NORTH AREA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL NEWS

August-September 2017

Garden in the Park

Saturday, August 19, 2017
9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Corner of Babcock Blvd. & Wildwood Road

Each summer since 1990, the North Park Demonstration Garden – a project of the Penn State Master Gardeners – has brightened the area in front of the war memorial at the intersection of Babcock Boulevard and Wildwood Road.

Garden in the Park, a free family-friendly event, offers guided tours of this year's planting beds, along with lots of other attractions and activities. *As in past years, NAEC is one of a number of local organizations that will be participating.* This event is a great time to pick up gardening tips, learn about local conservation activities, purchase fresh vegetables and fruit, and enjoy that ever−popular ice cream from the Creamery in State College!

Hartwood Hay Day and Green Festival

Saturday, September 23, 2017
Noon to 4:00 PM
Hartwood Acres Park

NAEC will also have a booth at this event. Come see us.

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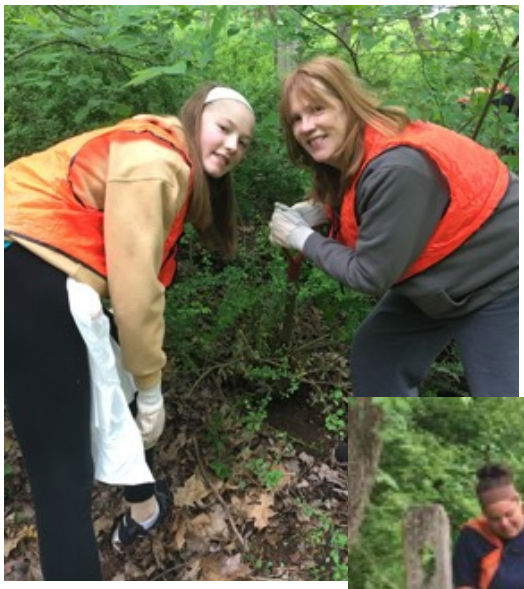
Allegheny Land Trust Launches Membership Campaign

Since its inception, The Allegheny Land Trust has relied on grants and donors for funding. It has never asked individuals to become members. That has changed. ALT has launched a membership campaign.

Members help ALT help local people save local land in our region, as well as develop trails, restore habitat, and offer cutting edge environmental education programming. They also help ALT to further demonstrate the breadth and strength of the organization, unlocking access to matching funds and additional foundation, business, and government support.

All members receive an ALT sticker, a subscription to VISTAS (the quarterly membership newsletter), periodic e-mail updates on accomplishments and activities, a 25% discount on any educational programming and recognition at their appropriate level on the ALT website and in VISTAS. Members at higher levels have additional benefits. For more information and to become a member visit http://alleghenylandtrust.org/become-a-member.

Friends of North Park Stewardship Day



On May 20th, about 70 volunteers cleaned up trash, maintained trails, and removed invasive plant species.

The weather was great and a good time was had by everyone there!

Stormwater Management Ideas

Text and photos by Beth Dutton

Here are some ideas for homeowners on what they can do to help improve water quality and better manage stormwater volumes.

- **Plant a tree.** This has a surprising large impact on stormwater runoff.
- **Convert some of your lawn to a more natural area.** Plant trees and shrubs to encourage wildlife. This will cut down on stormwater runoff and the areas you will need to mow.
- **Clean your catchbasin grate.** Don't sweep your grass clippings into the street, and if you have a stormwater catchbasin in front of your house, sweep up and remove leaves and dirt from around it and on top of it, and dispose of it in your trash. Since this water goes to local streams, this will help improve their water quality and it will also allow stormwater to flow freely into the catchbasin to help prevent street flooding.

Clogged stormwater inlet

Grass clippings on stream bank

- **Let your mower do the mulching.** Set your lawn mower on the mulch setting so that the nutrients from the grass clippings decompose into the lawn to feed your grass.
- **Mow high.** This will help choke out weeds so that you won't need to use as much (or any) weedkiller.
- **Test your soil.** Do a lawn test to make sure that you are applying the nutrients that your lawn needs at the proper time and quantity. To reduce nitrogen and phosphorus in our local streams, apply as little fertilizer as possible.
- **Be kind to your stream.** Don't dump lawn clippings or branches near the stream banks. Plant trees and bushes for a "riparian buffer" alongside streams to help trap and filter stormwater runoff and pollutants before they reach the stream.
- **Goodbye Gravel.** With a big rainstorm, gravels from driveways can wash away down the street, often with sediment, and end up in stormwater inlets. Since gravel driveways don't infiltrate much rain anyway, consider replacing it with a paved driveway. Driveways made out of permeable pavers are very attractive and eco-friendly.

Gravel washing off driveway

Small Streams Make a Big Difference

The US EPA, in response to a February executive order, has proposed rescinding the 2015 Clean Water Rule. This rule primarily restores protections to waters that historically were protected by the 1970 Clean Water Act. Over the years protections for many classes of wetlands and small streams have eroded because of judicial and other governmental actions.

EPA has opened a very short comment period of 30 days, ending on August 28, for submission of comments regarding the rescission proposal. It would be good for the EPA to hear from folks about the proposal.

