GCSWD hosts city students for riparian buffer project on the Batavia Kill

Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District (GCSWCD) hosted 18 students from the Manhattan Comprehensive High School to plant quick growing forest floodplain trees in Ashland, NY. The planting site, located in the Schoharie Basin and part of the New York City watershed, had been identified in a local stream management plan as a location where riparian (streamside) buffer restoration work is needed.

Despite unfavorable weather conditions of heavy winds and rain, the committed students were able to plant 285 trees in less than two hours. In groups of twos and threes the students carried the containerized native plant materials, some in heavy five gallon containers, to pre-dug holes. Pioneer species gray birch and speckled alder were planted among shrub species such as red osier dogwood, silky dogwood and nannyberry. Green ash and red maple were selected for their ability to grow quickly and establish deep roots.

According to Joel DuBois GCSWCD, "this project is intended to enhance the overall ecological function of the riparian corridor. By enhancing the riparian corridor we are protecting water quality through natural biological means, increasing habitat diversity and offering some level of stabilization for streambanks."

Studying watersheds and learning about riparian buffers in the classroom is one thing.

Taking a trip to the watershed to install a riparian buffer was the hands-on activity that reinforced the connection between healthy vegetation and erosion prevention. On site the students were able to see how past agricultural activities have resulted in minimal woody vegetation along the riparian corridor. Students observed that the streambanks are eroding as a result.

The NYC students were able to visit Greene County for the day thanks to a grant awarded to the Council on the Environment of New York City (CENYC) by the Catskill Watershed Corporation. Grant recipients are able to educate youth about regional water issues and provide NYC students opportunities to participate in streambank restoration projects.

The tree planting was coordinated by Laura Weyeneth GCSWCD and Michael Zamm CENYC. For some of the students, it was the first time they had seen the source of their drinking water. They were excited to make a difference in their watershed knowing that their actions will help to reduce erosion and improve water quality.

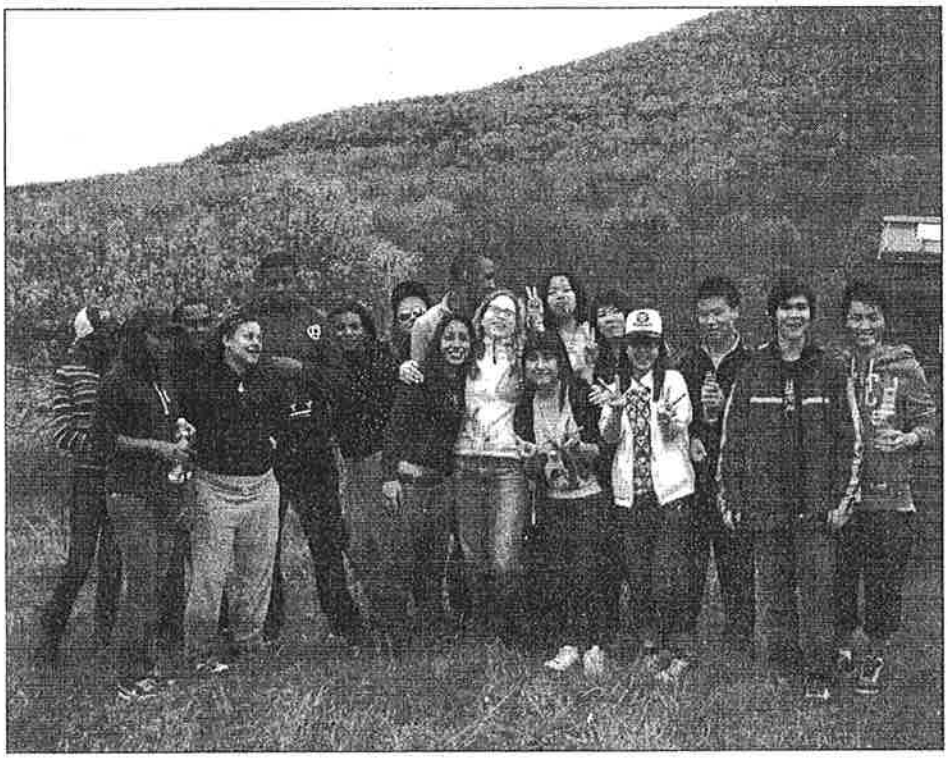
Watershed residents play a critical role as stewards of water quality. In this case, the landowner agreed to install a 100 foot buffer along the Batavia Kill where there had previously been only grass and Japanese knotweed.

Dave Burns from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection Stream Management Program concluded the event by speaking about comprehensive watershed protection programs that ensure the high quality water supply of the Catskill region remains unfiltered.

To help preserve, protect and restore your watershed, learn what best management practices you can implement at home, work or school. For more information about riparian buffers go to: www.catskillstreams.org/stewardship_streamside_rb.html

To participate in future riparian buffer projects, please contact Laura Weyeneth at (518)622-3620 or laura@gcswcd.com

A newly planted speckled alder will grow and help to stabilize the soil along the eroding banks of the Batavia Kill. A High School student from the Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School plants trees with her classmates on Thursday, May 14.



A grant from the Catskill Watershed Corporation to the Council on the Environment of New York City allowed 18 Students from the Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School to take a field trip to the Catskill Mountains to learn about their watershed first hand and help install a riparian buffer.

Three ESL (English as a Second Language) students from Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day High School discover a milkweed plant with their teacher while planting trees in a new riparian buffer that will increase habitat and reduce erosion along the Batavia Kill in Ashland. The black garbage bag was a make-shift rain poncho.