

2023 USCS ANNUAL REPORT



Upper Susquehanna Coalition

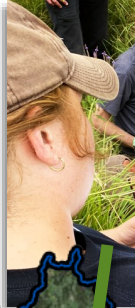
We are committed to protecting and improving water quality and natural resources in the Upper Susquehanna River Basin in New York and Pennsylvania.

2023 Highlights

Wetland
Delineation
Training

Wetland and Upland Deer exclusion fence installation

Cortland Water Fest

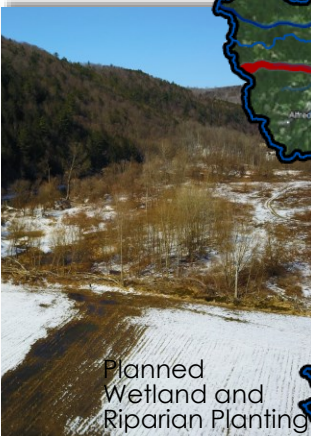


Chemung
Cover Crop

Wetland Restoration
Site



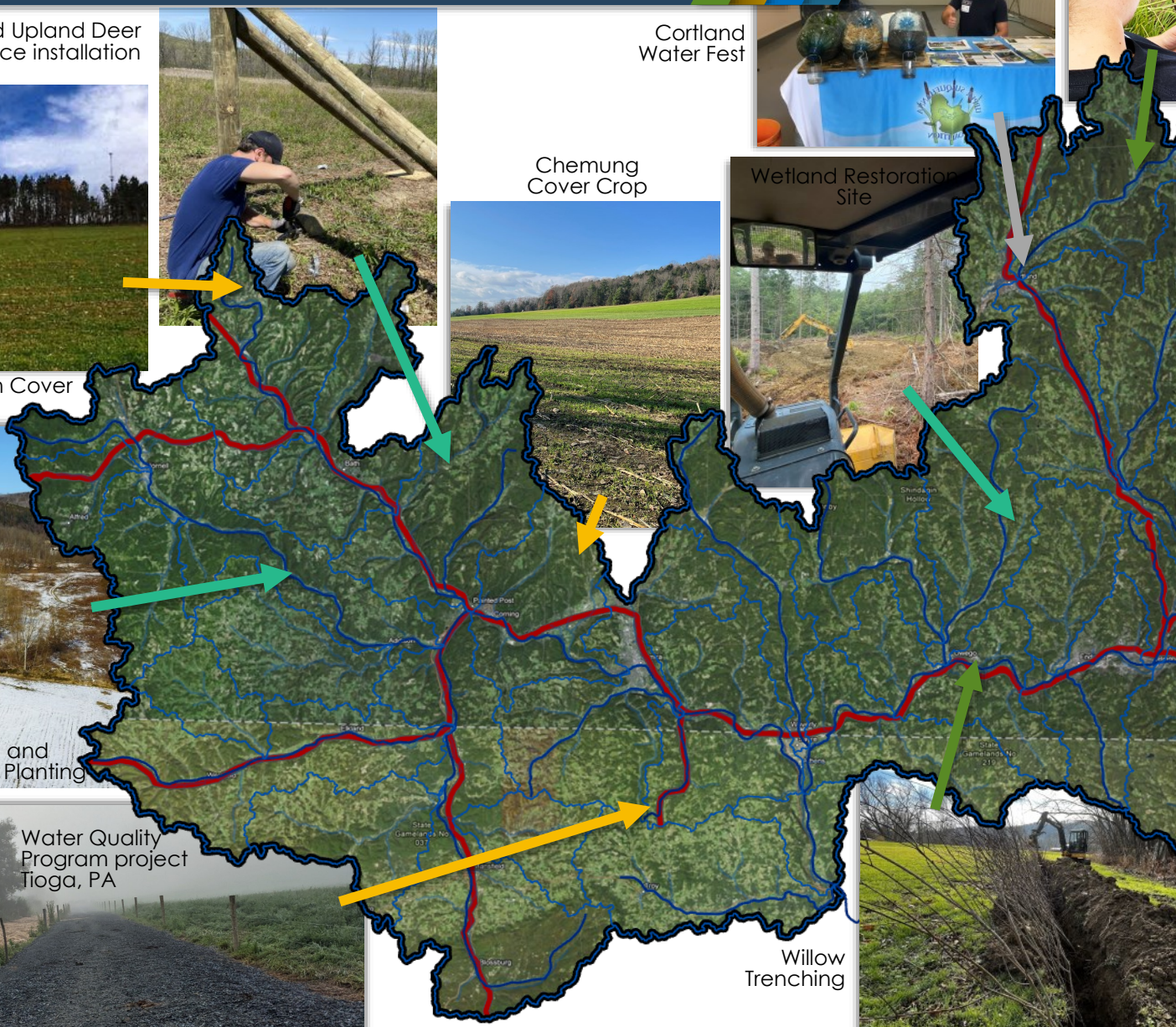
Steuben Cover
Crop



Planned
Wetland and
Riparian Planting

Water Quality
Program project
Tioga, PA

Willow
Trenching



2023 USC Board of Directors



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Coordinator's Note

This year we saw the return of the Watershed Forum that was held in October at Binghamton University. The turn out was great and we look forward to planning the 2025 event. In addition, USC staff worked to pursue and secure funding to support capacity and implementation in the watershed across all of our focus areas and teams. I hope you take the time to read through our annual report as it is always impressive to me to see how much work is accomplished in the watershed by our collaboration!