If you would like to know more about Rule and possibly send in your own comment here are some good web pages to look at:

- Trout Unlimited has a very nice page explaining the importance of small and ephemeral streams and a sample comment and EPA link at http://www.tu.org/blog-posts/small-streams-make-a-big-difference
- The Forest Network Blog has a nice summary and an EPA link at http://foresternetwork.com/stormwater-magazine/sw-editorial/editors-comments-we-need-to-be-all-over-this-one/
- The 2015 Rule itself is not as easy to find as it should be but it was found at https://archive.epa.gov/epa/sites/production/files/2015-06/documents/epa-hq-ow-2011-0880-20862.pdf
- Similarly the reasonably readable scientific and technical supplement supporting the rule is at https://archive.epa.gov/epa/cleanwaterrule/technical-support-document-clean-water-rule-definition-waters-united-states.html

Maps Matter! Let's End Gerrymandering

We have all felt the frustration that comes when Congress and the state legislature pass laws and budgets that are unfriendly to the environment. One political party dominates the legislative process. The other party has no voice, and there is no possibility of compromise. Voting districts drawn to favor the dominant party are a significant part of the problem.

In Pennsylvania, Democrats hold an approximately 4 to 3.2 advantage in voter registration. In 2012 Democrats won 80,000 more votes for statewide offices all of which they won. Of 18 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, Republicans won 13 and Democrats won 5. Does this distribution accurately reflect Pennsylvanian's voting preferences? Why has this lopsided distribution of House seats occurred?

Every ten years, in the year ending in 0, the U.S conducts a census. Some states have lost population; some have gained. In the year after the census, the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives must be reapportioned among the states so that the population represented by each representative is approximately equal. Some states must then redraw the district lines to account for gain or loss of a seat. States may also redraw their Congressional district lines – and the districts for their state legislature's senators and representatives – to account for population shifts within the state. In this redistricting process, politicians try to accomplish other, less laudable goals through a practice called Gerrymandering.

Gerrymandering is not new. It started in 1812 when Massachusetts Governor Elbridge *Gerry* approved a bill that drew districts favoring his party. A political cartoonist thought the map looked like a sala*mander*, hence the term *Gerrymander*. **Both parties do it.** *Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Michigan are Gerrymandered by Republicans. Maryland and Illinois are Gerrymandered by Democrats.*

Continued next page

There are several ways to Gerrymander. If a state loses a seat, district boundaries can be drawn to set up a primary contest between two incumbents. Districts can be drawn to pack voters of the minority party into one district leaving several other districts to the majority party. Or the voters of a minority party can be split and spread among several districts where they become an irrelevant minority.

Gerrymandering was made much more precise in the 2011 redistricting by recently developed computer methods. Data mining showed the map-makers past election patterns, and the party registration plus many personal characteristics of individual voters. Very precise computer mapping techniques allowed them to draw districts – often having grotesque shapes – that would group voters according to this data to produce the desired election outcome.

In Pennsylvania, redistricting is done by two different processes. Congressional district maps are established by ordinary legislative process. State senate and house districts are drawn by a 5-person commission consisting of the majority and minority leaders of the state Senate and House plus a fifth person chosen by those four or by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court if the four cannot agree. The Pennsylvania Constitution specifies that the districts be compact, contiguous and split as few municipalities as possible – conditions that are rarely honored by the commission. Both systems produce Gerrymandered maps.

Fair Districts PA, a project of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania and Common Cause supported by 27 additional organizations, would like to scrap both systems and create a new system that would have all the maps drawn by an independent commission of 11 voters: 4 registered with each major party and 3 registered as independents or with other parties. The commission could not include office holders, their spouses, lobbyists, or paid staff & officers of political parties. The commission could not use address of any individual, political affiliation of voters, or previous election results. It would hold public hearings, would make the information being used and draft maps available to the public – probably on the Internet – and would require at least one vote from each of the three groups to approve the maps.

This proposal has been introduced in the legislature as Senate Bill 22 and (identical) House Bill 722. The House bill has 96 co-sponsors. Since these bills will amend the Pennsylvania Constitution, one of them must pass in both the 2017-18 and 2018-19 legislative sessions and be approved by voters in a referendum.

You can find more information at www.fairdistrictspa.com. Fair Districts PA urges readers to join the organization at the website, by clicking on the JOIN US button, and to contact their legislators to support these bills.

NAEC at Ross Township Community Day

At the NAEC table at the Ross Township Community day, the animal skins from the Latodami Nature Center were popular (photo right).

NAEC also had an iPad with clip on microscope to look at the life in pond water.

Brochures, newsletters, the NAEC descriptions of "Walks in the Watershed" and information about the Latodami Nature Center were available.

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NORTH AREA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP FORM

____ NEW MEMBERSHIP ____RENEW MEMBERSHIP

Name_____DATE_____

Address _____

_____

_____

Phone_____ Municipality_____

Email_____

__Please send my newsletter by email.

__$20 Individual __$30 Family

__$50 Business or Organization

__$10 Student or retired person

Additional contribution $_____

Please make your check to NAEC; mail to:
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P.O. Box 71, Ingomar, PA 15127

Emailed newsletters arrive in color.