

WREN OCTOBER 2014 WATER POLICY NEWS FEATURE

“The WREN EXPERIENCE” Stories Shared by 2013 -2014 WREN Project Leaders

Compiled by Lynda Ginsparg

“The WREN Experience . . . I did not know what to expect when the Borough was awarded a grant through WREN and I did not know until I arrived at the conference that WREN was going to turn me into a leader. When you introduce yourself and your project at the WREN conference, you start down a whirlwind path of learning, doing and being part of the WREN Experience.” ~ Courtney Hayden, State College Borough, “Light Step, Right Step Festival.”

During the 2013-2014 funding year, WREN awarded and worked with 15 community partnerships: 12 watershed education (nonpoint source pollution prevention) projects and 3 source water protection projects. Project activities began July 1, 2013 and wrapped up June 30, 2014. Project leaders were asked to submit a final report. The report included an opportunity to share a story that may be of interest to future project leaders and Water Policy News readers. Here are their stories shared.

Source Water Protection Coalition Projects

COLUMBIA-MONTOUR COUNTIES

“We are proud that we went beyond our grant requirements and held several outreach activities. This was in part due to the fact that almost every event we planned was well attended. We feel we did very well to get the word out using a variety of means to attract people to the given event. Our evaluations indicated that those who attended learned something meaningful with the intention to take action or share the information with others.



Heather Almer

We are also proud that our coalition actively participated in the democratic process by commenting on proposed legislation (our letter on proposed changes to Ch 78 Oil and Gas legislation). We were told by the North Central regional director at DEP, Marcus Kohl, when he visited our Columbia County Conservation District board meeting, that letters submitted by organized groups like ourselves were important in pushing for more protection of drinking water through the source water protection process.” - WREN Source Water Protection project leader Heather Almer, Watershed Specialist with the Columbia County Conservation District; project titled “Columbia-Montour Coalition for Source Water Protection.”



Maryruth Wagner, left, District Manager with the Columbia County Conservation District, supervises sixth grade science students at Southern Columbia Area Middle School as they use the EnviroScape® model.

POCONO SOURCE WATER PROTECTION COLLABORATIVE: PIKE, WAYNE AND MONROE COUNTIES

*“Our proudest accomplishment was forming an organization that includes three rural counties, and enlisting the cooperation of the county Planning Commission to add a source water protection GIS layer onto the county maps for planning and emergency response purposes. Agenda items were developed for meetings that allowed consistency and promoted discussion of concerns and accomplishments.” - **Marian Keegan, Director of Community Conservation for the Hemlock Farms Community Association and project leader for the Pocono Source Water Protection Collaborative.***



Marian Keegan

BERKS COUNTY

“The July 31, 2013 conference (the first of the newly created Berks County Water & Sewer Association) brought over 100 officials from municipalities and water and sewer providers together to understand the importance of protecting water for our use from the moment it falls as rain or flows into the area through streams and rivers.



Paul Janssen

*Working together to identify threats, emergencies, and developing best practices has heightened the awareness of providers and emergency and municipal officials across the county.” - **Paul Janssen, Director, Center for Excellence in Government, Albright College and project leader for Source Water Protection for Berks County.***

Watershed Education Partnership Projects

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

“What surprised many of our workshop partners was the attendance of the owner of one of the biggest landscape architect firms in the area. They didn’t think this person had any interest in rain gardens and green stormwater BMPs.

His attendance at the workshop signaled something to us... that the concepts we presented at the workshop were gaining mainstream traction and that people are taking the stormwater issues more seriously. This person was interviewed for the [video](#) and he glowed about how much he learned during the event, why the topic was important to the community and his work, and how he planned to take what he learned and put it into action.



Etna Borough’s rain garden blooms beautifully beside the community pool building. Educational signage describes the benefits of a rain garden.

Here is someone that isn't part of the "choir." We reached new audiences and expanded the mindsets of more than just those who are already interested in green infrastructure and the environment."
-Mary Ellen Ramage, Etna Borough Manager and project leader, project titled: "Workshop on the Design and Maintenance of Rain Gardens for Landscape Professionals"



LANCASTER COUNTY



Stephanie Smith

"In October 2013, Lancaster Farmland Trust conducted an assessment of a small dairy farm in West Lampeter Township, owned by an Amish farmer. The farmer had no conservation plan in place and had not considered implementing any sustainable farming practices on his land. During the assessment, the Trust's Stewardship Coordinator, Joella Garber, provided a wealth of information about the project, conservation planning and best management practices. The Trust connected the landowner with the Lancaster County Conservation District, who is now providing assistance with the creation of a conservation plan. In addition, West Lampeter Township is considering providing funds to implement streambank fencing and a small riparian buffer on his property." - **Stephanie Smith, Municipal Outreach Coordinator, Lancaster Farmland Trust, "Agricultural Best Management Practices - A New 'Greening' Model for Municipalities.**

CENTRE COUNTY

"In November 2013, we distributed 175 ["My Healthy Stream"](#) books to the targeted audience. In January 2014, we just happened to be listening to the PSU NPR station when we heard the "My Healthy Stream" book and Trout Unlimited being mentioned during an interview with the local ClearWater Conservancy conservation biologist, Katie Ombalski.



