

## BACKYARD BUFFERS YEAR-END GRANT REPORT

Prepared by Three Rivers Habitat Partnership  
12/31/03

### A. Demonstration Sites

#### Timeline of Events for Oakford Station and Emmerling Park Demonstration Sites

Date	Event
01/03	Dominion Buffer monitored for predation and relative health
01/23/03	Meeting between WHC and the Dominion Wildlife Habitat Team– discussion of phase II buffer planting
02/03	Dominion Buffer monitored for predation and relative health
02/03	Emmerling Park site visit, potential volunteers and schools contacted
02/03	Backyard Conservation workshop held w/segment on backyard buffers – 25+ participants
02/03 - 03/03	Emmerling Park plan drafted, native plant sources identified, costs estimated
03/03	Dominion Buffer monitored for predation and relative health
04/03	Dominion Buffer monitored for predation and relative health, RCE Inventory – both sites
04/03	Plants ordered & volunteers established for Dominion planting
05/07/03	Dominion Buffer planting – 40+ shrubs of three different species and 185+ wildflower plugs of three different species , 15 volunteers, 75 man hours
05/17/03	WHC attended Emmerling Park Youth Days – met the residents, established volunteers, distributed brochure
07/01/03	Meeting between WHC and Dominion– discussion of possibilities for 2004 Dominion Foundation Grant
07/16/03	Additional wildflower planting – 190+ wildflower plugs of three different species, 3 volunteers, 12 man hours
07/18/03	Meadow staked off – 2 volunteers, 8 man hours
08/16/03	Workshop at Oakford Station – 45+ participants including homeowners, conservation group members and corporate employees
08/16/03	Additional donated trees, shrubs, & wildflowers planted at Dominion Buffer by children of workshop participants
10/03	Emmerling Park Site Visit
11/25/03	Meeting between WHC and Dominion– discussion of plans for next year at Dominion buffer – outcome: focus on education at Oakford for local schools
12/03	Emmerling Park plant redrafted, native plant sources contacted with plant lists

#### A1. Dominion Oakford Station Demonstration Site

Phase II of the Dominion Oakford Station Buffer started with a meeting between WHC and the Dominion Wildlife Team to discuss the progress of the buffer planted in 2002 and to cover options for the next phase of the buffer. Employees expressed concern over the slow visual progress of the 2002 planting due to starting with mostly bare root plants. The partners decided that the buffer extension for 2003 would be quantitatively small but with much larger shrubs and wildflowers than the previous year. This decision was made in efforts to help spur more project participants taking an active role in the future of the buffer.

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Dominion and WHC extended and planted the buffer during two days in the spring with 40 large shrubs purchased from Shemin Nurseries and over 375 native wildflower plugs from North Creek Nurseries. On the morning of May 7, fifteen volunteers and Dominion employees worked for a total of 75 man-hours in order to enhance the effectiveness and aesthetic appeal of the buffer at Oakford Station. The impact of this hard work is eye-catching and noticeable by anyone driving by the site. The event gained recognition in conservation newsletters such as Westmoreland County Conservation District's Landmarks and local newspapers including Penn-Franklin News (See Attachment G6). In addition to this major planting day, WHC and Al Barker planted five backordered flats of wildflowers in mid July, the meadow was staked off to prevent future mowing and children of workshop participants planted additional trees, shrubs, and wildflowers at the buffer in August.

**Plants Purchased for Phase II of Dominion's Oakford Buffer**

Common Name	<i>Scientific Name</i>	Size	Quantity
<b>Shrubs</b>			
Red Chokeberry	<i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	3 gallon pots	21
Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	5 gallon pots	5
Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	"30-36" BB	15
<b>Wildflowers</b>			
Bee Balm, Jacob Cline	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	Plugs	72
Bergamot	<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Plugs	76
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Plugs	76
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago caesia</i>	Plugs	76
Swamp Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnate</i>	Plugs	76

Spring monitoring of species planted in the first year indicated a 78% survival rate in the shrubs. There has been even less damage to the shrubs planted the second year due to their substantial size. Some of the wildflowers planted in May were damaged due to accidental mowing of the site occurring more often than needed. One month from when WHC staked off the meadow to prevent mowing and planted additional flowers, the success within the 50' by 300' area greatly increased and was noted by WHC and Dominion employees through visual observation.

Al Barker monitored the twenty songbird nesting boxes throughout the nesting season and observed the bat box for activity. He reported that 30% of the nesting boxes were empty, 5% contained dead birds, 5% contained house sparrows nests that he then destroyed, and in 60% of the boxes were bluebird nests, eggs, or chicks. He reports no activity in the bat box. A more intensive monitoring plan for the boxes is being prepared for next year through connections with local schools and/or scout troops.

