

Toms Creek Stewardship Outreach Initiative

-Submitted by Kay Schultz
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The Toms Creek watershed has a growing number of Watershed Stewards who are concerned about watershed health and are translating their concern into action. They are planting native trees and shrubs along St. Mary's Run and Willow Rill as the streams flow through Mt. Saint Mary's University, Mother Seton and Emmitsburg Elementary schools and are establishing a rainwater harvesting and native plant demonstration at the Up County Center. Cosponsors of the initiative, the Emmitsburg Business and Professional Association (EBPA), the New Forest Society, the Emmitsburg Council of Churches and the Monocacy & Catoctin Watershed Alliance (MCWA) supported the demonstration projects and have offered a series of seven Green Forums to help educate area citizens and businesses about citizen practices that can improve watershed health.

Students, faculty, administration and community sponsors took advantage of crisp fall weather to plant native shrubs and trees along St. Mary's Run during October 2007. Using native plants from Clear Ridge and Stadler Nurseries, Master Gardener Elvin Wolfe designed the planting and selected the appropriate species to help slow down run off, shade and cool the stream, and add habitat for insects, birds and aquatic life.

Students, teachers and parents at Emmitsburg Elementary, led by Heather Montgomery with Potomac Conservancy and aided by other Alliance partners, planted 90 native trees along Willow Rill on April 19th. Aaron Cook, with the Western Maryland RC&D, selected species that would be appropriate for the site. Adam Satterlee and Julia Crifasi co-managed the project for Emmitsburg Elementary. A grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust's Urban Tree Canopy program was used to purchase the trees and mulch. The planting at Emmitsburg Elementary launched the Potomac Conservancy's initiative to help increase tree canopy coverage on Frederick County Public School properties. The County's Board of Education recently adopted a goal of increasing school site tree canopy from its current 12% to 20% over a 10 year period.

Just a hop, skip and a jump down Willow Rill, parents, teachers, and partners planted more than 600 native shrubs in a natural stream corridor running through the Mother Seton School property the weekend before. Mother Seton's Green School Initiative is addressing both indoor and outdoor actions to improve watershed health while also creating opportunities for students to learn and take actions themselves. On a blustery day in late May, Pastor Jon Greenstone led a Blessing of the Trail ceremony in which all school children participated. Kay Schultz presented Watershed Steward signs to the school in recognition of their initiatives in planting trees and improving wildlife habitat.

Wildlife are also benefiting from the native plants in the new native plant gardens at the Up County Family Center, just up the hill from Emmitsburg Elementary and adjacent to the Emmitsburg swimming pool. Designed by Native Landscape Designer, Chris Pax, partners and volunteers planted three native plant gardens at the Center.

The Silver Fancy Garden Club contributed \$422 for the purchase of 229 native herbaceous plants including 10 species. The New Forest Society purchased 8 low bush blueberry plants, an Allegheny Serviceberry Tree and a White Fringetree for the gardens. A grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust has provided a Rain Bear rain barrel that will help harvest and slow down rainwater and an interpretive sign that will be installed this summer. Already, a birdhouse built by a volunteer from the Up County board, has put out the welcome mat for local wildlife!