

Nine Mile News

FALL 2011

photo by John Moyer

NINE MILE RUN
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



photo by John Moyer

This newsletter reaches you in the midst of another busy tree-planting season for the watershed association. Our Rooted in Wilksburg initiative, a partnership with TreeVitalize and the Borough of Wilksburg, is in full swing, planting dozens more native trees along streets and in parking lots in the borough. If you are ready for some hands-on involvement in greening our region, come out and volunteer with us at a Saturday morning planting event! (Check our website, ninemilerun.org, for dates, times, and locations.)

Reflecting upon the many benefits these hard-working arboreal multi-taskers will bring to the Wilksburg community over the coming years, one cannot help wanting to see these kinds of benefits replicated on a larger scale throughout our region. In the face of global warming and the clear need for many expensive infrastructure investments, we need to think seriously about how to make our communities more resilient, and how to invest our limited public funds most wisely and sustainably.

This is why the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association has become a partner in the Clean Rivers Campaign. The campaign is an educational program designed to raise citizen awareness about the issues of stormwater runoff and sewer overflows in Allegheny County, and to clarify the choices we face in complying with the court order to stop the overflows. The organizations partnering in the Clean Rivers Campaign - Pittsburgh United, Clean Water Action, Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network, Action United, The Sierra Club, and NMRWA - made significant progress last year when we succeeded in winning passage of legislation in the City of Pittsburgh that holds publicly funded development to a higher standard for managing stormwater on site through the use of green infrastructure. Now we are looking at the problem from a larger, regional perspective.

Too many people are not yet aware that ALCOSAN is nearing the end of a 5 year-long planning effort to comply with the federal consent decree to stop the sewer overflows that occur every time we get any significant rainfall in the area – often enough

that for half of the days of our recreational boating season, the water in our three rivers is not safe to touch. So far the solutions that have been studied and are being proposed all involve building much bigger pipes and tunnels, holding tanks, and treatment plants. But the cost of this “grey” infrastructure far exceeds what the ratepayers in our region can realistically afford to spend on the project.

Meanwhile, other cities around the country are testing innovative new green infrastructure solutions to keep the stormwater out of the sanitary sewer pipes in the first place (after all that’s what’s causing the overflows!) They are also learning more about the other benefits these solutions bring - cleaner air, cooler summer temperatures, increased property values, revitalized business districts, and good long-term green jobs to maintain what has been built. And they are discovering that the EPA is more open to the inclusion of green infrastructure solutions than they have been in the past, recognizing the urgent need to get multiple benefits for the dollars spent on these projects.

If you are interested in a sustainable future for our region, I urge you to join the Clean Rivers Campaign. Changing course at this point depends on the organized voice of informed citizens. Attend one our workshops to learn more about the issue and how you can make a difference. You may then also want to attend one of ALCOSAN’s public meetings this fall, and bring your questions and suggestions. More information about all of this is available at a new website, www.cleanriverscampaign.org.

The Nine Mile Run Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration is recognized as a model for how green infrastructure and natural systems can significantly improve degraded landscapes through better water management. This project should not remain an isolated demonstration but rather be the beginning of a new approach to how we deal with rain and its consequences.



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Our mission is to ensure the restoration and protection of the Nine Mile Run watershed through citizen engagement, demonstration projects, and advocacy.

OUR PROGRAMS ARE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR FUNDERS.

The Heinz Endowments
 The Heinz Endowments Youth Philanthropy Project SWIM
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 The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection,
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 The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy TreeVitalize
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 The Wilkinsburg Community Development Corporation
 And Our Members

Thank you to
 Betty Kindle and ALCOSAN
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 for their donation of professional services

In-Kind Donations
 Allegro Hearth Bakery, Squirrel Hill
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 The Coffee Tree Roaster, Squirrel Hill

Special thanks to Summerset at Frick Park and the Wilkinsburg School District for the use of their facilities for NMRWA meetings.

