

At the Watershed Group Day, March 26, 2014 in Martinsburg a very complex, complicated and common issue came up for discussion: the need for volunteers to bolster watershed organizations and their inherent activities. The volunteerism question is widespread, not only for watershed groups but any organization operating on a dedication of free time, effort and treasure.

For over a year now my home county has been in an uproar over the purchase of a Fire and Rescue building as well as the creation of a county-wide ambulance authority. Things have quieted to a dull roar at this point. The big issue both sides can agree on is the declining pool of volunteer fire and rescue workers to draw from.

As a West Virginia State FFA Officer I remember chanting with my fellow officers: “There are six roles to State Office and they go something just like this: recruit, retain, encourage, motivate, conduct state business” and I forget the last one. Maybe advocate. Later on as an Alpha Gamma Rho member I read in our handbook *The Crescent* that the one activity every brother must constantly participate in is recruitment.

The hierarchy of the Chesapeake Bay program starts in the halls of Congress and the White House. From their directives and allocations different agencies (Federal, State, and Local) get an idea of what should be done and how. These agencies rely on the expertise, talent, and caring of employees in their ranks. At this point, volunteerism must come into play to carry out the larger objectives. Where the rubber meets the road someone has to spend time physically doing what needs to be done to affect change. Somebody has to pick up tires and trash, plant trees, shovel mulch, install fish habitat, install rain barrels, and talk to others if we are going to live in a better watershed.

I had originally hoped to write a flag waving article highlighting the positive things supporting this activity in our watershed. I typed up a questionnaire, and then sent it out to quite a number of contacts to get some answers. As a sad reminder of declining volunteerism, only 2 responses came back.

I'm not going to cast blame or blow smoke. Free time is a precious commodity that is going up with the cost of living. Its allocation is a precious thing, but so is the environment we call home. These watersheds are our habitat, where we work, play, live, breath, eat, drink and recreate. I'm not saying do more, I'm saying get more people involved.

A great first step is going to take place June 23, in Martinsburg. It's a Potomac Watershed Volunteering Brainstorming session. Headed up by Alana Hartman, Jennifer Pauer and Suzy Lucas in response the same issue I'm writing about, I support it as a better idea to share what works to bolster involvement.

I would love to sit at my typewriter, finish this piece, yawn, stretch, and feel I made a difference. Mass communication certainly has its place. But let's take a breath and engage in the shared word at this event. Please join us from 3-5 pm June 23, 2014, in the Mountaineer Room at the Byrd Health Sciences Center, 2500 Foundation Way, Martinsburg WV.