

First United Methodist Church Receives New Trees

Kate Lehman, Warm Springs Watershed Association

On Saturday, November 7, fifty-nine Girl Scouts and their families as well as members of the Town of Bath Tree Board and the Warm Springs Watershed Association joined teens from First United Methodist Church to plant 24 trees on the church's property on Fearnow Road in Morgan County. The trees were provided through a West Virginia CommuniTree (CTree) grant made to the Warm Springs Watershed Association. CTree promotes tree planting on public land in Berkeley, Grant, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Mineral, Morgan, and Pendleton counties, the eight West Virginia counties in the Potomac Bay Watershed. Property owned by faith-based organizations is considered to be public land since the public uses it.

Lance Strait, a Tree Board member, noted what a great partner the church was. "Church leadership gladly participated in the many meetings required to plan this tree planting. Their teens were hard and enthusiastic workers. The church board also arranged to have the hardest part of the job done, which is digging the holes in which the trees are planted." Alan Truax of Double T-Homes dug the holes.

Many of the Girl Scouts had been involved in previous tree planting efforts and were aware of the benefits of a good tree canopy. Tree canopy is the layer of leaves, branches and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above.



Daisies help with the tree planting



Fun after the tree planting

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Teens help with the tree planting

A good tree canopy helps reduce the severity of flooding because leaves catch rainfall and roots soak up excess water in the soil that would otherwise end up in streams. Kate Lehman, President of the Warm Springs Watershed Association and a member of the Town of Bath Tree Board, pointed out that trees are also part of the water cycle. "Some of the water that is caught in the leaves evaporates and goes back up into the atmosphere. Eventually it forms droplets of water, some of which becomes rain. Without any trees the earth would become a desert. Trees help make rain, and they help to prevent too much rain from flooding our streams."

Candice Pennington, a local Girl Scout Troup Leader, said, "It was such a joy to be involved in this project and to continue in the vision of environmental protection originally put forth by Juliette Gordon Low, Founder of the American Girl Scouts."

Although WSWA has planted 600 trees in the watershed over the past five years, the percentage of tree canopy decreased by 3 percent during that time. The loss of tree canopy is not just a problem in Morgan County. The percentage of tree canopy is rapidly decreasing throughout the eight WV counties in the Potomac Bay Watershed. Large numbers of trees are often taken down to create space in which to build houses, roads, factories and shopping malls. There have been other factors in the loss of tree canopy in the area. Frank Rodgers of the Cacapon Institute noted: "Even though the 2009 recession slowed the building of new homes, the state's tree canopy continued to take hits from various infrastructure projects. The state loses trees, sometimes in 60-foot wide swaths, to new transmission lines and pipelines taking energy to population centers surrounding the state." The emerald ash borer has taken out up to 17 percent of the forest in parts of the Eastern Panhandle.

Andy Swaim, the Town Council representative to the Tree Board and a WSWA board member, said that both organizations are interested in establishing future partnerships with faith-based organizations in the watershed. "Most of the churches in the area have large paved parking lots. Such impervious surfaces increase the volume and velocity of stormwater runoff. Planting trees at strategic places would help reduce severity of flooding in the watershed. Also, trees could help to reduce the church's utility bills and enhance the beauty of the space. It's a win-win situation for everyone."