

Effective Networking for Successful and Sustainable Volunteer Stream Monitoring Programs in Urban Watersheds

Joanna Cornell¹, Laura T. Grape², and Diana A. Saccone³

¹Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, 12055 Government Center Parkway, Suite 905,
Fairfax, VA 22035

²Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services

³Reston Association

Abstract

Managing, monitoring, and maintaining urban watersheds require a collaborative approach. Fairfax County, located across the Potomac River from Washington D.C., depends on surface water as the drinking water source for its population of approximately 1 million residents. Our local model demonstrates how agencies and residents can combine their resources to encourage watershed protection. An extensive and organized volunteer stream monitoring program is an essential tool to gather seasonal stream health data and promote watershed stewardship. Monitoring teaches residents about the effects of urbanization; they witness severe erosion, trash, sedimentation, and poor stream habitats. Determining a stream's biological integrity builds residents' appreciation of the stream as a living system.

Establishing a sustainable volunteer stream monitoring program in Fairfax County relies on the collaborative efforts of many local agencies, including the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services, the Reston Association and many others. Working together, these groups developed a productive network that shares resources, data, and effectively capitalizes on outreach and education efforts by engaging various audiences within the region. Thousands of students and adults participate in a variety of hands-on programs; such as monitoring, stream cleanups, watershed walks, and discussions. The results include better communication among various agencies and the community, a larger volunteer base, and more comprehensive data. All of this fosters and supports the watershed planning initiatives currently underway for all of Fairfax County's watersheds.