Water quality improves downstream

Chesapeake watershed partnerships improve water quality downstream

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STAUNTON — A 15-year-old forest stands just a mile off of U.S. 11 in Staunton.

The Moore family had planted hundreds of trees and shrubs along the stream that runs through their farm on Bell's Lane thanks to partial funding through state and local agencies.

On Tuesday, a group of conservationist and environmental entities participating in the 2012 Chesapeake Bay Agriculture Networking Forum traveled to the area near Merrifield Farm and Bell's Lane to observe riparian buffer management. "It's a great example of partnerships between landowners and state agencies and organizations; (they) have come together and get a lot accomplished with regard to water quality and

improvement," Faye Cooper of the Valley Conservation Council said. "Poague Run is a headwaters tributary to the Chesapeake Bay. It's also a spring creek, which means it could potentially support native brook trout."

Cooper said many farmers and landowners can use funding projects like those with the Conservation Service to get a majority of riparian buffers financed.

It's these landscaping projects, making forested stream banks, that have improved water quality, said Robert Whitescarver of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. "All four farms upstream of Bell's Lane have installed alternative watering systems for their livestock and have excluded livestock from the streams and tributaries on their farms," Whitescarver said.

"Thousands of feet of fence and at least 17 livestock watering troughs have been installed to protect 5.8 miles of stream banks on Poague and its tributaries. Over 5,000 hardwood trees and shrubs have been planted along the stream to improve water quality and improve wildlife habitat."

Poague Run is a spring-fed valley spring that flows on Merrifield Farm west of Commerce Road in Staunton. The run empties into Lewis Creek, which is fed into the Middle River. The Middle River serves as a tributary of the Shenandoah River then onto the Chesapeake Bay.

Cattle farmer and field conservationist Robert Whitescarver of Swoope talks to visitors at local farms that are implementing new manure technologies to see how building fences and creating buffers can help restore vegetation and habitat along streambanks. / Holly Marcus / Special to the News Leader

Trout habitats

Work on natural springs in the Shenandoah Valley may soon be helping restore native brook trout habitats. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is giving $47,000 in grants for ongoing work with Trout Unlimited to start the restoration process.

Valley residents who own land in the Briery Branch, Mossy Creek, Cedar Creek — Meadowbrook or Paddy Run — or Redbud Run watersheds are eligible to apply for this Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative funding to help improve water quality on their farm.

Trout Unlimited's Shenandoah Coordinator Seth Coffman said in a release that riparian buffers with permanent vegetation are the key to stabilizing streams and improving trout habitat. "Adequate stream side buffers of grasses, shrubs, and trees are important not only for shade but also for holding the stream bank in place with a healthy root system for when it does flood," he said.

According to Cooper, this forum is a great example of the initiative Trout Unlimited is putting forth. And its pays off. Whitescarver said that in 2009 brook trout were reintroduced to Poagues Run — a stream that was found to be suitable for trout reproduction.

"It has taken many years and many people to improve the waters of this stream enough to reintroduce native trout," Whitescarver said. "It is an asset to the people who live in the watershed, the citizens of Staunton and Augusta County and to everyone downstream."