

News

Volunteers to plant grasses in creek

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Published: Thursday, April 12, 2007 2:00 AM CDT

ST. MICHAELS Next Wednesday, volunteers will install thousands of marsh grasses on the banks of the San Domingo Creek, a project intended to help the local waters and which is related to the coming nature trail.

With the help of a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Environmental Concern's project will add nearly 12,000 plants to sop up nutrient runoff and control soil erosion. The marshes will be on both sides of the San Domingo Creek, mitigating the impact of a bridge planned as part of the Rails to Trails project.

The entire project will add 6,500 low-marsh plantings, embedded below the mean-high water line, and 5,250 high-marsh plantings. The wetlands will be protected by a containment sill. Environmental Concern will also plant warm season grasses in a park area behind the marsh.

The plants' roots grow up to 8 feet into the ground, Environmental Concern President Suzanne Pittenger-Slear said, a reason they're so good at controlling erosion. The project will make use of native plants.

If you give them the right environment, they multiply very quickly," she said.

New marshes also serve as additional wildlife habitat, another one of their benefits, Pittenger-Slear said.

We don't have the diversity of wildfowl that we've had in the past," she said.

Since Environmental Concern restored the shoreline on its own property a couple of years ago, more birds have been spotted, including a pair of herons, she noted.

The marshes and the trail are all being built on state property originally acquired with the intention of creating a bypass around St. Michaels. Environmental Concern, a non-profit organization, is funding about half the project, Vice President Gene Slear said, as well as donating time for the nature trail. Because of requirements needed to be met for grants, however, nature trail construction won't begin until at least early next year, he said.

The marsh project was conceived before the nature trail was fully flushed out, Slear said. When details about the trail became more clear, it seemed logical to plant marshes around where a bridge will be built across the San Domingo Creek.

Slear said he would like to continue adding marshes around the San Domingo Creek, especially since rainwater runoff finds its way there via several town streets. Environmental Concern has cleared out phragmites' tall, invasive weeds' around the area. With phragmites out of the way, shorter marsh grasses can receive more sunlight and develop quicker.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," Slear said, especially when marshes are built contiguously.

The Talbot County Master Gardeners, the St. Michaels Elementary School Ecology Club, Cambridge Day School and various neighbors and other individuals will assist in the planting. Environmental Concern will be grilling out for their guests at the outreach event.

The Delmarva Odyssey Expedition has decided to feature this wetland restoration as part of a documentary following environmental scientist John Wik as he rows around the Delmarva Peninsula. Throughout his journey, Wik will be stopping at historic, cultural and ecological places of importance.

Besides the San Domingo Creek restoration, Environmental Concern is now also actively working on two other restoration efforts in Talbot County and one in Cecil County, Slear said.



Environmental Concern plans to fill this area along San Domingo Creek with marsh grasses.

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