Judi Sittler

It turns out that the interviewer, Patty Satalia, lives along the stream that was part of our targeted audience and received one of the books."
- Judi Sittler, Chapter President of Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and project leader of the "Return the Roots – A Backyard Makeover for Streamside Owners."



Volunteers get digging in the winning homeowner's backyard for the 'Return the Roots' makeover project.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

"Our success story is that Steve Saile, Director of Facilities at the Abington School District (ASD), has not only become an advocate for watershed protection, he is now actively interested in pursuing green stormwater management on the ASD grounds. ASD is home to two of our creek's headwaters (East and West Baeder Creek). We first approached ASD in 2012 and proposed a Riparian Buffer on the Junior High campus at East Baeder Creek. Working with ASD, students, faculty, administration and community volunteers, we planted the buffer. The ASD expressed their interest in an additional buffer along an additional reach of the creek back, so we



Julie Slavet

planted Phase II in 2013. Steve attended our stormwater tour to see Philadelphia Water Department projects up close. After visiting Womrath Park, where a rain garden captures runoff from the adjacent parking lot, Steve contacted us to ask if we would consider a project using the same concept, to keep parking lot runoff from entering storm sewer inlets and flowing into the creek. . . We are now working with Steve to find support to complete a master Stormwater management plan for the ASD campus.” - **Julie Slavet, Executive Director of the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership and project leader of “Managing Rainfall in the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed: Stormwater Project Tour.”**

DAUPHIN COUNTY

“The site where our buffer planting took place was previously flooded during Tropical Storm Lee. Because the home that used to exist there was completely ruined, the property had been recovered through FEMA. The people of this community remember how badly it was damaged during the flood and were instrumental in the clean-up efforts after the storm. Several other homes on the street where our project took place also suffered during Lee. This unique situation allowed us to put more emphasis on the fact that riparian buffers are



Manada volunteers are busy during the recent Arbor Day

a natural method to reduce the impact of flooding.

On the day of the event I was approached by three different families who live down the street from our planting site. Each of them told me that they were very happy to see a planting taking place there and thought we were doing such a great thing for their community. This project allowed a property that was devastated from flooding to transition into a hopeful site of restoration.” - **Jennifer Hine, Associate Director, Manada Conservancy & project leader for the Manada Conservancy’s ‘The Swatara Greenway: Restoring Our Riparian Buffers, A Community Planting Project.’**



Jennifer Hine

LEHIGH COUNTY



Erin Frederick

“Our Master Watershed Stewards designed and planted 166 one-gallon wildflowers, along with a wild flower seed mixture in Covered Bridge Park along the Hokendauqua Creek in Allen Township, Northampton County. Previously the site had been mowed to the edge of the stream and was in need of a riparian buffer. The volunteers also leveraged funding by partnering with Trout Unlimited,

which had funding for educational signage and additional plants. This project went well

beyond its intended scope. They also engaged the neighbors!”

- **Erin Frederick, project leader, ‘Master Watershed Steward Program’ and Horticulture & Natural Resource Educator for Penn State Ext.**

WANTED: HEALTHY TRAILS AND STREAMS

Look for Pennsylvania's LEAST and MOST WANTED PLANTS as you walk the Saucun Rail Trail today. Our LEAST wanted are **non-native, invasive plants** which threaten a healthy environment. Our MOST wanted are **native plants** which give food, provide habitat and clean our water.

LEAST WANTED
INVASIVE WEEDS are plants that grow from other parts of the world and do not support our healthy ecosystem. These plants threaten the health of native Pennsylvania animals and plants and take up the space plants that they need.
Japanese Barberry This non-native shrub from Japan and China is highly invasive. It forms a dense thicket that blocks sunlight from other plants.
Winged Burning Bush This non-native shrub from China and India is highly invasive. It forms a dense thicket that blocks sunlight from other plants.
Lonicera Maackii This non-native shrub from China and India is highly invasive. It forms a dense thicket that blocks sunlight from other plants.
Ornamental Kalmia This non-native shrub from China and India is highly invasive. It forms a dense thicket that blocks sunlight from other plants.