HELLOS AND GOODBYES

Farewell to Justin

It was a sad day at Nine Mile Run when Justin Hynicka announced that he was leaving us for the great Northwest to pursue a graduate degree in forestry. Justin was accepted into the school of Forestry at Oregon State University, where he will be studying Forest Ecosystems and Society. Justin joined NMRWA in 2009 as a rain barrel intern and was promoted to GreenLinks Coordinator later that year. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2008 with a double major in Chemistry and Environmental Geology. Justin was known for his intelligence, analytical skills, a matchless work ethic, and... a quirky sense of humor. Good Luck – Justin!



Welcome Alicia

Alicia joined NMRWA in September 2011 as our new GreenLinks Coordinator. Originally a native of Toledo, OH, she completed her undergraduate studies in environmental science at Creighton University in Omaha, NE. Alicia moved to Pittsburgh in the fall of 2010 as a participant in PULSE - the Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience, where her placement was at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, serving as TreeVitalize Program Assistant. Alicia will be spearheading Rooted in Wilkinsburg – the Wilkinsburg TreeVitalize 500 Tree Initiative. Having lived in three unique urban environments, Alicia is fascinated by the intersection of the human and natural environment. In her free time, Alicia enjoys volunteering, knitting and discussing pop culture.



SWEET STREAM SWEEP STUFF



CUT THE SALT!

Did you know that salting your sidewalk could kill trees and harm aquatic life? Elevated sodium and chloride levels in soils inhibit water absorption and reduce root growth. Salt also disrupts the uptake of plant nutrients stunting long-term growth. Salt in snowmelt runs off into Nine Mile Run and has a detrimental affect on the macro-invertebrate populations by decreasing dissolved oxygen in the stream.

This winter try a watershed friendly alternative to the standard road salt (typically sodium chloride). Ask your local hardware store for safer options, such as calcium magnesium acetate and potassium acetate. If these alternatives are unavailable try reducing the amount of salt you use by applying the recommended half a teaspoon of salt per square foot. Also, it takes less salt to prevent ice from forming than it does to melt ice, so salting before the snow becomes compacted is safer and more economical.

THE THIRD STATE OF THE WATERSHED

Every two years, NMRWA presents the results of our stream monitoring efforts at the State of the Watershed. Our Third State of the Watershed was held on this September 24th. This all-day public event took place at the newly refurbished UCP/CLASS building on Braddock Avenue and featured presentations on the recent stream monitoring findings and an inspiring presentation by George Hawkins, the general manager of DC Water.

In 2007, following the completion of the Nine Mile Run Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration, we presented the first full year of monitoring. The restoration was designed to ameliorate years of neglect and degradation and transformed “Stink Creek” into an amazing regional asset. With a reconfigured stream channel and reconstructed streambed, newly created wetlands and floodplains, the restoration expanded and enhanced critical habitat. The results were dramatic as the stream began to show signs of renewed health after so many decades of abuse.

The visual changes to the stream continue to attract and enchant visitors, but to fully understand the restoration’s effect we must look at the stream through the eyes of a scientist and carefully monitor the water quality and habitat. Thus, NMRWA’s monitoring committee has continued to examine a number of key indicators of success, including pH, heavy metals, bacteria, macro-invertebrates, and fish.

Much has changed in the last five years. The stream’s pH has stabilized, creating a more

hospitable environment for fish and macro-invertebrates, and the stream banks are filled with native plants that attract diverse and abundant wildlife. However, although we see many improvements, we also continue to see high bacterial counts in the stream from sewage overflows caused by stormwater runoff.

This is not only a regional issue but a national one as well. Many large older cities, including Washington DC, are looking at creative solutions to these problems. George Hawkins, the General Manager of DC Water, has a long history with the issues of stormwater runoff and its impact on water quality. Hawkins previously served as executive director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, where he built an award-winning program to improve local zoning and master plans to both target growth and protect critical ecosystems. He also held senior positions with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), including Senior Assistant Regional Counsel and Special Assistant to the Regional Administrator. According to Mr Hawkins, we have lots to celebrate at Nine Mile Run. The improvements we see in the stream are remarkable; higher numbers of fish and invertebrates, stabilized pH readings, no significant heavy metal pollution, a stream channel that accommodates fluctuations in flow, and habitat that continues to attract a diversity of species. Mr. Hawkins shared his reflections on our nation’s environmental track record with water quality and the possible solutions that will not only improve water quality but will also enhance our quality of life.

