



Bi-monthly

NEWSLETTER



2019 BMP Verification & Data Entry Update:

By: Emily Dekar
USC Ag Coordinator

It is critical each year that BMP Data Entry & Verification is completed on time and as accurate as possible. The 2019 BMP Verification lists were sent out in August of 2018. All farms that were selected were required to have verification completed by June 30, 2019. All data for verifications as well as regular data entry was due to be entered into the database by July 31, 2019 for the 2019 progress run. I am pleased to announce that as of August 9th, all 2019 Verifications were completed and accounted for in the data base. The month of August will be used to complete quality assurance reviews all on data that was entered this year, and you will be notified if there are any red flags. Starting in September, 2019 Progress Year data submission testing will begin to be sure that all of our data is being submitted correctly to the Chesapeake Bay Program. During this time, you are free to continue to enter any data in the USC AEM Online Tool. If there is any data that has been missed and should be included for 2019 progress, as long as it has an implementation date prior to June 30, 2019 when entered into the database, it will be included with our submissions. Once test submissions begin, I will send each county a report showing totals for each BMP reported for you to review. Please contact me with any questions you may have regarding the database or data entry.

UPCOMING EVENTS



August:

23 - Deadline for Upper Susquehanna Posters and Exhibitors



September:

5 - EPA Ag Forum
20 - USC Meeting



October:

1 - Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum

Add your event to our calendar by emailing Palmerm@co.tioga.ny.us

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Calling for Trees for Tributaries Projects!

By: Lydia Brinkley
USC Buffer Coordinator

For the past four years, the USC has been coordinating the DEC's Trees for Tributaries Program in the Upper Susquehanna Watershed. The incorporation of this option into our buffer programming has led to about 5,000 riparian plants being planted each year in addition to achieving implementation results through other programming. Through the Trees for Tribs program, plants and materials are provided for project implementation. Districts and partners can participate by soliciting landowners, creating planting plans, and coordinating implementation.

To participate, a species request list can be provided to Lydia Brinkley ASAP, but no later than December 6, 2019. While no species request can be guaranteed, the earlier requests are better! The species list generally includes native species commonly found in riparian areas. Ideally, plant requests will be provided in intervals of 25. If there are any questions about logistics, please reach out to Lydia at lbrinkley@u-s-c.org.

Now is the time to start planning for spring 2020 implementation. No project is too small! Let's continue utilizing the program to its fullest extent by reaching our 5,000 plant limit!



Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum Seeking Exhibitors and Poster Presenters

The Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum Planning Committee is actively seeking exhibitors and poster presenters for the 2019 Watershed Forum. The fourth annual Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum will be held on Tuesday, October 1 at Binghamton University. If you are interested in participating as an exhibitor or poster presenter, please contact Miranda Palmer at Palmerm@co.tioga.ny.us.



Getting a Handle on Watershed Needs

By: Mike Lovegreen
USC Stream Coordinator

The USC has a long history of assessing the watershed needs in the Region and developing a strategic plan to address those needs. This really is no surprise since the USC is made up of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts/Conservation Districts. One of the primary roles of the Districts is to identify those specific needs in their Counties, develop plans to meet those needs and mobilize resources to address them.

In the last several years, the USC Stream Team has helped focus on individual watersheds through several initiatives to help Districts do a finer job of identifying needs. Working through various funding resources as well as sharing training and organizational assistance, the USC has worked to assist in over a dozen watersheds assessments in the last few years. While all the studies have varied slightly according to the local capacity and resources available, they all have followed similar approaches that include:

- Developing Background Studies – an inventory of the physical, geological, social and economic elements that have influenced the evolution of the watershed and it’s response to the environment it exists in. Historic projects and impacts on the stability of watershed development often provide clues to current challenges.
- A Physical Assessment of the watershed – this includes an on the ground inventory of both needs and opportunities to address current and projected challenges.
- A “Triage” List of Potential Projects – which includes consideration of different solutions to identified needs along with an estimate of costs in dollars, technical resources and educational needs
- A Priority List – that considers both the realistic funding projection and the community needs.