MOST WANTED
NATIVE PLANTS are those that are growing here before Europeans settled this land. These plants provide food and habitat for our birds, insects, and other animals. They also help clean our water and take up the space plants that they need.
Goldenrod Goldenrod is a native plant that grows in wet areas and helps clean our water.
Carex Carex is a native plant that grows in wet areas and helps clean our water.
Spice Bush This native shrub is a hardy plant that grows in wet areas and helps clean our water.

Look, learn and join!
 Look closely at you with the trail. How many of these plants can you find? Learning to identify these plants is the first step. Help improve the health of the trail and water creek by joining local riparian management projects. You can also improve your own neighborhood by removing invasive plants and planting native species in your own landscape.

"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you." - John Muir

Logos for Lehigh Valley Council of Watershed Stewards, Penn State, and Lehigh Valley Regional Planning Commission.

The sign above invites visitors to look for the 'least wanted' and 'most wanted' plants along the Saucun Rail Trail in Lehigh County.

LANCASTER COUNTY

“During the course of this project . . . (we) observed a greater willingness from the partners to continue to assist with the rain garden even after the grant period ends.

Our partners have shown tremendous loyalty, and have been willing to continue to volunteer and donate hours of professional experience. We also observed positive understanding with some Borough Officials at public meetings as new ordinances are presented for adoption. Most Borough Officials understand now why these new laws must be adopted,



and utilize the rain garden as an example when addressing water quality issues at public meetings.”

A lush rain garden blooms alongside the Mount Joy Borough Hall. The educational sign near the front door describes the benefits of a rain garden and includes a cutaway drawing of how a rain garden works.

- Stacie Gibbs, Zoning Code Officer for Mount Joy Borough & project leader, ‘Mount Joy Borough Community Rain Garden – A Blooming Good Idea!’



Stacie Gibbs (r) pictured with Ken Barto (l) also with the Borough

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY

“We developed a working relationship with our Municipal Authority, Conservation District and Little Shamokin Creek Assoc. Our initial target audience was the community of the Hill Neighborhood. We discovered that it wasn’t just these residents who valued water conservation, education and absorption, but our city as a whole.

There has never been this type of education and implementation available, therefore we opened it up to the entire city and had an overwhelmingly positive response. Our goal is to continue educating our officials and citizens so that these challenges are addressed and it becomes second nature to think about our water



Volunteer Jess Runkle decorates a rain barrel during a workshop sponsored by Sunbury Revitalization Inc. for the Hill Neighborhood residents

quality when addressing issues throughout the city.” - Natalie Wertman, President, Hill Neighborhood & project leader, ‘Storm Water Runoff Management: From Education to Implementation’



Natalie Wertman (l) pictured with Jessica Ackley (r), VP Hill Neighborhood

CENTRE COUNTY

“The Borough of State College has previously been awarded a number of grants of greater financial benefit for stormwater management infrastructure than awarded through the WREN grant process. When we applied for

the WREN grant, it was to pursue a smaller project that would be both designed and completed by an AmeriCorps member as part of her service at the Borough.

My first grant project was awarded by the DEP in 2010 while I was also an AmeriCorps member at the Borough.



State College Borough's Alan Sam (l) Environmental Coordinator/Arborist with Courtney Hayden (r)

At \$3,000, the grant was manageable for a new volunteer. Through the grant, I completed the installation of two high quality wetland educational signs, but I can confidently state that the WREN project at only \$1,500, had a higher overall impact on me as a municipal staff member. The project also had a higher return on investment than the small grant the Borough was awarded in 2010 and even some of the larger grants awarded to the Borough. Both the project leader (Alan Sam) and I came away from the conference with renewed interest and vigor for tackling community-based projects. The WREN grant is not only an opportunity to provide funds for stormwater management projects, it is an unexpected opportunity for educational in-service to grantees.

Our project was not the first rain barrel workshop in State College, or the biggest workshop; but we knew that we were a part of a group of leaders across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania all working toward the same goal.

In quick-paced sessions, we were handed down the tools honed by a long series of successful projects. These tools increase the likelihood of success for each entity awarded a grant through the WREN program, which is why I would not call it a grant program. To me, I became part of what I can only call the "WREN Experience," and I hope that I took a little piece of it back to my organization when we drove away from Carlisle, PA. - Courtney Hayden, State College Borough, "Light Step, Right Step Festival."