(To hear George’s complete presentation, please visit our website at www.ninemilerun.org. You will be inspired – we promise!)

After lunch participants got outside and eagerly joined workshops on water quality, fish, and macro-invertebrates sampling, a rain garden installation, and a bicycle tour of the NMRWA’s green projects throughout the watershed. To receive a copy of the complete report, please contact Lisa Brown at lisa@ninemilerun.org or call 412-371-8779 x115.

Many thanks to our sponsors: Drs. Phillip and Susan Smith, Hatch Mott MacDonald, Duquesne University’s Center for Environmental Research and Education, and The Heinz Endowments .

Also a thank you to **Brueggers Bagel Bakery** and the **Coffee Tree Roasters** in Squirrel Hill for their donations of bagels and coffee for breakfast.



Electro-fishing with Mike, Brady, and Tony.



George Hawkins making a fine point.



Rain garden installation at the Biddle Bldg.

CELEBRATING BIODIVERSITY!

Last fall, the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association received funding from The Sprout Fund to create a project that engaged citizens in stewardship and promoted biodiversity in the watershed. NMRWA partnered with the Word of God School in Swissvale, transforming their school yard with a rain garden that incorporated a diverse population of native plant species. By introducing native plants that attract and provide habitat for wildlife, this project also created a distinct outdoor learning environment. Although school yard gardens are not unique, school rain gardens and gardens that focus on native plants and stormwater runoff are rare in the Pittsburgh region. A beautiful and restful space, this garden also promotes the importance of native plants in ensuring biodiversity.

We launched the project in February with lessons for the students by NMRWA's Luke Stamper and Sara Madden on watersheds, the issues of stormwater runoff, native plants and biodiversity and the importance of green spaces in our communities. Once the students had an understanding of the issues, Sara returned to lead them in a design workshop for the garden. Anticipation began to peak, but the weeks of rain throughout April and early May delayed the construction. Finally, in late May

we held the ground breaking and with over 40 volunteers we excavated the site by hand. Students, teachers and parents worked for three days digging the bed, building benches and bird baths, planting small trees and perennials and finally building a soil berm and adding mulch around the plants.

After a summer of growth, NMRWA returned to Word of God School in September for a Celebration of Biodiversity. Everyone who worked on the garden came to help weed, mulch and water, and partied with a delicious cake. Working with the Word of God Community was a wonderful experience for the NMRWA staff – what an incredible group of dedicated teachers, parents, and students!

NMRWA sees the Word of God School yard Transformation as an exciting pilot project to promote a network of school yard rain gardens throughout the watershed! This project was a stop on NMRWA's State of the Watershed tour on September 24th. A huge thank you to the Sprout Fund for their financial support!



Word of God crew posing for photoshoot.



The Cake!

WHO ARE THE URBAN ECOSTEWARDS?

Have you ever noticed folks emerging from the wetlands, or woods in Frick Park armed with shovels and garbage bags? These are the Urban Ecostewards. They are on the front lines of the battle against invasives and are often seen carrying the severed remains of Japanese Knotweed or Garlic Mustard. Each ecosteward adopts a section of Frick Park to care for – think adopt-a-highway. But ecostewards are not your typical volunteers. Ecostewards receive vital training that includes workshops on invasive species removal, erosion control, native seed collection, and tree and wildflower identification. Workshops are scheduled throughout the year providing training for new volunteers and refresher courses for current volunteers. In addition, being an ecosteward is a great way for folks with busy schedules to lend a helping hand. Ecostewards set their own schedule and visit their sites when it is most convenient.