Wendy Walsh

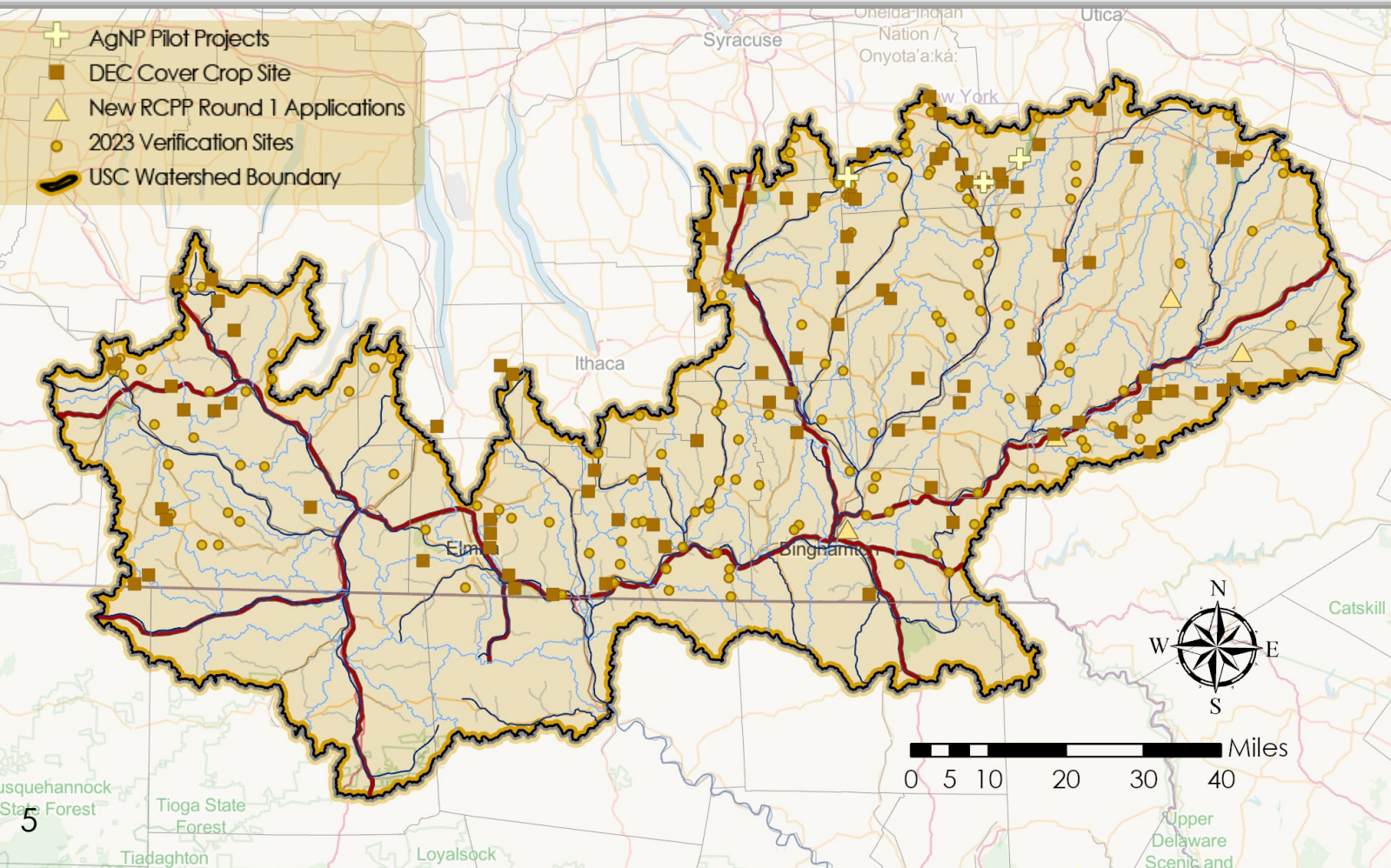




2023 Ag Team Update

Expanding Nutrient Management Across All Landscapes

Nutrient management planning is a key water quality practice in the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay, whether it be on a farm or in the urban setting. We have received funding through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to assist our member Soil and Water Conservation Districts with expanding their nutrient management planning efforts on farms. Along with farm planning, we have partnered with NYSDEC to develop an Urban Nutrient Management Plan Guidance Document, as well as a plan template and education and outreach materials. Landowners in the watershed that are managing their lawns in accordance with the "Top 10 BMP's", can fill out a Pledge Card, committing to continuing their good water quality practices. We rolled out this program late spring/early summer of 2023, and have received over 100 pledges, totaling close to 500 acres. Moving forward we plan to further engage with state owned land, golf courses, colleges and universities, parks and other



publicly owned land through the help of our soil and water conservation district, regional planning boards, and many other partners across the watershed.

Chesapeake Bay Program

As we approach the 2025 deadline for the Chesapeake Bay partnership to meet several goals under the Watershed Agreement, there are many accomplishments to be proud of including stream health, fish passage, and protected lands. However, there is still progress to be made towards meeting all our goals across the entire

Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership has been in the process of developing a path forward beyond 2025. Identifying and addressing new scientific data, enhanced monitoring and reporting, defining existing and emerging challenges, and engaging communities are all high priorities that are being discussed. The Upper Susquehanna Coalition is specifically pleased of how far we have come in data collection and reporting to the Chesapeake Bay Program. **Our data numbers look good, and our water quality looks even better.** We still have

work to do, as things like climate change will affect our load reduction goals moving forward, but we are committed to protecting and improving local water quality for our communities that will in turn positively impact **our neighbors downstream.**

