

Public Outreach and Stewardship Workplan

Practice #5: Stream Stewards Outreach and Education Campaign

Project: Watershed Group Capacity Building

Project Overview: The watershed group capacity building project began in June 2011 in response to a request from local watershed groups for capacity-building assistance and an expressed desire to assist the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in protecting and restoring local streams and watersheds. By providing local watershed groups with training and guidance on how to grow and maintain membership and activities, the County not only gains residents who are aware of their role and influence in water quality improvement but it also receives hands-on assistance needed to implement projects to restore and sustain healthy streams. During this project, watershed groups improved their organizational structure, local presence in the community and increased their activities and memberships.

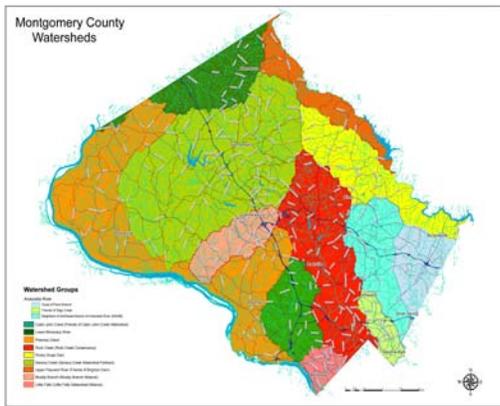


County Staff and ICPRB contractor working with Friends of Cabin John Creek members and volunteers on a conservation landscaping project at Geneva Day School as part of Train-the-Trainer workshops

Background: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates everything that goes through storm drains under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Municipal Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permit Program. The MS4 Permit Program is intended to reduce and eliminate pollution from our storm drain systems. The County's [MS4 Permit](#) requires adding stormwater management, achieving water quality goals, and engaging the public in meeting these requirements. The [Public Outreach and Stewardship Workplan](#) for the MS4 Permit laid out outreach priorities, delivery techniques, program start up costs and measurement tools to achieve social behavior change and improve water quality in the County.

Target Audience: Watershed groups within Montgomery County including Eyes of Paint Branch, Friends of Cabin John Creek, Friends of Sligo Creek, Little Falls Watershed Alliance, Neighbors of Northwest Branch, Rock Creek Conservancy, and Seneca Creek Watershed Partners. The Muddy Branch Alliance formed in 2011 just prior to the start of this project and the Watts Branch Alliance was initiated in 2013.

Watershed Group Capacity Building Project Results	
Watershed:	Countywide
Drainage Area:	500 sq. mi.
County Impervious Area:	12%
Project Location:	Countywide
Project Goal/Specific Behavior Change: Increase watershed group formation, volunteer capacity and organizational structure in order to successfully involve more residents in water quality protection measures.	
Total Project Budget:	\$60,000
Contract: Interstate Comm. on the Potomac River Basin	\$60,000
Annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum Scholarships:	~\$1500
Project Timeframe:	June 2011-January 2014
Collective Results: Increased watershed group communication, activity and organizational structure throughout the County	
Organizational Results	
Group Memberships (collective):	40% increase
Strategic plan(SP)/Work plans(WP) developed:	2 SPs/4 WPs
New watershed group formations:	Watts Branch Alliance
Established Board of Directors and 501©3 status:	3 groups
Executive Director hired (part-time):	1 group
Project Implementation	
Train-the-Trainer workshops held:	2 workshops
Conservation Landscapes installed:	2 demonstrations
Storm Drains Marked:	903 across 7 watersheds



Map of Montgomery County's local watersheds

Project Area: Countywide

Process: In June 2011, DEP entered into a contract with the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) to provide services to strengthen community-based watershed groups' structure and assist them in supporting the County's MS4 Permit requirements. The original scope of the project included Train-the-Trainer leadership workshops, group networking tools, and organizational support including database management, web and grant writing support and assessments and workshops for capacity building improvement.

Train-the-Trainer workshops – The workshop component of the project was proposed to train watershed group members to assist in residential stormwater management education and increase implementation efforts in the County. The first workshop occurred in October 2011 at the Izaak Walton League Headquarters. This involved a full day of training on conservation landscaping followed by a second day of hands-on implementation.



Train-the-Trainer workshop attendees working with Watershed Stewards Academy graduates on a conservation landscaping project, addressing runoff concerns at Izaak Walton League

Based on participant input, the course was scaled back to a one day workshop: half day training and half day implementation. The training materials were simplified for less technical audiences and the one day workshop was offered in 2012. The revised workshop proved more manageable for both staff and attendees. Even with these changes, participants did not feel comfortable leading future trainings without further assistance. From this feedback, no future workshops were scheduled during the project. A total of 40 residents participated in the 2 workshops.

As a simpler tool to attract new volunteers/ members with relative ease, DEP and ICPRB provided training for installing storm drain markers in their watersheds with the message 'Do Not Pollute'. Watershed groups were offered free markers and installation supplies. By 2014, after significant assistance from DEP, storm drain markers had been installed by seven of the nine watershed groups in seven county watersheds: Cabin John Creek, Little Falls, Muddy Branch, Northwest Branch, Rock Creek, Seneca Creek and Watts Branch totaling 903 storm drain markers. This proved to engage and connect several first time volunteers with the groups.

Group Networking -The first step in the project was establishing better communication between the existing groups and DEP and also among the watershed groups themselves.