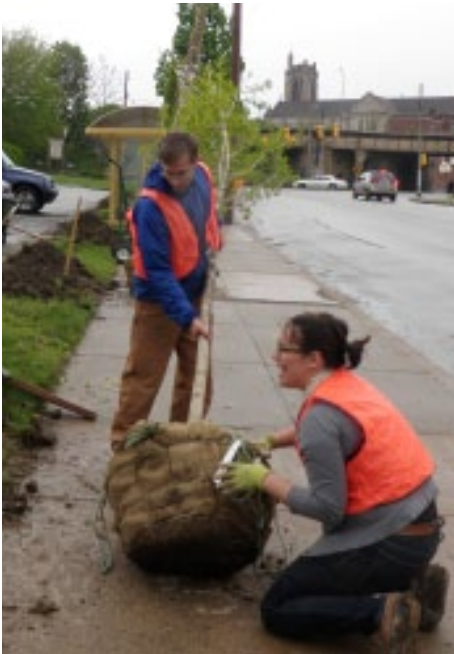
Nine Mile Run's Urban EcoStewards work along the stream monitoring and removing invasive plant species, collecting litter, and planting and cataloging native plants. In 2011, our forty-one ecostewards logged in over 300 volunteer hours. We also expanded the program to include the borders of the restoration area. By moving beyond the stream banks, we hope to check the spread of invasive plant species in the restoration area from the upper reaches of Frick Park. To help us in the battle against invasive species, we need more volunteers, with the goal of 45 volunteers stewarding the restoration area by the end of 2011. These dedicated volunteers are vital to NMRWA's mission to ensure the protection the Nine Mile Run Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration. Consider joining the ranks of the Urban Ecostewards today by emailing luke@ninemilerun.org or calling 412.371.8779 ext.120.



Erosion Control Workshop

Get Outside!

Please check our website, www.ninemilerun.org under "Get Involved" for a complete list of upcoming events, cancellations and last minute changes. We will post any changes the night before an event. Unless otherwise specified, all events are free and open to the public. Families are welcome!



Justin and Sara demonstrating proper planting techniques



Albert Kollar leading the NMRWA geology tour.

Rooted in Wilkesburg The Wilkesburg TreeVitalize Project- 500 Tree Initiative

- ▶ Saturday, October 29th
- ▶ 9:30am-1:00pm

Meet at the Wilkesburg Municipal Parking Lot Behind South Avenue United Methodist Church 733 South Avenue

Please check our website for locations for the following planting dates!

- ▶ Saturday, November 5th
- ▶ noon-3:00pm
- ▶ Saturday, November 12th
- ▶ 9:30am-1:00pm

Help NMRWA plant trees in the Wilkesburg Tree Vitalize Project-500 Tree Initiative! This project will ensure tree-lined streets for Wilkesburg's future while providing many economic and social benefits! In addition, these trees will help reduce stormwater runoff and non-point source pollution entering the Nine Mile Run Stream. Join NMRWA, TreeVitalize, the Borough of Wilkesburg, the Wilkesburg CDC and the Wilkesburg Shade Tree Committee, as we continue to add to and improve green spaces in Wilkesburg. We provide all tools and supplies. Funding for this project was received through the Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (PennVest). Register by writing alicia@ninemilerun.org or by calling 412.371.8779 ext. 116.

Duck Hollow Hike

- ▶ Sunday October 30th
 - ▶ 9am-noon.
- Meet at Duck Hollow parking lot along the Mon at the bottom of Old Browns Hill Rd.

Join NMRWA and Edgewood resident, Paul Heckbert, for this hike in the woods in Duck Hollow and Swisshelm Park. Paul will take us on some little known trails. Parts of this hike are rigorous. Boots are recommended. Estimated time is 3 hours.

Register by emailing lisa@ninemilerun.org or call 412.371.8779 ext.115.

Geology Walk

- ▶ Sunday, November 13th
 - ▶ 1pm-3:30pm
- Biddle Street Parking lot on Braddock Avenue
non-members: \$10 / Members: Free!
Not sure if your membership is current?
Email judi@ninemilerun.org

One of our most popular seasonal walks - so be sure to sign up early! Join local geologist, Albert Kollar for this unique trip back in time to when Braddock Avenue was the Monongahela River and Pennsylvania was close to the equator. Using the rocks and formations in Frick Park, participants will learn about important geological and paleontological periods. You must preregister for this event! Please register by calling 412.371.8779 ext. 115, or email lisa@ninemilerun.org.

Urban EcoSteward Events Planting Techniques

- ▶ Saturday, November 19th
 - ▶ 1-3 p.m.
- Emerald View Park (Point of View Statue), at the corner of Grandview Ave. and Sweetbriar St.