232

Sites with BMPs verified

16,455

Acres of cover crops supported

\$529k

In cover crop funding distributed

118

Urban Nutrient Management Pledges

480

Acres of Urban Nutrient Management Pledges

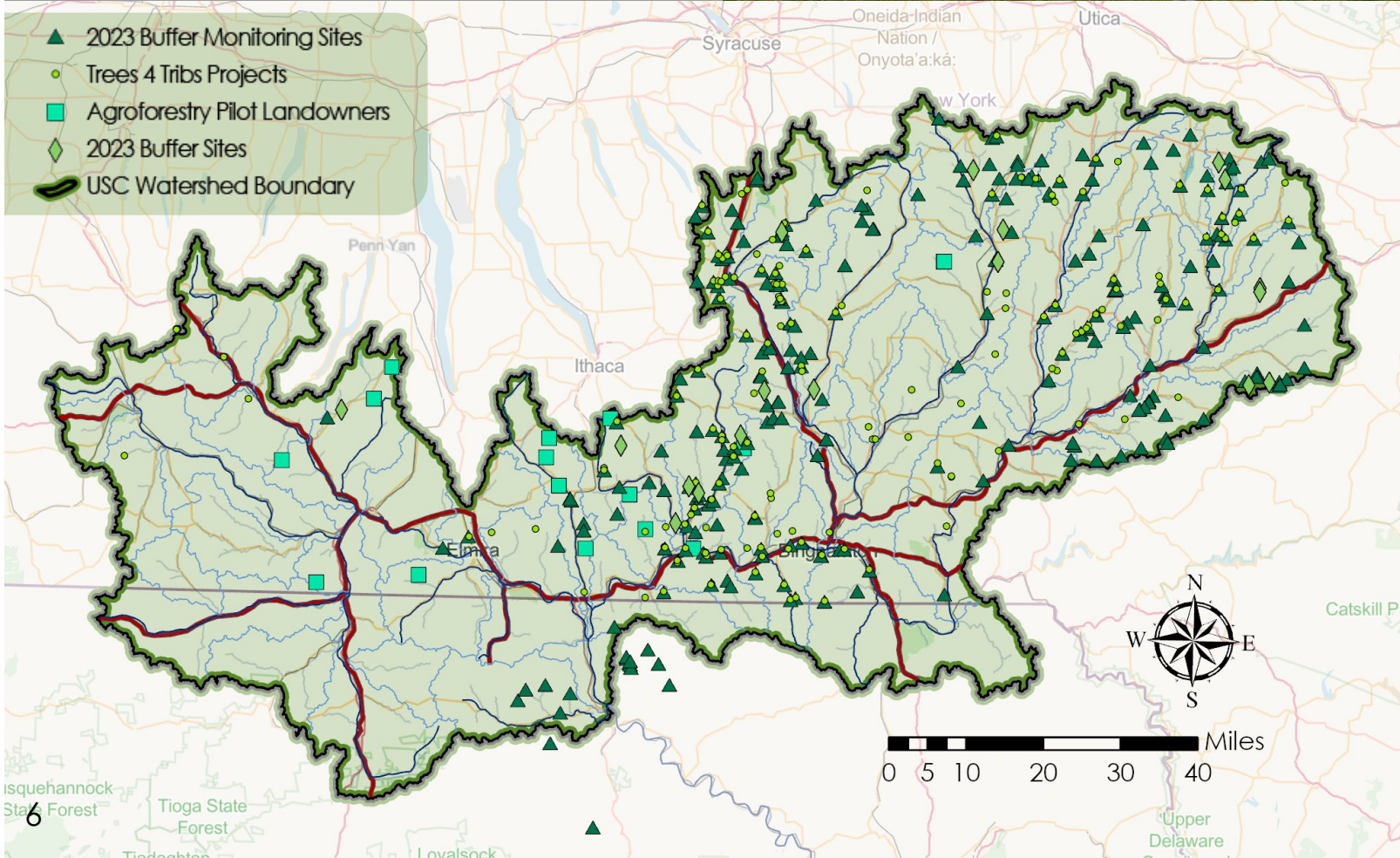
2024 Ag Team Goals

- Development of an Online Record Keeping Application
- Increase implementation of Urban Nutrient Management Planning
- Increased focus on capturing all implemented BMP's and data reporting prior to 2025
- Coordinate Round 2 RCPP Project Funding
- Provide trainings to SWCD and partners as needed

2023 Buffer Team Update

Each year we get more on the ground and engage with more volunteers through our buffer program! We have several established programs that grow every year, such as the Buffer Steward Program, the Trees for Tributaries Program, and the USC Water Quality Program. This year we received funding from several sources to make our buffer program comprehensive, these include the United State Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Environmental Protection Agency, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Arbor Day Foundation, and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission.