Some example of products and projects that the USC, in particular the Stream Team has engaged in the recent years includes:

A **Stream Corridor Assessment Guide** and training program. This guide recognizes that stream corridor functions are integrated and impact on each other. These stream corridor components include the channels, banks, riparian areas, floodplains and upland impacts. Symptoms of stream channel instability and increased flooding is often related to the dysfunction of one or more of these corridor elements. The guide provides a method of assessing each of these components and direction as to next steps. The guide has recently been added to the NY Agricultural Environmental Management Program.

The **I-4 Program** funded through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Under this funding through the USC, 7 watershed in 4 USC Counties organized and conducted watershed assessments utilizing the approach outlined above. Over 4,000 sites were documented and assessed and 37 associated studies were conducted.

The **NY Rising Projects** funded an additional 6 watershed assessments in Tioga and Broome Counties, again following the assessment outline above, utilizing the assistance of a consulting firm.

Ongoing efforts by the USC include the seeking of resources to continue these watershed assessments and aiding in the facilitation of studies in other areas.



Photos obtained from New York Rising Watershed Assessments in Tioga County



New Partnerships and A New Project: Shorescaping on Tully Lake

By: Laura Grant
USC Buffer Technician

After experiencing their first harmful algal bloom in 2016, residents became concerned and looked for solutions. The Tully Lake Property Owners Association began collaborating with the Cortland- Onondaga Federation of Kettle Lake Associations, and the Syracuse University Environmental Finance Center. With some funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a consultant was hired in 2017 to generate a watershed implementation plan (WIP). The WIP suggested several methods of reducing the nutrient and sediment loads into their beloved kettle lake. One of the methods the groups decided to pursue was the implementation of shorescapes along the homeowners' properties. A shorescape is a landscaped shoreline comprised of aesthetically pleasing native plants to reduce erosion, improve wildlife habitat, and improve water quality.

To implement these projects, the organizations invited the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District as well as, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) to help with the process. Together all the groups worked to source funding, find willing landowners, and design and implement two shorescape plantings. In the Fall of 2018, a total of 401 plants were installed by the Onondaga Earth Corps, a conservation corps that works to empower youth through environmental work. In both locations there will be plants blooming from March, with the early blooms of fragrant sumac, to October with the late blooms of New England asters. In the first year of these projects, about 800 gallons of stormwater are expected to be intercepted through stemflow. This rate of interception will continue to increase as the woody plants continue to grow in height and girth. The diversity of rooting depths from the various types of plants will also reduce erosion.

After one year in the ground, the sites are flourishing with minimal mortality, and fresh blooms are attracting a wide array of pollinators. Another two projects are planned for implementation in the fall of 2019. The USC is looking forward to another successful round of implementation.



Above Sunfish Bay Site shows newly implemented shorescaping on the right that was completed in October of 2018, and a flourishing shorescape on the left in August of 2019 at the same site.



Training to Feature PA Dirt & Gravel Roads Programs

By: Mike Lovegreen
USC Stream Team Leader

The USC Stream Team has organized a training on September 11, at the office of the Bradford County Conservation District in Wysox PA, to feature the PA Dirt and Gravel Roads Program. The morning will begin with an overview of how the program is organized and administered in PA and travel to the field to view and discuss various best management practices. The program is administered by the Conservation Districts in PA and is funded to provide direct technical, educational and financial assistance to local municipalities to address water quality issues related to road systems on dirt and gravel roads as well as low volume paved roads. To be eligible for the financial assistance, a comprehensive 2 day training is required from municipal officials every 3 years. Individual sites are assessed for their environmental impacts and are ranked by a locally developed system.

Those interested in attending the one day overview should contact Mike Lovegreen, Stream Team Leader at mike.lovegreen@u-s-c.org or by calling Mike at 607-346-2718.



USC to Host EPA Ag Round Table Event

Recently, the Upper Susquehanna Coalition has been asked to assist EPA Region 2 staff with the coordination of an EPA Agricultural Round Table event. The purpose of the event will be to give EPA Region 2 staff along with EPA Regional Administrator, Pete Lopez the opportunity to hear concerns from the Agricultural community in the Upper Susquehanna River Watershed. The event will be held on Thursday September 5th at the NYS Grange facility in Cortland starting at 9:00 a.m. The event is open to farmers across the watershed, our partners and USC members. Please consider attending this event and consider bringing along someone from the farming community who would like to share their perspective with EPA!