Learn how to plant trees, shrubs, and herbs for long term success. To register, contact the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy at <http://www.pittsburghparks.org/uestrainings>



MAKE A GREENER CHOICE ABOUT YOUR ENERGY SUPPLIER AND SUPPORT NMRWA TOO!

Did you know the electricity production is responsible for more pollution than all the cars and trucks on the road?

Deregulation of the electricity market in Pennsylvania means you can now choose your energy supplier. At NMRWA we chose Viridian Energy! Viridian Energy is a socially responsible energy company providing greener electricity at an affordable price. Viridian was founded with the vision to empower customers to make a difference in the environment simply by switching energy providers. You can make a difference by choosing Viridian, a renewable supplier.

It's easy! If you sign up through the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association's group you not only help the environment but NMRWA also receives funding for our programming – we receive \$2 a month for each customer who joins our group, for as long as the customer remains with Viridian.

Viridian has a new fixed rate option, priced lower than Duquesne Light. Sign up today at www.viridian.com/ninemilerun and click on "become a customer!"

When it comes to protecting the watershed, our ideas hold water.

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At StormWorks, we sell and install attractive, durable rain barrels for Pittsburgh's residences and small businesses. We also design and install rain gardens using our own labor and expertise, and plant trees, nature's best stormwater managers. **Contact us today for a consultation and estimate 412-371-8779 ext. 114 or swpgh.com**

STORMWORKS
LOCALLY RUN, LOCALLY FOCUSED

StormWorks is a project of the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association.

PLEASE JOIN US!

Your membership contributions are a vital source of support for our programs. And our members' voices lend strength to ours as we advocate for green approaches to our urban challenges. Please choose a level of support that works for you:

\$20 BASIC MEMBERSHIP

\$50 SUPPORTER LEVEL
RECEIVE A *NMRWA logo Hat*

\$100 STEWARD LEVEL
RECEIVE A *NMRWA logo T-Shirt*

\$250 RESTORER LEVEL
RECEIVE *An autographed Poster-sized photo of Nine Mile Run by John Moyer*

\$500 PROTECTOR LEVEL
RECEIVE A *NMRWA Rain Barrel, with delivery and installation included*

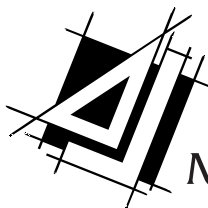
\$1,000 VISIONARY LEVEL
RECEIVE *All of the above, or NMRWA logo jacket.*

Sincere thanks to all who renewed their membership or gave additional gifts on October 4th, the Day of Giving!

The Nine Mile Run Watershed Association is a legally incorporated 501 (c)3 charitable organization. Official registration and financial information may be obtained by calling 1.800.732.0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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ASK MAGGLES

What are some good native plants to use in a damp and soggy area near my house?

There are a variety of native plants that prefer damp and soggy conditions.

My personal favorite is Cardinal Flower, or *Lobelia cardinalis*. This plant produces a spike of scarlet red flowers in the middle of summer, which may persist into September.

Bottle Gentian, or *Gentiana andrewsii*, is another great choice for an area of the yard where conditions are a little damp. I am amazed by this plant's display of glossy green

foliage and deep bluish-purple flowers, which are quite unique in form—they look like flower buds that never open. These flowers appear in late August and early September.

Golden Groundsel, or *Packera obovata*, is a good choice for moist sites, producing yellow daisy-like flowers early in the growing season (around early April). In addition to its charming yellow flowers, Golden Groundsel produces shiny foliage with great shape and texture.

Culver's root, or *Veronicastrum virginicum*, produces white spikes of flowers in the middle of summer and does well in damp and soggy locations.

What are some great native plants for fall & winter interest?

Designing for the winter garden is an exciting prospect as the garden can be beautiful in the winter. The obvious choice is to select plants that are evergreen or semi-evergreen.

Some of my favorites include: Mountain Laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), Inkberry Holly, (*Ilex glabra*), and Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*). Another way to provide winter interest is to select plants that have interesting textures, fruit, branching habits, or seed heads. Some great plants with these characteristics include: Red Twig Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), Pagoda Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), Northern Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), and Little Blue Stem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). Let's not forget the native shrub that flowers in November: Common Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*).

Great gardening!

Maggie

