



EXAMPLES OF ASSORTED ADOPTER ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Educational Examples

Brader Wetland Buddies: The staff, parents and students at Brader Elementary School in Christina School District, building on their wetland adoption of several years ago, have turned their school grounds into a model for schoolyard habitat development. In addition to expanding and enhancing their existing freshwater wetland, the Brader community has added habitats on the school grounds in the form of a butterfly garden and songbird sanctuary, and created a nature trail in the woods behind the school. Moreover, the staff have integrated all these habitats into the school curriculum at all grade levels, so that children can enjoy multi-disciplinary, hands-on experiences with the natural environment throughout their time there. After each habitat project was completed, a celebration was held to dedicate the natural areas. These habitats are constantly maintained and enhanced and used school-wide on a regular basis.

Gambacorta Marsh adoption: Several years ago, fifth grade students at Martin Luther King, Jr. School in the Colonial School District, under the guidance of teacher Kathy Tidball, adopted Gambacorta Marsh in New Castle. After having a dedication of their Adopt-a-Wetland sign, and various visits in which they performed clean-ups and installed bird boxes, the students embarked on a special project to help primary students learn more about the value of wetlands and identify and appreciate the animals that depend on the marsh for food and shelter. They planned a "Wetland Discovery Day" at Carrie Downie, a school within walking distance of the marsh, during which the fifth graders shared wetland activities and games they had designed with the Carrie Downie second graders. They also gave each child their own student-made "Guide to Gambacorta Marsh", a coloring book featuring drawings and descriptions of the animals found in the marsh, written from the animals' point of view. As a culminating activity, the fifth graders then took these younger students out to their adopted wetland, where they served as eco-guides for the second graders as they walked along the marsh path, helping the younger students use binoculars and field guides to identify the birds of the marsh.

Gunning-Bedford Middle School Environmental Club: Jeff Gibeault and his students from Gunning Bedford Middle School in the Colonial School District adopted a vernal pool wetland in Smyrna and visited this site several times during the course of the school year to make observations and collect data on the organisms found there. Numerous after-school-hours visits followed, taking place during all seasons, and involving students in clean-ups, water quality monitoring, macroinvertebrate bio-monitoring and amphibian studies. As a result of these activities, Jeff's students gain real-life experience with the natural world that is all too uncommon during these times. As a way of applying and sharing their knowledge of vernal pools, Jeff's students designed attractive and informative posters showing the various organisms found in vernal pools. These posters were then sent to fifth and seventh grade classroom throughout the state and to state parks to create awareness of the ecological importance of these seasonal wetlands. This service-learning project was awarded a grant from Delaware Learn and Serve America to help with the expenses related to the site visits and production of the posters. The students in Jeff's class continue to maintain an active involvement in wetlands. In 2002, they waged a letter-writing campaign to lobby for the passage of HB-340, aimed at protecting some of these valuable, isolated, seasonal freshwater wetlands, which lost federal protection as a result of a recent Supreme Court decision. We applaud Jeff and his students for their interest and active involvement in studying and trying to preserve and protect wetlands in Delaware!

Monitoring Examples

Delaware Audubon Society: The members of the Delaware Audubon Society (DAS) are an extraordinary example of diligence in bio-monitoring of a wetland. Their 78-acre Grassdale site, located along the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, has been ranked as a gem in the Delaware State Park system. In addition to enhancing environmental education in Delaware by providing Audubon Adventures Guides to all Delaware elementary schools, the DAS have carried on comprehensive biological inventories of multiple habitat types at their site, identifying 257 species of plants and animals, including an astonishing 116 species of bird life! This comprehensive inventory will provide valuable baseline data for any changes that may occur in the area relative to potential future changes in the topography/hydrology of the land bordering the canal, as proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers. As part of their ongoing efforts to promote the value and protection of wetland areas, in 1999, the society sponsored a statewide "Why Wetlands are Valuable Ecosystems" essay contest for fifth graders, and recognized the winning entries at a commemorative AAW Adoption Ceremony, at which then Lieutenant Governor, now Governor, Ruth Ann Minner presided. The job DAS is doing in cataloging and exemplifying the value of wetlands biodiversity is an inspiration to us all.

