



Bangor Area Stormwater Working Group: Stormwater Pollution Stormwater Pollution Prevention (P2) & Volunteer Outreach and Engagement Initiative



507 (!!) volunteers participated in ad hoc “Anytime Stream Clean-ups “ April-June 2013

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (completed June 2014)

The Bangor Area Storm Water Group (BASWG) is comprised of the City of Bangor, City of Brewer, Town of Hampden, Town of Milford, City of Old Town, Town of Orono, Town of Veazie, University of Maine, Eastern Maine Community College, Air National Guard Bangor Base, Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center, University of Maine Augusta Bangor Campus.

With partial funding from this grant, the Bangor Area Stormwater Working Group engaged residents in a community-based initiative to reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff. Volunteers stenciled storm drains, took part in street and stream clean-ups and participated in a stream bank tree planting and stabilization project.

THE CHALLENGE/APPROACH TAKEN

BASWG utilized this grant to engage local citizens in volunteer outreach and education efforts designed to teach residents about stormwater pollution and personal actions that can reduce it. The project builds on prior efforts to raise in pollution prevention by initiating:

- 1) neighborhood-based storm drain stenciling programs
- 2) "Anytime street and stream clean-up" events
- 3) a stream bank tree-planting and stabilization project utilizing volunteers in partnership with the Penobscot County Soil and Water Conservation District.

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THE RESULTS

- The BASWG now offers “Anytime Stream Clean-ups” as a package which includes template materials to identify sites, provide a Stormwater 101 training, deliver a safety training and work with the media to promote each event. In 2013, 467 volunteers participated in this project’s Anytime Stream Clean-ups on streams in the Bangor area. This number was increased slightly to 498 volunteers in April-May 2014.
- Storm drain stenciling projects were held in four new areas in Bangor, Brewer and Hampden. Forty-eight citizen volunteers participated in these stenciling events.
- Three hundred willow wattles were planted along Capehart Brook’s eroding shoreline, in conjunction with a stream clean-up to increase visibility of the project.

NEXT STEPS/ OPPORTUNITIES

The BASWG and the City of Bangor plan to support Anytime Stream Clean-ups. As more organizations and businesses seek community service activities, Anytime Stream Clean-ups represent a visible and desirable option in the region.

BASWG’s intercept surveys indicate that storm drain stenciling in neighborhoods continues to be one of the best ways to increase awareness about the flow of stormwater and potential behavior change actions for reducing polluted runoff from lawn care activities. BASWG continues to seek ways to engage citizens in this work.

Despite a rocky start, Project Willow demonstrated that there is a real potential for both streamside improvements and citizen engagement in planting projects. As the City of Bangor continues to develop watershed management plans and work to increase stakeholder awareness, streamside plantings may play an important role over time.

NEEDS

First, the incredible success of the Anytime Stream Clean-up option requires a huge commitment of time, resources and inter-municipal coordination. The BASWG has had to restrict the number of these events that can be held in one year, due to resource constraints. The BASWG is currently developing a plan to generate ongoing donor support for additional clean-ups. Ideally, BASWG would be in the position not only to respond to interest, but to actually recruit new citizens, especially in targeted neighborhoods where there are impaired streams and citizen engagement is most needed to facilitate long-term change.

Second, with stenciling events generating the most “bang for the buck” in terms of behavior change goals for pollution prevention, the BASWG is always seeking additional funds to support stream clean-ups. should coordinate with BASWG to identify opportunities for streamside plantings, to share resources and lessons learned.



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Third, BASWG needs to find a more effective way to identify and coordinate locations for streamside plantings. Future work on watershed planning should coordinate with BASWG to identify opportunities for streamside plantings, to share resources and lessons learned.

LESSONS LEARNED

Build it and they may Actually Come! Lots and Lots and Lots of Them!

When you build something, sometimes you can only wish for people to be interested or participate. And sometimes you build something and they DO come. By the Hundreds! Be prepared not only for what happens when you don't get the response you want, but also be prepared for response to exceed expectations. When the BASWG developed anytime stream clean-up option, the group was inundated by requests. We had a target goal and exceeded it by hundreds of participants. This required additional staff time, donations of goods and services, etc. to supplement planned resources from the grant and in-kind commitments. We recommend either setting a cut-off (example: the first 200 people) or have a plan to accommodate (we have developed some new partners and systems to accommodate new numbers).

Let External Momentum Help you meet your Goals

On the other hand, the anytime stream clean-ups have been a tremendous success, securing community engagement and interest in our streams in ways we had never expected. For years, we had tried to set dates and recruit volunteers. These were marginally successful. But by opening up opportunities for citizens to volunteer when they wanted to, as part of their own organization/business' plans, we opened the door to true citizen engagement and capitalized on the momentum of other programs that were seeking to do volunteer work in their communities. The Anytime Stream Clean-ups are a win-win.

Never Underestimate Red Tape

Our project had three parts to it. The easiest of the three was going to be a volunteer project engaging citizens in the planting of willow wattles on the banks of Bangor's impaired streams. We had stakeholder groups in the pipeline, money to purchase willow wattles and the timing was great, with watershed plans in place and a recent outreach campaign about stormwater having aired recently enough for people to remember why they might want to help reduce stormwater run-off to Bangor's streams. And yet, because the project was tied to other work along impaired streams, the City had to wait on approval from the Army Corps of Engineers to "disturb" the targeted shoreline. So we waited....and waited...and waited some more. The City even reapplied...and then it was winter and the end of the grant period. Fortunately we were able to secure an extension and plantings are now planned in a different location (not requiring Corps approval) tied in with a different citizen initiative for April. Our faith in permit approval was overly optimistic. With a grant timeline, we would advise choosing sites where there is no red tape (under municipal control or with a signed agreement for private property in hand).



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Applicability for Other Municipalities

BASWG is always interested in sharing its models and templates. Any interested municipality should contact the BASWG and we will share what we have (as well as our lessons learned and ideas for improvements!) The three projects funded by this grant work well in the Greater Bangor Area because there is a regional culture of "rolling up your sleeves and doing it yourself" as well as neighborhood projects. These projects might not work as well in less-connected neighborhoods or where there is an expectation for services to be provided rather than having to chip in personally.

Any municipality seeking to replicate one of these projects is welcome to contact the BASWG to discuss preparations regarding coordination, access, training, liability, and required resources.

Recommendations

- Continue to provide funding for projects like this! The BASWG would never have stimulated and sustained the current level of citizen engagement without this support. Being able to try out projects and have funding that stimulated other support was Invaluable.
- Including a list in the grant RFP of common citizen engagement budget items that can and cannot be funded would also be helpful (for example food and beverage or liability coverage). This would also help applicants think about specific expenses they will have to find other ways to support.
- When MCP can't fund a critical part of a project, having a list of alternative funders and sources of support would be incredibly helpful.

Contact

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Wynne Gugliemo, Environmental Coordinator, City of Bangor served as PM on this project.
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