In 2023, USC supported stewardship activities in Madison, Cortland, Broome, Onondaga, Tioga, Tompkins, Chemung, Steuben, Otsego, Delaware, and Chenango Counties in New York and in Bradford County, Pennsylvania. In all 12 counties combined, a total of 1,535.8 acres of riparian forest buffer were monitored for survival. Nearly the same number of acres, 1,421.8, had buffer establishment activities such as tree shelter maintenance, mowing, or invasive removal performed on them by buffer stewards, SWCD district/USC staff, and volunteers. Buffer stewards from all counties also participated in group



workdays throughout the watershed. A total of 9 group workdays were hosted during the 2023 season- two in Broome County, and one each in Madison, Cortland, Bradford, Tioga, Otsego, Delaware and Chenango Counties. Participants were not limited to just buffer stewards; a total of 65 participants attended these workdays, including district, USC, USDA, DEC, and other agency staff. At these workdays, groups stewarded and/or monitored a total of 70 acres and planted over 550 trees.

It was another successful year for our trees for tributaries program as well. The program was offered in both spring and fall planting seasons again this year, something we are striving to offer in the years to come. Through the program we planted 10,000 trees and shrubs on 50.1 acres of riparian area along our streams. Offering this program in both spring and fall planting seasons has allowed us to continue to increase our volunteer engagement. By holding 24 volunteer planting events we had 498 volunteers donate a total of 1,451 volunteer hours to tree and shrub planting.

This year we were able to get trees on the landscape through a couple of other pilots and new initiatives. First, through a pilot agroforestry project with Cornell Cooperative Extension, we engaged with 17 landowners, mostly all of whom are located in the western part of the watershed where we have little engagement with tree planting practices. While landowners planted 1,000 trees, we also we able to engage further with some landowners to restore wetlands and reforest old fields. We installed a few pilots to ensure the success of our reforestation efforts, including applying stone mulch on 1,000 stems and installing deer fence around 5 acres of field to help promote natural regeneration. Last, through our USC Water Quality Program we have been able to fund landscape wide reforestation.

Through funding reforestation across the landscape, we have been able to plant very wide riparian areas and extend into the upland area, as well as expand outreach and engagement by working with and within disadvantaged communities in the watershed.



