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Cooks Current Newsletter

The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

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Plant Stewardship Index

On August 25, the Honorable Congressman Patrick Murphy held a press conference at the last covered bridge in our watershed. He announced federal money allocated to preserve land here in the Cooks Creek valley (\$700,000.00) through the Highlands Greenway Initiative that ranked us number one in importance out of four states. These national tax dollars will help stretch local funds, increasing the quantity of land preserved. Our mission as a watershed association, however, is more about the quality of the land and waters that sustain our lifestyles.

I recently proposed to my fellow board members, and now to you, our membership, that we actively engage in a concept called the plant stewardship index (PSI). Our exceptional value watershed designation is based on the high quality of our streams, which in turn depend on the quality of the native diversity of our landscapes. These landscapes are important habitat for all manner of creatures: birds, native bees, amphibians, reptiles, and butterflies. Various animals are only spring and summer residents; many birds, of course, are migratory in nature. The quality of these natural habitats is stressed by fragmentation: roads, houses and lawns; predation by out-of-control deer populations; and overwhelming numbers of invasive plants.

The complex web of interdependency on which the ecology functions will begin to break down. The plant stewardship index can help us reverse this trend. Anyone interested in preserving and enhancing the quality of their wild areas, whether they be municipalities, institutions, or private landowners, can utilize the plant stewardship index. It gives public and private land stewards an index number for the plant communities under their care, reflecting the quality representation of these vital native remnants. The PSI survey uses a walkthrough of a site and a comprehensive, user-friendly sampling method to efficiently and accurately inventory a property's plant species. The Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (BHWP) website is where the calculated PSI number is stored (along with over 700 other plant lists). Repeat surveys over time can help management plans and reveal the quality of native plant communities.

As contiguous properties become part of the survey, this data can become a firm foundation for watershed-wide plant conservation. This data will be open access, science-based, and grounded in truth, leading to a truly knowledge-based green and sustainable future. Please join me in learning how to use this system by contacting

BHWP to sign up for their introductory and advanced classes as well as their “Knowing Native Plant” classes. Working together, all of us can learn to live in better harmony with the native flora and fauna with which we share this special watershed we call home.