

WATERSHED GROUP MEETING OF HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

-Melissa Merritt, Potomac Valley Conservation District

The health of the South Branch River watershed inspired a public meeting on water quality in Hampshire County November 7, 2011 in Romney, WV. The meeting was hosted by the West Virginia Conservation Agency. Other agencies represented were WV Division of Natural Resources, WV Department of Environmental Protection, and the WV Department of Agriculture. The goal of the meeting was to gain community input on local natural resource concerns as well as towards solutions. Guest speaker, Lou Scavnicky, President of the Opequon Creek Project Team, discussed the reasons why a watershed group can benefit the area. The meeting was filled with discussion on what steps need to be taken to help protect the South Branch River Watershed.

Several concerns and potential ideas were discussed that were considered the most pertinent by the group. Visible pollution such as trash along the river was one such concern. Continuing stream cleanups were suggested on the banks of the river. An idea was also posed to improve recycling, with a worry that there weren't enough recycling centers to take the materials. Fish health was also discussed, with a desire to improve water quality conditions to help improve bass populations. The importance of riparian buffers was cited in protecting and improving those fish populations.

During the discussion, an idea evolved to not only discuss particular projects for the area, but to also become a resource for the community. The idea was put forth that a watershed group should be dedicated to providing a message that can involve all members of a community, as well as addressing specific concerns. The idea was that, too often, very specific objectives can potentially isolate the community, so an effort to educate and create programs that everyone can relate to as a whole would be the most beneficial, along with creating smaller initiatives to tackle specific goals. Reaching out to schools was considered a top way to get the entire community involved. The hope was that anything that is taught to children in schools would make its way back to their parents, reaching a broad range of individuals. One of the themes of the discussion was to create a base of information, allowing other community groups to utilize this resource for their own programs.

The Potomac Valley Conservation District is in need of such a group with the mission of helping the South Branch Watershed. The initial interest in the watershed from members of the community this past month will hopefully become an effective voice for the concerns of the South Branch River and its drainage areas. With community involvement also comes the potential of technical and financial assistance from government agencies and other organizations through grants and other forms of aid. The first meeting of the community in Hampshire County for the concern of the South Branch was a successful dialogue of how to improve water quality in the watershed. It is anticipated that future meetings will further develop this mission and provide a lasting resource for the community for days to come.