1,617
Volunteer
Hours

83,322
Stems
Checked for
Survival

51,555
Plants
Planted

206.5
Acres
Planted

10
Buffer
Stewards

271
Sites Assessed

2024 Buffer Team Goals

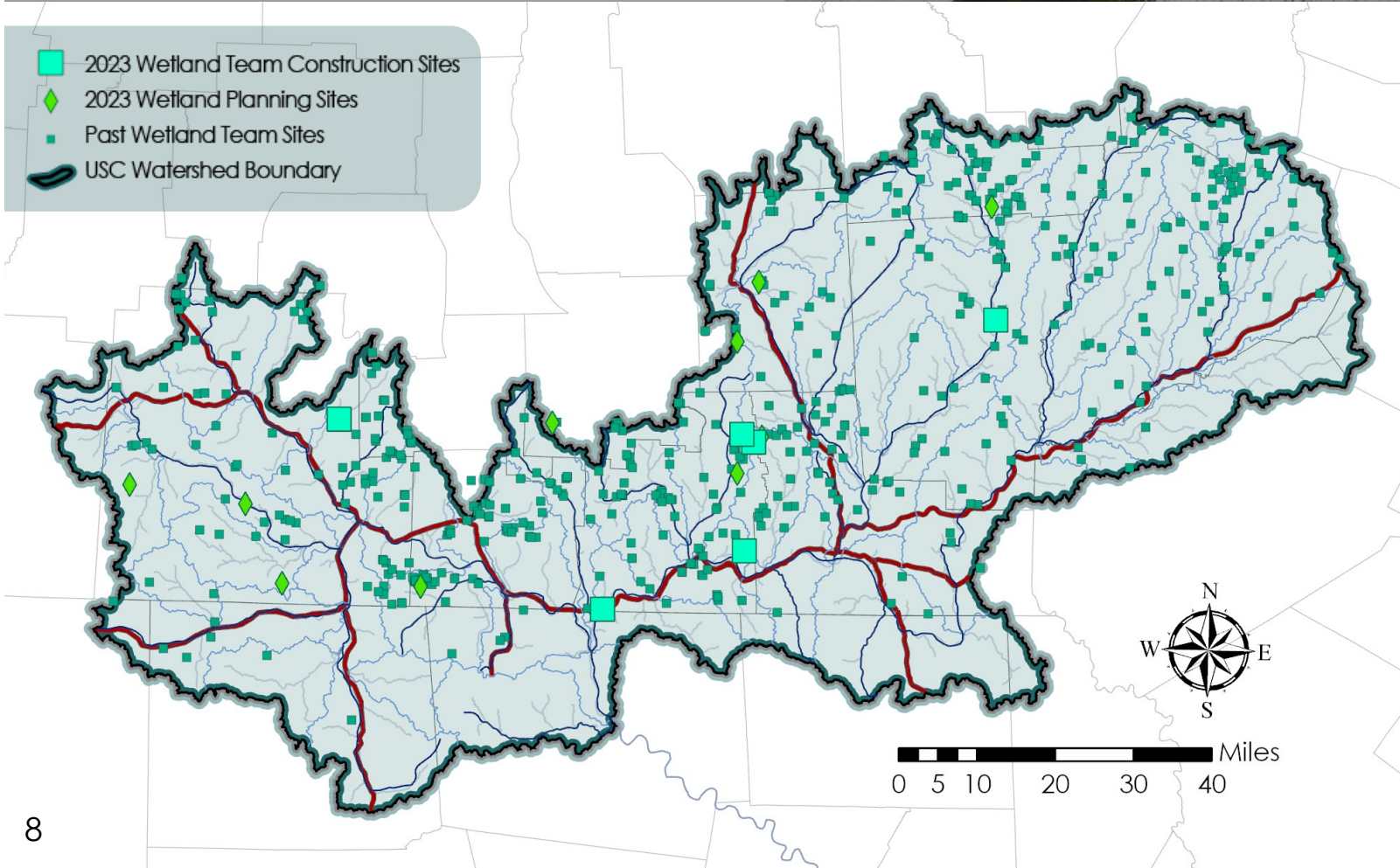
- Stay relevant with state programs for carbon sequestration and tree planting.
- Engage with contractors and encourage district participation for more robust project stewardship.
- Continue to work with urban and disadvantaged communities on tree planting.
- Secure priority tree and shrub species in diverse stock.
- Promote and fund tree planting across the watershed landscape.
- Focus on volunteer retention and expansion.



2023 Wetland Team Update

The USC Wetland Team delivers wetland conservation at a watershed scale. While wetlands are understood to provide nutrient and runoff retention as well as habitat to many unique species, their benefits are often overlooked across the watershed. We are dedicated to increasing wetland restoration and expanding wetland education and understanding across our region. We support a wide variety of wetland-related programs, providing site review, monitoring, design, construction and maintenance assistance to partners, members and our other USC teams alike.

In 2023, our team focused on identifying restoration opportunities on municipally owned properties and other protected properties. We completed GIS review of thousands of acres municipally owned properties, prioritizing areas for review across the watershed. While we have a long way to go before this process is completed, we have been successful in identifying many potential opportunities, and initiated the planning and restoration process on 10 of these projects

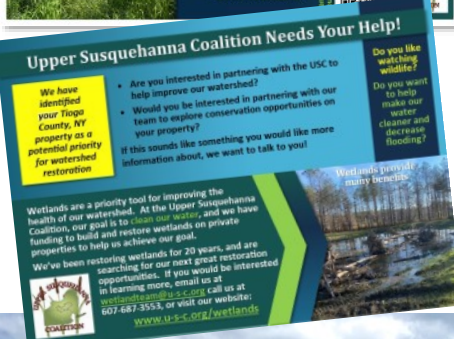


totaling 70 potential acres of projects. Additionally, 21,000 acres of potential work area was mapped and identified for review by our team in the coming months. We've been pleased with the response from these municipalities and land protection entities, and look forward to expanding these efforts in the future.