Chesapeake Watershed Forum: In the fall of 2011, scholarships were provided for group representatives to participate in the Chesapeake Watershed Forum (CWF), an annual event that brings together watershed groups, local governments and others to network and learn about new restoration techniques and water quality issues affecting the Chesapeake Bay watershed. While at the 2011 CWF, the DEP and ICPRB led informal mini discussions with the watershed groups which led to the following recommendations: **1)** DEP assistance on printed outreach material that included group identity and contact information; **2)** DEP assistance on capacity building; **3)** Countywide group coordination to help avoid duplication of efforts; and **4)** Creation of a networking tool to better connect the groups.



Montgomery County Watershed group representatives attending the annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum

Capacity Building Support: After participating in the CWF, the groups received a formal survey which identified interest for DEP assistance in the following areas: **1)** Board development (organizational and engagement); **2)** Strategic planning; **3)** How to more effectively use databases; **4)** Assistance in targeting audiences, simplifying and utilizing effective messaging; and **5)** Assistance with grants.

From October 2011 through 2013, ICPRB and DEP met with interested groups individually to assist them in organizing their group's structure, mission, goals and community stakeholder meetings. By February 2012, after conducting multiple group surveys, corresponding with the groups and holding progress meetings to clarify priorities, the focus of DEP assistance shifted solely to providing the groups the basics of capacity building. To begin the process, a winter meeting on the importance of capacity building and organizational structure was held. This led to seven groups participating in the [River Network's Assessment tool](#) from March to June 2012. From that assessment exercise, it was evident that the groups were all at very different organizational levels which posed a challenge for providing universal training opportunities.

After compiling the groups assessment tool results, interest in training support in the following broader areas were recognized: **1)** board development, training, and orientation; **2)** organizational development - policies and legal requirements (insurance); **3)** volunteer recruitment and management; **4)** Strategic planning – specifically developing annual work plans and evaluating work goals and progress; **5)** tracking mechanisms/tools - budgets, financials, volunteers, activities; and **6)** communication skills/outreach/marketing - within the organization and to the public including multicultural outreach.

From late 2013 into 2014, consultant-led trainings were established and seemed to create a synergistic effect within the groups for achieving solid organizational development. As one group board member stated, "It let them (the group) move beyond wordsmithing, and applied real planning principles to what seemed to some as insurmountable organizational hurdles".

Collective Results:

<u>Organizational Development</u>	<u>#</u>
Annual Chesapeake Bay Forum Attendance	8 representatives
MoCo Yahooogroup listserv creation (self administered by groups)	41 participants
Groups participating in RN Assessment Tool	7 groups
Strategic Planning Workshop attendance (groups represented)	20 members, 6 groups
Workshop attendees who stated an increase in planning knowledge	85%
Attendees who stated the workshops were effective or highly effective	93%
Draft work plans and strategic plans developed	4 work plans, 2 strategic plans
Formation of Board of Directors and achieved non-profit status (501c3)	3 groups
Creation of Watershed Group Incubator by Muddy Branch Alliance	3 groups participating
Collective membership increases (* includes members outside MC)	40%; 3,772 current members*
Stakeholder meetings held (representing 2 groups)	4 community meetings
<u>Implementation</u>	
Storm Drains installed (in 7 different watersheds)	903 (43% installation rate)
Train-the-Trainer Workshops held and demonstrations implemented	2 workshops and projects

From June 2012 to July 2013, there were seven groups actively recruiting members and conducting special activities including adopt-a-road and watershed clean-ups and invasive plant work days. As an example of how far the groups have come, in 2013 alone, the now nine (9) local groups collected and removed over 1,000 bags of litter and recyclables from area streams; recruited over 4,200 volunteers that participated in or hosted over 300 community events resulting in approximately 10,000 volunteer hours, a service value to the County of over \$230,500. This is recognized as a substantial cost benefit and a significant effort in improving stream health by the watershed groups in Montgomery County. Additional outreach initiatives that also helped to support the goals of this project include the creation of the H2O Summit, the Stream Stewards program, among other programs and volunteer efforts.

Conclusions:

Major outcomes from the capacity building and strategic planning workshops include:

- Improved rapport and strengthened lines of communication among the watershed groups and between the groups and DEP
- Revitalized interest in support for stream protection related to the MS4 Permit requirements
- Clearer identification of needed capacity building skills moving forward
- Importance of strategic planning to achieve long term group goals



Seneca Creek Watershed Partners and Neighbors of Northwest Branch representatives participating in the 3-step strategic planning process

Future Recommendation:

Results from the group surveys and training workshops identified the following areas of interest for additional training likely to enhance the organizations' capacities in the future to support stream and watershed goals

- Continued support and communication with DEP
- Events and trainings that provide the opportunities to interact with other groups, as well as individualized assistance.
- Guidance on implementing work plans and evaluating strategic plans.
- Communication skills, outreach, and marketing
- Volunteer recruitment and management
- Board development

Based on the experiences and feedback from this project, it was determined that future training programs are likely to be most effective if they:

- Involve a leadership team of two to four members from each group
- Provide short multi-group workshops, followed by dedicated time with each group
- Require that participating groups commit to action items throughout the training
- Are led by an experienced outside consultant with the ability to address the needs of groups at varying stages of development

References:

- ICPRB Watershed Group Capacity Building Project; Contract No. 1008926
- *www.independentsector.org

For more information:

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/dep/whatcanyoudo.html