The Belisle Family: Connie Belisle characterizes her adopted wetland along Isaac's Branch west of Brecknock Park in Camden as "one of the most pleasant walks in Kent County". Nevertheless, she is "amazed at the amount of trash that people just drop". Connie's stewarding of this site, which includes picking up that trash and carrying out ongoing water quality testing for Delaware *Stream Watch*, has made the trail a lovelier place for the citizens of Kent County to enjoy, and one in which a solid baseline of water quality exists to help ensure it remains so. When it comes to all the environmental challenges we face today, we often hear the remark, "I'm only one person, what can I possibly do?". Thanks to the dedication and commitment of Delawareans like Connie, the answer to that "is more than you might think", and we congratulate Connie Belisle in taking that message of grass-roots stewardship so strongly to heart and practice.

Indian River High School: The wetland on the schoolgrounds of Indian River High School may appear as just another constructed wetland catch basin, but to Todd Fritchman and the students of his Advanced Biology and Environmental Studies courses, it is so much more than that. Over the past several years, through Todd's initiative, this adopted site has served as a living laboratory from which a variety of state standards-directed, inquiry-based learning activities and environmental education experiences have been launched. The goal of constructing a seasonally-wet "Delmarva Bay-type" wetland was funded through an MBNA educational grant, with design and technical support provided by experts at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and actual construction work completed by the Sussex Conservation District. Thanks to such support, hundreds of Delaware high school students have been able to learn ecology first-hand, through carrying out studies on such topics as: wetland dynamics, macro-invertebrates and their role as bio-indicators, water quality monitoring, adaptations of hydrophytic plants, and amphibian reproduction and life cycles. This project, owing to the efforts of Todd and his students, provides another shining example of what powerful places wetlands are for learning.

White Family & Friends: One of Delaware's most precious kinds of wetland habitat for plant and animal diversity is also one of its lesser known and appreciated, but not to adopters Jim and Amy White, their two boys and assorted friends. But then Jim and Amy, recent authors of "Amphibians of Reptiles of Delmarva" are far from your ordinary folk. In 2000, the family adopted two Delmarva Bay wetlands in the Blackbird Forest area, where they had been monitoring some remarkably diverse, and in some cases rare, populations of salamanders and frogs for over a decade. That work continues, but now, with the help of their sons and a few friends, the Whites also carry out periodic clean-ups of these sites, and have on several occasions generously hosted/presented in-the-field amphibian monitoring experiences for various other wetland adopters. We are so privileged to have such talented and dedicated people as the Whites in our program.

Habitat Improvement Examples

Area 33 Girl Scouts adoption: Girl Scout troops in the Caesar Rodney/Dover Air Force Base School District, 375 strong, adopted the wetland and pond at Tidbury Park near Camden in 1998. Their wetland drains into Tidbury Creek, a tributary of the St. Jones River. Progressing from clean-up-oriented visits twice per year, the scouts have since gone on to expand their site stewardship work to monthly projects, including: water quality testing, planting of buffer zone trees, and shrubs and invasive plant removal. With the help of Kent County Parks Supervisor Carl Solberg (with whom they have forged a wonderful partnership) the scouts designed a Gold Award Project at the park with signage noting the location of native shrubs, trees and flowers in the area adjacent to the wetland so that visitors to the park can learn about the benefits of using native plants and preserving wetland habitat. In 2001, the girls came together on a weekend to undertake the getting-down-and-dirty task of removing the invasive plant, Phragmites, from a recently-constructed wetland at their site. They dug, pulled, cut and got muddy, but with fantastic results. The Area 33 Girl Scouts are a fine example of educating girls in real-world service learning and environmental stewardship.

