



Forest Conservation Program Annual Report



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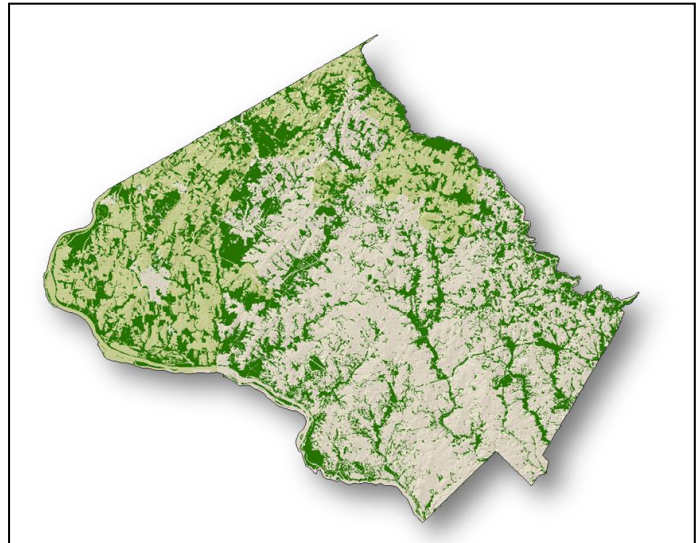
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Completed: 06/20/13

Description

Forest Conservation Program Annual Report

Staff Recommendation: Transmit Annual Report
Data to the Maryland Department of Natural
Resources (DNR)



Summary

The State Forest Conservation Law requires all jurisdictions to report to DNR each year regarding efforts to implement and enforce the law. This report includes these findings as well as other aspects of the forest conservation program and forest related issues.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Transmit Annual Report Data to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The following table summarizes the Forest Conservation data requested by DNR:

<i>Forest Conservation Plan Data:</i>	Acres
Tract Area of Forest Conservation Plans	1858.28
Existing Forest w/in Plan	419.70
Forest Loss During Development	181.14
On-site Planting Requirements	134.43
Forest Retention On Site	237.76

<i>Data Requested by State DNR</i>	
NRI/FSDs & Exemptions	196
Forest Conservation Plans Approved	57
In-Lieu Fees Collected	\$140,757
Mitigation Bank Use	24.32 acres

DISCUSSION

The Forest Conservation Program in Montgomery County has been in effect for over twenty years. The State requires accurate record-keeping and annual reports from all jurisdictions administering the Forest Conservation Law. Other aspects of the program are highlighted below.

Reforestation Program

The reforestation program using in-lieu fees began in the spring of 2008 with a 1.5 acre planting within Reddy Branch Stream Valley Park in Brookeville. Planting has continued along denuded stream areas since then. At this time six acres and more than 1200 trees have been planted. We're delighted that the most recent planting at Reddy Branch was done using trees purchased from the M-NCPPC Pope Farm nursery. This site has recently been adopted by one of the Department of Parks volunteer Tree Stewards.

The second 2.5-acre reforestation project took place in the fall of 2008 along the west side of the main stem of Rock Creek in Chevy Chase. We have recently received approval from the Department of Parks to expand this planting effort to the east side of Rock Creek. This spring, Casey Trees, a non-profit organization in Washington, DC donated a dozen trees to that area to demonstrate some innovative methods of raising nursery stock trees. We plan to follow that initial planting with another 100 trees this fall.

The third 5.5-acre site within Watts Branch Stream Valley Park was planted in March of 2010. This floodplain area along the mainstem of Watts Branch, just upstream from the Potomac Filtration Plant Intake, had been a contentious area of Park encroachment for some years. More than a thousand trees were planted in this field to help jump-start its return to a riparian forest. Another acre of planting will take place at this site in the fall of 2013.

The most recent planting site is located along the Hawlings River mainstem in Rachel Carson Conservation Park. Site preparation began in the fall of 2010. A one-acre planting took place early this spring. Pope Farm was also the supplier for this effort.

Volunteer Efforts

Once planting has taken place, the young trees need significant care for the next few years. Although staff continues to employ contractors to do some of this work, such as treatment of invasives and occasional mowing, we have relied heavily on volunteer efforts to help with deer protection. Tasks include repair of deer protection, placement of deer protection around naturally regenerating trees, and removal of invasive vines. In FY 2012 our Department hosted five volunteer efforts with a total of 89 volunteers at the three established planting sites. In FY 2013, the number of volunteers went up to 134 at six different events.

In-lieu fees provide deer protection fence materials and tools for these efforts. The average expenditure per year for these efforts has been about \$2,000.00. This is minimal compared to the cost of hiring contractors for the same work. We have established relationship with the local Wildlife Achievement Chapter of the Izaak Walton League who brings volunteer groups to the Reddy Branch planting site once or twice each year. Other volunteer groups looking for an outdoor project are directed to us by the Volunteer program of the Department of Parks. These tend to be corporate groups such as Marriot and MetImmune or youth groups such as JIDS and JCA. Last year we also worked with an Eagle Scout candidate to organize an event.

In 2012 the Planning Department agreed to be a partner with Conservation Montgomery for a Chesapeake Bay Trust Community Greening Grant. In-lieu fees were used as matching money for an urban planting project in the Long Branch neighborhood. Staff also provided help with site location planning. During the first of two planting events this spring, staff from both Park and Planning participated with an educational component and helped with team supervision. The second event will take place in the fall of 2013.

Leaves for Neighborhoods Program

Leaves for Neighborhoods is a coupon program funded by in-lieu fees from developers unable to meet forest mitigation requirements on-site. Coupons are worth \$25.00 when a qualifying tree is purchased from private nurseries in Montgomery County. 587 coupons were redeemed in FY2012. This number has gone up in FY 2013 to 806 redeemed coupons.

Urban Forest Planting Effort

In 2009, Maryland State DNR amended the restrictions that governed the use of in-lieu-fee funds. Rather than being restricted to use for forest only, the fund could now be used to meet urban tree canopy goals. This opened up the potential for using developer funds to enhance urban forest and improve the quality of life in urban areas. Since then, staff has worked to develop an urban planting program. Over the last four years this has evolved into the Shades of Green program which will be discussed before the Planning Board as another item.

Forest Conservation Easements

342 acres were placed in conservation easements bringing the total easement area in the County to 10,734 acres. This does not include other types such as scenic easements, nor does it include easements held by other organizations like the Rockville, Gaithersburg or other environmental organizations.



Regional Canopy Effort

Staff has been involved with a Council of Governments workgroup tasked with developing recommendations for a regional tree canopy goal strategy. We have helped to guide the process of evaluating the feasibility of establishing regional tree canopy goals and ultimately increasing tree canopy in the Metropolitan Washington region. Action items have included an assessment of regional baseline tree canopy conditions and projected attrition, a review of existing local tree canopy enhancement programs and goals and development of a regional strategy for Canopy Management. This initial effort will be completed by the end of the year.

Public Private Collaboration

As mentioned earlier, Casey Trees recently did a demonstration project at the Rock Creek in-lieu fee planting sites. Casey Trees is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing and enhancing the urban forest. Until recently, their area of activity has been exclusively within the District of Columbia. Now they have plans to extend their work to Montgomery County. Our staff has begun discussions with Casey Trees to determine how our organizations might work together toward common goals.

CONCLUSION

The Forest Conservation Program continues to be successful.

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