### **A2. Emmerling Park Demonstration Site**

The Emmerling Park site is still in the planning phase with a planting day scheduled in early April 2004. The initial plan for phase II was to plant a demonstration site in the spring of 2003. In February and March 2003, WHC visited the site and with assistance from master gardeners designed and drafted a plan. WHIP funds of \$5,000 from the USDA NRCS were budgeted into planting and were put on hold because of federal budget delays. Therefore, the partners have extended the

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planting and workshops into Phase III of the Backyard Buffers project. A Riparian, Channel, and Environmental (RCE) Inventory was conducted at the site in April, however due to staff changes at WHC, the data from this visit is not available and therefore an additional RCE will be conducted before the planting in the spring of 2004. WHC made an appearance at the Emmerling Park Youth Day event in May to meet the residents and potential volunteers for the project and to inform about what was going to happen at Deer Creek. The site was revisited and the plan redrafted in October, plant lists have been made, nurseries contacted and volunteer groups are established for the spring planting.

The plan for Emmerling Park includes seven small gardens within the site and focuses mainly on species native to Pennsylvania that have high wildlife value (See Attachment G2 for the potential species list separated by garden name). The gardens range from having a formal to natural look and each have a different theme such as "Hello Hummingbirds" which includes species such as Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) and Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) both whose nectar attracts hummingbirds. "Bird Borders" are two shrub islands designed to give the gardens an enclosed feel and include species of shrubs that birds frequently feed on such as Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*) and Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). When designing the Emmerling Park site, WHC decided to use as many "deer resistant" species as possible because deer fencing will not be available to protect the site. Although no plants are truly resistant to deer and the list can vary due to deer population size and climate, the species that the partners will plant in Emmerling Park are considered less palatable to deer than other potential species.

## B. Workshops

The third workshop at Dominion, held in August 2003, had an attendance of 45+ participants, which is over double of the anticipated turn out. The participants, with guidance from master gardeners and biologists, took home the knowledge and materials to create, protect and beautify wildlife habitat in their own backyards. Children were welcome, helping to plant additional wildflowers, shrubs and trees at the Dominion buffer as well as having an up-close look at the life of Beaver Run by getting in the stream and observing the macro invertebrate life. Participants from a wide variety of backgrounds were eager for additional workshops on similar topics. (See Attachment G6 for the press release, announcements, and web postings for the event.)

As in past workshops, Backyard Habitat Design included a three-part segment including both a lecture and hands on approach to engage the participants (see Attachment G5 for the workshop agenda handout).

- Annette Paluh, a wetlands biologist and master gardener, discussed the benefits of landscaping with native plants by covering what specific species to plant and the advantages of planting them in your backyard. She discussed species suitable for a wide variety of habitat types.
- Marcia Maslonek, wildlife biologist and program director with the Wildlife Habitat Council, discussed landscaping accessories for wildlife such as songbird nesting boxes, bat boxes, and bee blocks. In addition, Ms. Maslonek guided the participants outside through the Dominion Buffer pointing out plants discussed in Ms. Paluh's talk and giving the attendees an up-close look at songbird nesting boxes and bat boxes.

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- Thelma Redick, master gardener and educator with the Wildlife Habitat Council, explored the “how to's” of creating your own backyard habitat as well as the dos and don'ts of native plant gardening. The participants had the opportunity to initiate drafting their own backyard habitat design on paper as well as ask site-specific questions to Ms. Redick.

Following the agenda, door prizes including a Bluebird Society songbird nesting box kit and a backyard habitat consultation with Ms. Redick were given away, participants enjoyed food donated by Dominion, and every one took home at least one tree or shrub and multiple wildflowers appropriate for their own backyard habitat. Dominion, WHC employees and the Pennsylvania Bluebird Society donated door prizes while Wetland Supply Company, North Creek Nurseries, and Sylvania Natives contributed plants. Participants had access to a variety of handouts on all topics and well as brochures and flyers to local native nurseries.

WHC gave participants the opportunity to provide feedback through a survey. Comments were positive with many attendees particularly enjoying the split for children, the amount of information on plants, nesting and design, the mixture of topics and speakers, and actually going out to see and identify plants, hands-on. The only suggestions for improvement from the participants were that WHC increase the length and provide a larger facility for the indoor portion of the event. WHC will split the next workshop into two sections - a formal section that mocks the August 2003 workshop followed by an informal informational session after for those who have additional questions and wish to start on their own backyard habitat design. Participants learned of the workshop through a wide variety of sources including corporate employers such as Dominion, PPG and Bayer, the Tribune Review, and e-mail ListServ's indicating that the workshop announcement was widespread.