CLEARFIELD AND CAMBRIA COUNTIES

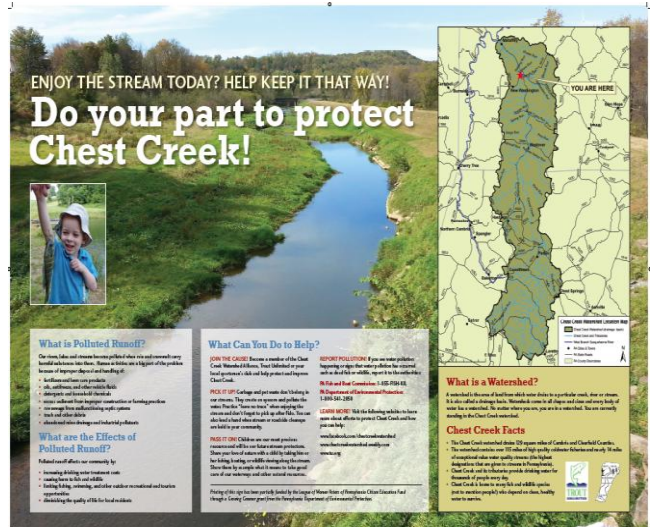
"There are four larger boroughs located within the Chest Creek watershed that have traditionally acted virtually independently of one another when it came to water related issues, but due to the outreach efforts of this project, the municipalities are thinking more about cooperating on issues that affect them all including: drinking water supplies, illegal dumping, improving stream access and recreational opportunities, AMD cleanup, and nearby biosolids applications.



Rachel Kester

At the start of this project, the Chest Creek Watershed Alliance was nearing collapse as an organization due to lack of community interest/participation. Through this outreach campaign project, the CCWA has had an influx of new members, renewed interest from local elected officials and community members, and an interest in developing/implementing additional community and water quality benefit projects. Overall it has been a great success!"

- Rachel Kester, Project Coordinator, Eastern Abandoned Mine Program & project leader for Trout Unlimited's "Chest Creek Watershed Community Engagement Project."



Chest Creek's poster asks "What is Polluted Runoff" and shows "What Can You Do to Help?"

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

“That Rain Gardens became important to people enough to change their behaviors is evidenced by the number of tour and workshop attendees that wanted rain gardens and were willing to help install others’ rain gardens as they wrote on a post-event survey form.



(There was also a) willingness of volunteers to come back after a day of volunteering and even come back another season. We already have five additional homeowners who want rain gardens installed this Fall.” - Susan Curry, “Public Awareness + Incentives = 10 Rain Gardens in Ambler, PA”



Ambler Borough Environmental Advisory Council Rain Garden display at the Ambler Farmers Market.

Susan Curry (l) pictured with Susan Johnson (r) of the Ambler Borough EAC

BUCKS COUNTY

“Our Township manager and director of Public Works and Parks/Recreation have been very supportive of our efforts. Our public works department and park and recreation departments played a key role in assisting us during Warrington Day in



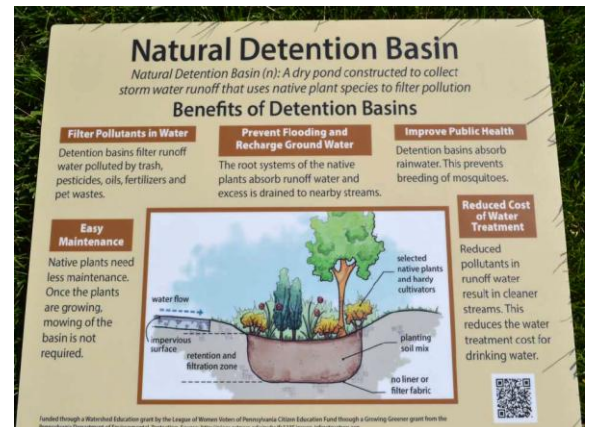
Adele and Nick Weremeychik of Warrington Twp EAC shared their working rain barrel display at 2014 WREN Grantee Meeting

September 2013 and our Community Service Day in May 2014.

In addition, public works

will be installing the signs and the administrative staff set up the web pages for the QR codes for the sign fact sheets and will post the powerpoint video on the Township’s TV channel.” - Fred Suffian, chair of the Warrington

Environmental Advisory Council, “Green Infrastructure Outdoor Classroom Trail and Home Owner Linkages.”



This is one of ten interpretive signs along the Igoe Porter Wellings/Lower Nike Trail in Warrington Township. The signs, created by the Warrington EAC, have helped to transform the 2.45 mile trail into an outdoor learning experience for trail visitors.

JOIN US AND BECOME A WREN PROJECT LEADER in 2015. Check out our [2015 Grant Flyer](#). Information about our [Non-Point Source Watershed Education grants](#) and our new three-tier [Source Water Protection grants](#) will be available at the WREN website mid- December. Can’t wait to get started? You can review the 2014 grant guidance and applications now. Requirements for 2015 grants will be similar. Contact WREN Director Julie Kollar, juliekwren@verizon.net for additional information.