USC Hosts Wetland Delineation Training

By: Melissa Yearick
USC Wetland Coordinator

The USC Wetland Team was pleased to host a wetland delineation training in partnership with The Wetland Trust (TWT) and Dr. Michael Losito in early August. The training took place at the TWT Wetland Field Station in New Berlin, NY and included three full days of office review and field work at the 40 acres of former golf course now restored wetland.



The training included a thorough review of the US Army Corps wetland determination data sheet, and the 3 components necessary to complete wetland delineations - Wetland Vegetation, Wetland Soils and Wetland Hydrology indicators. Other topics included a history of wetland regulations and protection mechanisms and tools for evaluating wetland quality.

Thanks to all who attended, to The Wetland Trust for providing the perfect facility, and to Dr. Losito for the thorough education and for leading an interesting and engaging workshop. Happy wetlanding everyone!



Training attendees learned how to use, and practiced using Munsell Soil Color Charts to identify wetland soils, learned how to identify characteristics of hydrology, and how to use Newcomb's Wildflower Guide's simple plant classification tools, the go-to guide for flowering plants, vines and shrubs in the northeast, and then identify the wetland indicator status of identified plants.



Grasstravaganza 2019: Finding Inspiration in Natural Systems

By: Troy Bishopp
USC Grazing Specialist

Cobleskill, NY—New York’s NRCS Resource Conservationist, Ed Henry, set the stage of Grasstravaganza 2019 by quoting Thomas Jefferson’s understanding of a strong agronomic economy as the backbone of a nation: “Agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness”. Henry believes the adoption of properly managed grazing is one of the most efficient ways to produce food for New York consumers and inspired the capacity crowd to grasp the possibilities.

He shared his story of traveling to Africa and seeing millions of grazing animals roaming the Serengeti. “The flow of energy and nutrients from the herds is all part of one giant natural grazing system. The scope and scale of this natural dance is nothing less than awe inspiring. We aspire to mimic this in our corner of the world and learn grazing management that sustainably balances the needs of the soil, plants, animals and the people. This is our task for the next 2 days”.

The planning committee made up of Cobleskill College staff, agency professionals and farmers put together a lineup of presenters, vendors, organizations, learning stations and local farm tours that followed the theme of “Health and Resiliency from Soil to Table”.

Thursday night highlighted Washington County’s Dairy Farmer and Taste of NY Ag. Marketing Educator, Jessica Ziehm who gave an impassioned, real-life account on standing up for what you stand for. The Colby alumnus said, “We are 2 to 3 generations removed from the farm. It’s no wonder why people don’t understand what farms do. Farming requires a social license to operate today. We need to take every opportunity to educate”. She described her 6 ways of reaching the public and neighbors: Own your actions, be transparent, find shared values, be passionate and authentic, listen and invest in goodwill.

The event featured a keynote by Dr. Elaine Ingham, the world’s foremost soil biologist, researcher and founder of Soil Foodweb, Inc. Her approach and extensive use of compost teas has been used on over 5 million acres worldwide to dramatically reduce input costs, increase yields and to sequester soil carbon. True to form, she inspired the audience to consider themselves, “the gardeners of the planet” and stop treating living soil like just dirt. “My journey and discoveries from intense magnification of the soil serengeti has shown how powerful biology is to healing a planet and the bottom lines for agriculture. When we get biology going in the soil, we increased yields 300%”.

She detailed the macro and micro-organisms’ jobs and benefits that suppress disease, retain nutrients, decompose toxins and build soil structure. She chronicled how biology constantly replenishes plant nutrients in small increments at just the right amounts and how much we don’t know about what’s under our feet. She argued against soil inputs that weren’t local. “All biology species are local; that’s where the inoculates should come from”. Ingham lobbied for making “bio-complete” compost and suggested spreading 1 ton of complete compost per acre which she said you could make in 21 days from her recipe regime. “It’s exciting to work on a biological level that has the potential to sequester all of the atmospheric carbon in 3 to 5 years”.



