



Stream Restoration Continues

Citizens' involvement improves planning process.

By Mike DiCicco

Wednesday, March 11, 2009

While some residents who studied plans for the next phase of stream restoration in Reston still did not approve of the project, Gavin Small said, "overwhelmingly, people were in support."

Small and about 60 other residents walked along Reach 4 of the Glade watershed with Mike Rolband, the president of Wetland Studies and Solutions Inc. (WSSI) and his workers Saturday morning, March 7, as the company unveiled the first draft of its plan for that portion of the stream.

Reach 4 runs from Steeplechase Drive to Soapstone Drive. Including two tributaries, a little over a mile of streambed is to be restored. The Reston Association's Design Review Board approved plans for reaches 1 to 3 in late January, and work is underway there.

Small said most concerns voiced Saturday related to tree removal, particularly with regard to larger trees.

A total of 115 trees are to be removed. Only one has a diameter of more than 30 inches, but 19 are more than 18 inches across and are considered medium-sized. Forty-two of the trees to be axed have 6- to 9-inch diameters. Many are on the banks of the stream and have had their roots undercut.

"I think it's wonderful," Small said. "The planning has been done as well as it could have been done."

While nobody wants to see trees cut down, "we have to look beyond our noses," said Carolyn Badila, noting that the long-term effects of not having the work done would outweigh the loss of trees now. Badila, a member of the environmental committee that advises the Reston Association, also went along on the walk. "It's not just restoring a stream," she said. "It's going to restore ecosystems. So we're on the 'yay' team."

A FEW MONTHS ago, that team was lagging behind. The stream restoration project in the Snakeden watershed went largely unnoticed until late last fall, when hundreds of trees were removed during the restoration of the stream's badly damaged lower reaches. Residents turned out in droves to oppose the project.

Rolband has responded by soliciting public input, and he revised plans for the first stretches of the Glade in order to minimize tree removal and avoid areas that were special to residents. In February, scores of people turned out to support the resulting plans.

"We're just amazed by how thoughtful and inclusive Mike Rolband is," said Joanne Bauer, who had also gone along on the stream walk. "A lot of community input has made this a better project." While the project would probably always have its opponents, she said, "The level of civil discussion has improved dramatically since this whole process began."

"Generally, I think most people were very supportive," Rolband said. He said that he had been surprised by how few specific issues had been raised.

A major topic of discussion was which of the two trails that run along the stream should be used as access for machinery. WSSI had recommended that the unpaved trail be used because fewer people walk on it. "Way more people use the paved trail. But the people who use the unpaved trail are very passionate," Rolband said. He said he had agreed to continue the discussion.

The reach is split into sections 4A and 4B, divided by the point where runoff from St. John Neumann Catholic Church empties into the stream. After that point, damage is heavier.

However, work on all six reaches of the Glade would be much less intense than it was in the Snakeden watershed, as it is not as badly damaged. Much less of the land surrounding the Glade is covered by impervious surfaces, Rolband said.

If the final plans are approved by the Design Review Board in mid-June, the work in Reach 4 could be completed by the holidays, Rolband said, although bad weather could tack on a month or two.