WHC believes that the successes of this workshop and those in the past workshops have provided a model for future event planning. Collaboration between WHC and Dominion employees produced suggestions to make the workshop “family friendly” by allowing children to attend and have their own activities to engage in, providing food, and holding the workshop on a Saturday afternoon. WHC planned to advertise to a variety of sources to hit the corporate, public, and conservation sectors. Two workshops are planned at Emmerling Park site in 2004 and WHC will follow-up with past workshop participants when sending information about the upcoming Emmerling Park workshop.

## **C. Brochure**

The brochure was widely distributed in Phase II of Backyard Buffers. Requests for the brochure have come in from a wide variety of sectors including watershed associations, the National Aviary, and individual homeowners. The numbers of brochure sent for just these requests in 2003 was over 1,600. In addition, the brochure was available at a number of events that WHC displayed at, including Emmerling Park Youth Days in Indiana Township and the Annual Watershed Cruise. The brochure is also a model to other geographic areas. West Virginia DEP contacted WHC in 2003, requesting permission to use the brochure as a model in developing a similar publication applicable to their geographic area. They are still in the design process and WHC is excited to see the final product.

## **D. Web page**

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The four pages created for Backyard Buffers within the WHC site are continually updated to reflect updated plantings, workshops, photos and resources. It is estimated that the general Buffers page ([http://www.wildlifehc.org/threerivers/backyard\\_buffers/](http://www.wildlifehc.org/threerivers/backyard_buffers/)) alone received over 2,600 hits in 2003. Updates to the four pages will continue in 2004 and will include the creation and addition of two new pages for the Beaver County and Emmerling Park buffer projects.

### **E. Phase III – Dominion Education and Outreach, Emmerling Planting**

Plans for Phase III have begun and include the addition of an educational component that engages local schools and has strong curriculum ties at Dominion's Oakford Station, a spring planting at Emmerling Park, and a two new Buffers sites in Beaver County community parks. In 2004, the major focus of WHC's efforts is education. In addition to making Dominion more of a hands-on learning site there is a possibility of the addition of permanent signage at Dominion as well as the development a buffer trail guide brochure for both the Dominion and Emmerling Park sites. Also planned in phase III is the continual maintenance of the shrubs, wildflowers, and development of a bluebird box monitoring plan at the Dominion riparian buffer.

In the spring of 2004, the Backyard Buffers partners will plant the Emmerling Park demonstration site. The site will be the first of its kind in the area featuring native species planted in a formal fashion along a riparian zone that will be termed a "streamside garden". A new path will go through the planted understory while native woodland wildflowers and colorful shrubs will be planted in beds around and between existing trees to create a naturalized understory that retains the formality of a traditional garden while increasing wildlife and reducing non-point source pollution. A naturalized garden may be more appealing to a suburban resident who owns a small plot of land that s/he wants to be aesthetically pleasing. By taking a garden approach, WHC and other partners will reach an additional segment of the population. The Emmerling Park site will provide opportunity for Dominion employees in Allegheny County to become more locally involved that previously were less interested because of the distance of Dominion's Oakford station.

In phase III two workshops will be held based on the "streamside garden" that will be open to volunteers, landowners, garden clubs, watershed groups, and conservation organizations. The first workshop will occur before the planting in March and will focus on creating a backyard design for a "streamside garden". The second, to be held in August with a focus on the maintenance of a streamside garden, will display the results of the planting. Brochure mailings, flyer invitations and press releases will be sent to advertise for the both planting and workshops. To increase the chances that a homeowner will create their own backyard habitat or streamside garden, the workshop will feature specific on-site examples, teach participants how to design for success, and provide a package consisting of a list of native plants, the brochure developed in phase I, and other relevant resources information. The workshops for phase III will be similar to those of phases I and II but the formal style of the shaded buffer at Emmerling Park will provide an alternative riparian zone that can be compared and contrasted with the buffer along Beaver Run. The two different approaches will be discussed to provide homeowners and other private landowners alternatives for their property depending on site conditions and personal preference. The Backyard Buffers website will be continually updated, include a page designated for the Emmerling Park buffer, and serve as a resource center of information that relates to the geographic area, featuring designs for streamside gardens.

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### **F. Certification**

TRHP will assist Dominion with their management plan to apply for certification through WHC's *Corporate Habitat Certification/International Accreditation*. The program recognizes commendable wildlife habitat management at individual sites. WHC certification adds value to programs by providing third-party credibility and an objective evaluation of projects. A site must demonstrate that programs have been active for at least one year with a management plan that lists goals, objectives, prescriptions and complete documentation of all programs. TRHP can assist Dominion in applying for and achieving WHC certification and possibly in the future CLL certification. The certified wildlife habitat programs focus on restoration, creation, protection and enhancement of habitat and individual species management by establishing *Wildlife at Work* programs based upon WHC recommendations.