Aaron Gabriel leads a discussion on grass and legume mixes suitable for our region.

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Grasstravaganza 2019: Finding Inspiration in Natural Systems

Special Guest, Victor Shelton--Farmer, Prolific Writer, State Agronomist and Grazing Specialist from USDA-NRCS in Indiana provided the grazing management context, experience and practical tips that farmers and agency professionals should use for successful implementation. "We need to spend time observing our pastures and not be drive-by graziers looking from pickup trucks, said Shelton. Think livestock as tools with fermentation vats for improving biology above and below ground, when properly managed". He advocated for "stop grazing heights", proper plant recovery periods and plant diversity, keep something growing all year, well planned-out infrastructure and monitoring tools. His monthly "grazing-bites" advice column can be found at www.waynecountyswcd.com or OnPasture.com.

Guests were treated to a cornucopia of workshops led by seasoned grazing advocates ranging from marketing opportunities to maximizing animal performance, and comparing cost savings from grazing to optimizing the use of technology tools in managing land. Learning stations were set up around the college property that looked closer at soil compaction in pastures, pasture grasses and legume mixture plots, reseeding versus rejuvenating pasture strategies and Dr. Ingham showcasing the soil food web close up and teaching the tools to help get the biology moving in your favor. An inside tradeshow also helped farmers concentrate on what help is available regionally in establishing a grazing operation.

New York's Commissioner of Agriculture and Schoharie County's own local farmer, Richard Ball, provided some poignant stories and inspiration before the dinner featuring local beef. "I'm excited to see how well positioned New York's grazing lands are in helping farmers save on feed costs while enhancing our soil health and contributing positively to consumer's health. With the proliferation of the NYS Grown and Certified Program, producers are able to connect the dots from farm to plate with their customers and share the stories that make a difference for our region".

As in the past, folks were treated to a tour of local grazing farms which included; Tafel Dairy Farm, Sweet Tree Beef Farm and the multi-species operations of Sap Bush Hollow Farm and Black Willow Pond Farm. The visits allow a hands-on look at the tools and techniques used every day on these successful, robust operations. It also provided plenty of time for guests to ask specific questions and network with others.

New York NRCS Resource Conservationist in Animal Science and State Grazing Specialist, Karen Hoffman, said the agency dedicated funding for this event in support of an effort to bring a statewide perspective to the many stakeholders. As an avid grazer herself, she shared her story of how grazing tools and animal management contributed to improving her land's soil health and the vibrancy of the environment. "It's been an honor to work with a diverse committee of graziers to help make this event happen on a bigger scale and provide recognition of how important grasslands and land stewards are to our state".

For more information about this event or other grazing related topics, contact Karen Hoffman at 607-334-3231 Ext. 116 or karen.hoffman2@usda.gov



The Grass Whisperer with Indiana's NRCS Grazing Specialist Victor Shelton



Upper Susquehanna Coalition Attends Empire Farm Days

The Upper Susquehanna Coalition provided information and explained what we do and how we do it at the 2019 Empire Farm Days amongst a few deluges of rain. This was a goal of the expanded USC outreach and education committee. Meeting with prospective farmers and catching up with folks that have installed conservation practices made for an interesting 3 days. And we also had a few laughs along the way!



A New USC Website

By: Melissa Yearick
USC Wetland Coordinator

With the 2019 start of our newly engaged USC Outreach and Education Committee, committee members have been working to update USC's resources and public interaction. We've increased our Facebook engagement, updated materials and resources for outreach events, started producing this bi-monthly newsletter and completed a website overhaul.

The updated website has both a new look and new content, discarding many of the older resources and updating much of the text and program descriptions.

The website includes a members-only resources page, updated calendars with team-specific events on each team page. Also included on individual team pages are blog posts related to that team that link to a searchable blog-styled post database.

The possibilities are endless with this type of website format, and we're looking forward to improving the effectiveness of our outreach through it.

