

Rally to the River

Posted by [John Lang](#) on November 23, 2009 · [Leave a Comment](#)

The time to start saving the world is today. The place to begin is Wilmer Park. Okay, maybe not the whole world. Just 500 feet of riverbank along the Chester. But every movement has a first step, then another.

Volunteers are being asked to come to the park on the Monday after Thanksgiving to start planting Chestertown's "Living Shoreline."

This effort to create something that closely resembles a natural shoreline replaces an extensive bulkhead that formed Wilmer Park's river edge. Riverkeeper Tom Leigh says, "A living shoreline, because it is vegetated, provides habitat for fish and crabs and it takes up nutrients that run off from upland sources."

Leigh notes that the old bulkhead, an artificial barrier, was made of ties that typically were treated with arsenic or creosote, which are full of toxins that leach into the environment. Bulkheads have a lifetime, Leigh observes, while living shoreline is theoretically there forever — "and it's aesthetically more pleasing than a vertical bulkhead."

To make a more natural shoreline will take many hands.

"About 10,000 plants will be on site, so there's plenty of work," says Kees de Mooy, Chestertown's assistant zoning and housing administrator. He's hoping there will be 20 to 25 volunteers at any given time, working in one-hour segments, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Among the groups coordinating volunteers are the Chester River Association, Washington College's Center for the Environment and Society, the Chestertown Garden Club, Chestertown Middle School and Gunston Day School.

But, anybody who shows up with rubber boots can expect to find plenty to do. And if all you've got is a rubberneck, it'll be fun to watch.

Workers from Environmental Concerns, the site contractor, which has been removing the bulkhead, grading and spreading sand, will be there with power augurs to drill holes in river bottom exposed by low tide.

Volunteers will come behind the drillers and drop a fertilizer pellet and then a seedling into each hole, then backfill.

Grasses being planted are two kinds of spartina and, closest to the park's edge, switchgrass – 10,000 plants, countless sore backs, mud everywhere.

Nobody says it's going to be easy, saving the world.