

THE PENNSYLVANIA HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

PHS Spearheads TreeVitalize Watersheds Program

This fall, the TreeVitalize Watersheds program will initiate dozens of new projects to help reduce storm runoff and improve water quality in communities throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. The program provides trees and shrubs to help restore “riparian buffers”—areas along streams and rivers—as well as upland areas and drainage basins. PHS will play a major role by training volunteers for watershed projects through its Tree Tenders network, raising awareness, identifying projects across southeastern PA, and streamlining the application process.

One major project is the Rosyln Park Sandy Run Stream Bank Restoration and Management Project in **Abington Township**. The aim is to reforest the stream bank along Sandy Run, which drains into the Wissahickon Watershed. In the first two phases more than 100 volunteers planted 4,000 native trees, shrubs, and grasses. The third and final planting will take place on October 18. The project is a collaborative effort of the Abington Township Parks and Recreation Department; the township’s Environmental Advisory Council and Shade Tree Commission; and Abington Trails, a nonprofit organization.

The TreeVitalize Watersheds program is focusing on nearly 200 sites in Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties. Through the program, the partnership of PHS, the Fairmount Park Commission in Philadelphia, the Conservation District office in each of the four surrounding counties, and the Stroud Water Research Center in Chester County has reforested some 300 acres of riparian areas with 50,000 trees and 19,000 seedlings so far.

Public and private funding sources have contributed more than \$1.5 million to TreeVitalize Watersheds thus far, including four \$250,000 Growing Greener grants from the



Volunteers plant trees for a TreeVitalize Watersheds project at Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust in Montgomery County.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

In addition, **Aqua Pennsylvania, Inc.**, a major regional water utility, has contributed \$500,000 in funding as well as technical assistance on projects in its source water zone. Other assistance has come from **PECO Exelon**, which has provided \$150,000 in project funds.

“Aqua is pleased to have been a major contributor in the initial years of the TreeVitalize program,” says Preston Luitweiler, vice president and chief environmental officer for Aqua Pennsylvania. “The work improves water quality, natural habitat, and the appearance of the landscape. TreeVitalize helps instill stewardship of water resources and the environment. We also know that trees capture carbon from the atmosphere, so we are lowering our carbon footprint while caring for our water resources.”

PHS has been a lead partner in TreeVitalize since 2004, when the public-private partnership was initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources with the goal of restoring the tree canopy in southeastern Pennsylvania. TreeVitalize expanded in 2005 to include watershed restoration projects in the region, and is now working in other metropolitan areas across the commonwealth.