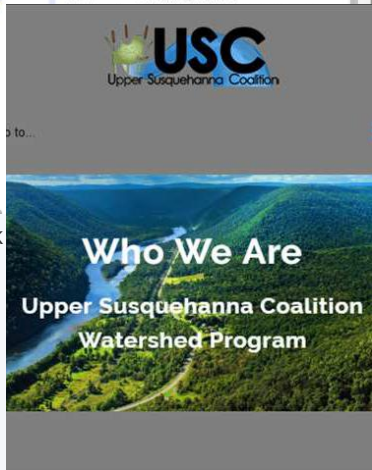
Send us photos you'd like included in our flickr group, articles to post on our blog or calendar events to help us stay relevant, and we're always looking to add features, so let us know if you have suggestions!

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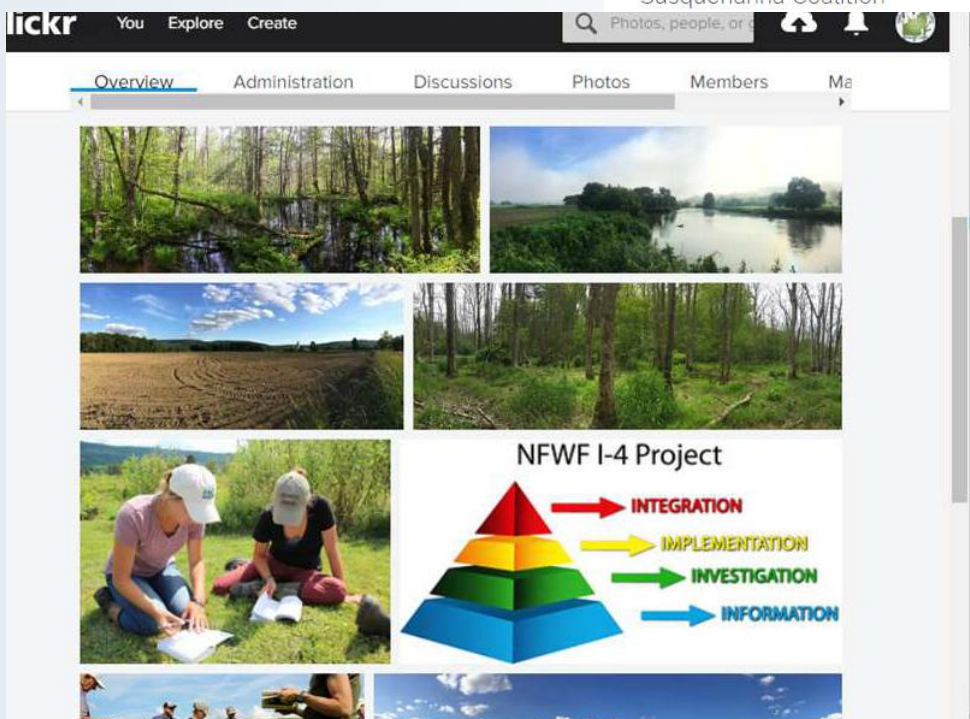


Above: our new homepage with blog posts, Facebook feed and calendar.

Right: A mobile version of the website is part of the Wordpress theme.



Below: our Flickr Photo Group (access info is on the USC Members Only Page) has a searchable framework that USC members can pull photos and other resources from.



Project Spotlight : Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Submitted by: Aaron Buchta

Barbland Dairy Installs Waste Storage

With help from New York State Agriculture and Markets via the CAFO Waste Storage and Transfer Program, Barbland Dairy in Fabius recently completed a 5.8 million gallon waste storage facility. This satellite manure storage will provide the farm's Fabius facility with six months of manure storage capacity. This progressive farm will utilize this facility to use drag hose manure injection on several hundred acres of cropland.

The waste storage structure is lined with HDPE to prevent leakage, and has a concrete ramp and floor for the removal of accumulated solids.



Photos above show completed waste storage

Project Spotlight : Tioga County Soil & Water Conservation District

Submitted by: Miranda Palmer

Tioga County Ag Resource Group Hosts Sundaes at the Farm

The Tioga County Ag Resource Group hosted their 13th annual Sundaes at the Farm on Stronghaven Farm located in the town of Barton on July 21st. This event is a great celebration of agriculture in Tioga County and gives the public an opportunity to spend time on a working dairy farm. It was a hot weekend; the highlight was definitely the free ice cream sundaes! The pictures below display the good time had by all!