We continued to evaluate and pursue restoration on potential sites as they were brought to us by our partners, or as land-owners reached out directly. We engaged with districts and completed site evaluations for sites included as part of Water Quality Program applications. And we worked to promote wetland restoration through partnership development across the watershed.

Outreach

This year while wrapping up our Expanding Wetlands restoration work, we developed several flyers for use in outreach, both general and to individual landowners promoting wetland restoration, the benefits of wetlands, and encouraging interested parties contact our team. As part of the outreach to individual landowners, we will map priority wetland opportunity areas by county, and in partnership with the districts, focus on direct mailing to landowners with promising wetland restoration areas on their properties. In 2023 we also hosted a 3-day wetland delineation training in Norwich, NY in partnership with Dr. Mike Losito, a certified wildlife biologist, professor of wildlife management and wetland trainer. We had 19 students attend from 8 counties and learn about wetland regulation, and how to identify and map them.



2024 Wetland Team Goals

- Identify additional wetland needs in the watershed
- Initiate targeted wetland outreach
- Develop Chesapeake Bay Wetlands Action Strategy for New York
- Construct USC Water Quality Program wetland restoration projects
- Continue assisting USC Teams and Partners with construction and maintenance needs.

8,449
Acres of potential work area reviewed

120
Acres of wetland site planning

687
Equipment hours in 2023

36.5
Acres of Wetland Restoration/Enhancement Work in 2023

480
of Residents engaged with about wetlands

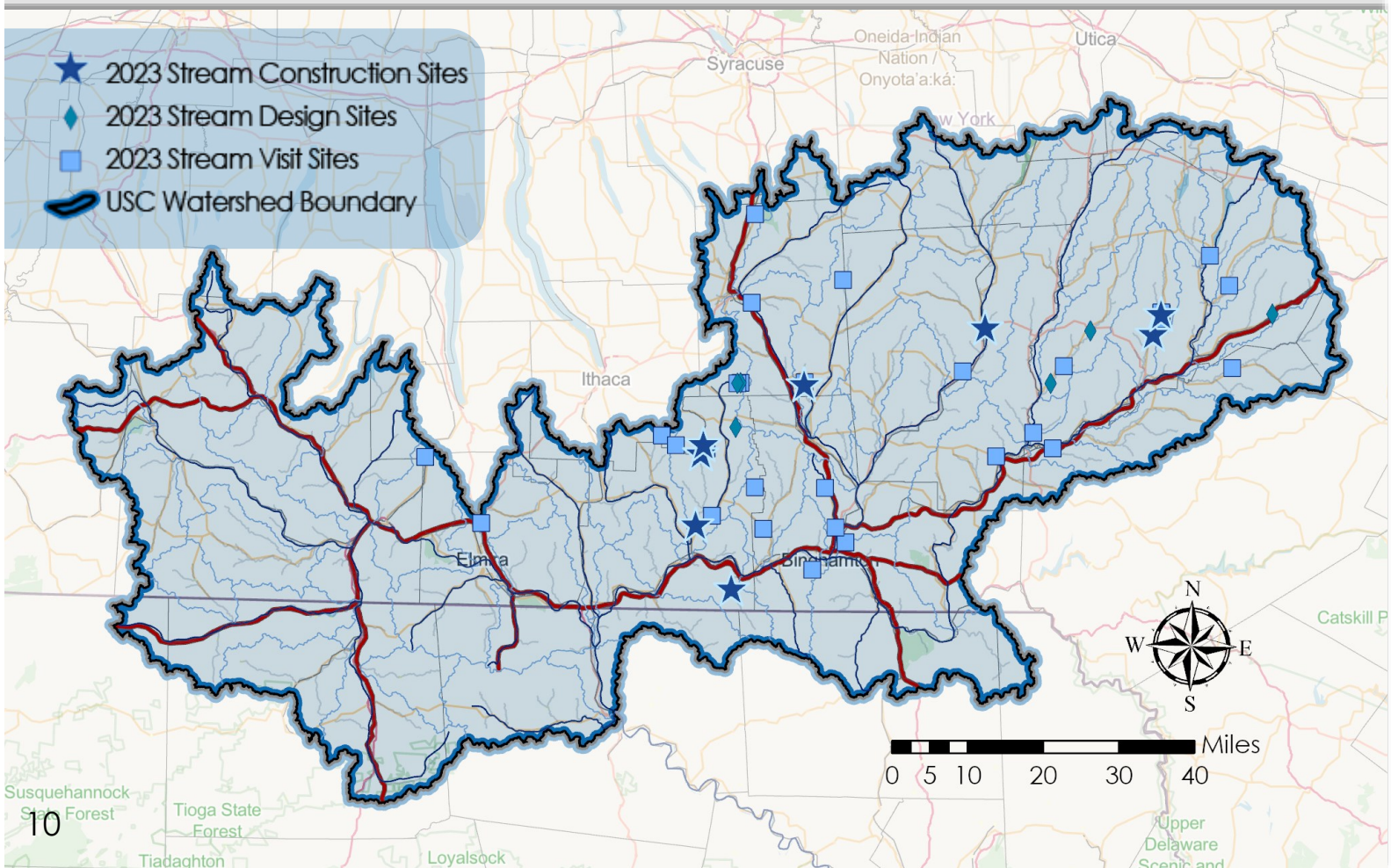


2023 Stream Team Update

The Upper Susquehanna Coalition's Stream Team is a representative characteristic of the membership of the USC. Each member SWCD identifies, plans and implements stream corridor related projects individually or with the educational, technical, planning or financial support from the collective USC.

In 2023 our stream team and our partners completed work on a project dedicated to reducing nutrient and sediment pollution in the stream corridor while increasing public education about stream processes. Priority watersheds for this project included the larger Cohocton and Tioughnioga watersheds where barriers to fish passage, bank instability and riparian canopy gaps were assessed. Through this project, 1,585 people were reached with outreach activities, 11.88 acres of riparian buffer were installed, 2,550 feet of stream corridor restoration was implemented and 381 sites were assessed for stream corridor restoration potential.

