

Conoy Creek Restoration Tour

In 2008, the Masonic Villages at Elizabethtown, embarked on a project to restore a 3,200 foot portion of the Conoy Creek. One aim of this particular project was to restore this section of the Conoy to an approximation of its appearance 200+ years ago, before the installation of a series of man-made mill dams. A second focus of the project was to create floodplains, wetlands and vegetative buffers that perform their natural and historic functions of pollution removal, species habitat and flood control. Finally, the project was intended to develop nutrient credits which could be traded on the open market and assist municipal authorities in meeting effluent discharge requirements, while at the same time, in the vision of the Masonic Villages, allowing the stream to become a “revenue-generator,” creating funds that could be used to restore subsequent stream sections. All of these goals are summarized in our project motto of “Preserving our Heritage and Protecting the Bay.”

The driving force behind this project was the removal of tens of thousands of cubic yards of legacy sediments from the stream corridor, and along with the sediments, the accompanying nitrate and phosphorous concentrations, which otherwise would be eroded and transported to the Susquehanna River and, ultimately, the Chesapeake Bay. These legacy sediments and nutrients built up over a number of years behind a series of milldams that were once located along Conoy Creek, resulting in a significant and continual source of pollution, even when current best management farming practices have significantly reduced new sources of pollution from the surrounding lands. The completed project acts as a complement to the long-standing farm conservation practices of the Masonic Village, which are geared toward the prevention of new sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorous loadings to the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Subsequent to the removal of these sediments, it is hoped that this project will lay the foundation for market traded credits that will help to meet and exceed the 2010 Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy goals.

In addition to the legacy sediment effort, the project significantly reduces non-point pollution and restores the historical functions, values and long-term stability of the Conoy Creek through more traditional methods such as the creation of over six (6) acres of new wetlands, return of natural vegetation, restoration of natural floodplains, stabilization, and the establishment of traditional habitat. Flood and stormwater storage has been increased, and is benefiting the community. Further advantages include aquatic and terrestrial habitat enhancement; invasive plant management; biodiversity; and open space management. The project site will remain stable indefinitely and will require little or no maintenance in its restored, natural state.

RETTEW Associates, Elizabethtown Borough, West Donegal Township, the Conoy Creek Watershed Association, and Franklin and Marshall College are supporters and participants in this project. Further, the Masonic Village hopes to enlist various public entities, such as the local school district, in providing future educational opportunities along the restored stretch of the stream. Proposed trails along the restored portion of the Creek will provide an important link in a regional park and trail system.

The total estimated cost of the project was \$565,000. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has awarded a Growing Greener Grant to the Masonic Villages in January 2007 in the amount of \$413,000. The Masonic Villages funded the remainder of the costs.

Construction on the project started in August 2008 and was complete by the end of October 2008. The project will be monitored for five years from its completion date for channel stability, native plant species growth, etc. It is hoped that credit protocols will soon be in place to allow for trading of nutrient credits and subsequent use of the revenue to restore the next downstream portion of the Conoy.