plants thrive.

It's Betty and Bob's stewardship ethic that resulted in their decision to establish the beneficial stream buffer and increase wildlife habitat. They are very pleased with the results and excited about the numerous wildlife sightings and encounters. The Eylers have done a terrific job maintaining this planting and the trees and shrubs look fantastic. Betty and Bob Eyler certainly deserve to be recognized as exemplary watershed stewards.