Entrix Consulting, Inc. adoption: In 1998, a group of scientists at Entrix, Inc. chose to demonstrate to their surrounding community that a business in New Castle County could make a difference for Delaware. They chose Bellevue Park because it had significant public use and exposure, greatly needed restoration, and provided an opportunity to showcase the many values of using native plants for habitat enhancement. The first project was to remove exotic multiflora rose from the pond shoreline and to replant the area with native tree and shrub saplings. The follow-up project was creation of an emergent wetland along an unvegetated portion of the pond shoreline. Donated plants from several plant nurseries in the area provided valuable living resources to complement the labor-intensive work that Entrix employees supplied in removing the invasives, and replacing them with wildlife-enhancing native species. Entrix continues to monitor and enhance their site and provide a great example of wetland stewardship in New Castle County.

Friends of Back Creek adoption: "The ponds are full of ducks now", stated Sam Burke, thus validating the exceptional effort he and his family have expended over several years in restoring their 120-acre tidal wetland along Back Creek in Broadkill Beach. The wetland, which had been in their family for generations had, due to changes in the tidal flows of Back Creek and diminished numbers of muskrats, become overrun with Phragmites, greatly reducing plant diversity, use by wildlife, and overall habitat quality. And so the family embarked on the ambitious goal of rehabilitating this massive area of marshland. Sam and his sons tirelessly worked at removing the phrag, replanting the area with native plants, installing duck boxes, and seeding the wetland with native species of grasses, utilizing an amphibious vehicle to reach otherwise inaccessible areas of the marsh. Now, the Burke family is beginning to see huge dividends for all their toil, time and trouble. Ducks, muskrats and other wildlife are returning to their marsh as living evidence of the fruits of their restoration efforts.

Sussex Bird Club: From participating in the "Christmas Bird Count" and other bird migration monitoring to maintaining their Chapel Branch wetland in Sussex County with clean-ups, installation and annual tending of their many duck boxes, the Sussex Bird Club is setting a great example of ongoing wetland stewardship. The group adopted their beautiful Chapel Branch site at its confluence with the Nanticoke River in 1995. Their members faithfully steward the Chapel Branch site by small boat and on foot to catalogue bird species, conduct bird-watching outings, complete clean-ups and fully enjoy the pleasures of watching and listening to their countless feathered friends.

Still more examples:

The Webber Family Farm: "This has been a dream of ours for a long time ... I think farmers were the first environmentalists ... and a concern of ours has been the wetlands". So says Joyce Webber of B & J Farms, and wetland adopter since 1995. Long before that, Bill, Joyce, Mathew and Bobbi Jo Webber have been an exemplary farming team producing poultry and small grains on their family farm near Kenton. Back in the mid-90's, out of concern for controlling nutrient run off from their farm, and with stewardship of their land as a primary focus, the Webbers, with the help of DNREC's Division of Soil and Water's Drainage Section, turned three acres of their more low-lying, seasonally-soggy land (that also drained a significant portion of the area they farm) into a constructed wetland. Designed to treat the large volumes of water coming in from the farming operation, these wetlands serve to remove and reduce excess nutrients reaching them, thus cleansing the water substantially before it flows out to the Jordan's Branch Tax Ditch and ultimately into the Chesapeake Bay. The Webbers worked very hard to develop their wetland, involving their local FFA, youth groups, and the press, thus extending the educational benefits of their project to the community at large. As a result of the wonderful example they've set as watershed stewards, the Webber Farm wetland was chosen as the site of the press-event signing, by then Governor Thomas Carper, of the six-state Year 2000 Memorandum of Understanding protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

Butterflies 4-H Club, Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill: 2002 was the 100th anniversary year of 4-H Clubs throughout this country, and we are fortunate to have a local representative of that fine tradition in our program. That group, which goes by the name "Butterflies 4-H Club", works with physically-challenged people at the Delaware Hospital for the Chronically Ill and provides a shining example of how 4-H clubs are making a difference in their communities. As part of their work in AAW, the Butterflies Club has adopted the marshlands in the vicinity of the heavily-used Woodland Beach Boat Ramp and faithfully travels several miles in each direction from the site, cleaning the area, planting native plants to attract butterflies and other wildlife, and enthusiastically participating in various other activities that promote wetland stewardship. During 2002, the Butterflies, in further reflection of their love of wetlands, won first place in a statewide "4-H Litter Awareness" trashcan decorating contest at the Delaware State Fair, for their entry featuring a wetland scene from their adopted Woodland Beach marsh.