The map below identifies 2023 stream engineering team sites including 8 projects implemented, 10 projects designed, and 29 projects evaluated throughout the USC watershed.



One Stream Team project implemented in 2023 included the installation of 380 linear feet of streambank rehabilitation using natural stream design on the Chenango River. This project protected a severely eroding streambank and had the added benefit of partnering with the site landowners on wetland restoration and enhancement, and riparian forest buffer restoration and plantings. The toe wood project installation took

just over a week to complete, and utilized 60 root wads and 2,400 live willow stakes.



3,635
Linear Feet of
Construction

4,663
Linear Feet of
Stream
Restoration
Designed

2024 Stream Team Goals

- Accelerate implementation of stream restoration projects in partnership with a diversity of landowners.
- Secure funding to support stream restoration efforts in the watershed
- Host virtual ESI Training Session and continue to expand our online training resources
- Build capacity of stream team with a stream design training

2023 Outreach Committee Update

In 2023, our outreach committee developed outreach material, web content and updated USC outreach flyers. We published newsletter and newspaper articles, and partnered in the hosting of the 2023 Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum.

We partnered with groups to provide education and outreach opportunities in 9 counties across the watershed, with hundreds of watershed residents being reached. We produced 3 quarterly newsletters which were sent out to our member SWCDs and partners as well as posted on our website, and published 197 Facebook posts throughout the year.

In 2024 we plan to continue with most of our outreach priorities, expanding where possible to reach more watershed residents and be a more effective tool for our members and partners. We have determined that we will continue to alternate between facilitating an Upper Susquehanna Watershed Forum and our Watershed Wednesdays series, with 2024 targeted for our next round of Watershed Wednesdays. We will also begin planning for the 2025 Watershed Forum, looking to make it better than ever.

7,400
Total
Facebook
reach

26,000
People
reached
through
outreach
activities

158
Watershed
forum
attendees



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