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TOP STORY

DEP tours Kulpmont Veterans Memorial Park, announces environmental education grants

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Bert Myers, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) director of environmental education, right, speaks with Jim Koharski and Susan Zaner, long-time members of the Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA), during a tour Wednesday of Kulpmont Veterans Memorial Park. SCRA was awarded an environmental education grant of \$2,995 for a project titled "Veteran Memorial Field Green Building Techniques and Rain Garden Build."

KULPMONT — Representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Borough of Kulpmont and Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) were among those who attended a tour of the Kulpmont Veterans Memorial Park on Wednesday, during which DEP revealed that SCRA was awarded an environmental education grant.

Bert Myers, director of environmental education for DEP, announced during the tour that a total of \$632,897 in environmental grant funds have been awarded to 63 projects statewide, 50 of which engage youth and adults living or working within environmental justice areas. The grants, he said, have been awarded to schools, institutions, conservations districts, and community and environmental organizations.

Myers visited Kulpmont Veterans Memorial Park, the site of a former stripping pit, to view several onsite projects completed with past DEP grant support and learn about upcoming environmental projects planned within the park.

Myers said SCRA was recently awarded \$2,995 for a project titled “Veteran Memorial Field Green Building Techniques and Rain Garden Build.” It will include a hands-on environmental field day for high school students to learn about green-building techniques for a planned restroom and pavilion facility. These features, he said, include the use of recycled materials, rain water collection, solar power and energy-efficient insulation. The students will complete their field day by planting a rain garden using native plant species.

Steve Motyka, SCRA vice president and member of Kulpmont Borough Council, believes the park was underutilized prior to 2016, noting that the walking track was in disrepair and the stream channel had no vegetation.

“A 2016 DEP Environmental Education mini grant sparked a resurgence for this recreational complex, and we have built on that momentum year by year with the help of subsequent grants,” Motyka commented.

More than 500 students from Mount Carmel Area and Our Lady of Lourdes Regional have participated in environmental educational programs at the park to date, learning about historical mining practices that heavily impacted the community’s natural resources and participating in environmental restoration practices, such as riparian buffer and tree plantings, to improve the site.

These programs were made possible through a total of six prior DEP Environmental Education awards and a host of community partners. The environmentally-friendly restroom and pavilion facility was funded in part by a grant from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

“Hundreds of trees have been planted by students at this park, instilling in them a new environmental awareness, and because of those efforts and their impact on the landscape, hundreds of people now use this facility daily,” Motyka added.

Myers congratulated SCRA and its project partners, including the Northumberland County Conservation District, Penn State Master Gardeners and numerous community organizations and businesses, on their latest grant award and their track record of successful projects at the site.

“The partnerships and collaborations are the kind of things that DEP’s Environmental Education Grant Program is really pleased to fund,” Myers said. “These funds provide students and adults with educational programs that emphasize the value of a healthy environment in their backyard.”

Also attending the event were Rep. Kurt Masser, Kulpmont Councilmen Joe Dowkus, Marlin Hodge and Bernard Novakoski, DEP Local Government Liaison Lisa Meade, Northumberland County Conservation District Watershed Specialist Ben Paul and SCRA President Jim Koharski, Treasurer John Bucanelli and long-time members Susan Zaner, Leanne Bjorklund and Nick Bjorklund.

The Environmental Education Grants Program was established by the Environmental Education Act of 1993, which mandates setting aside 5% of the pollution fines and penalties DEP collects annually for environmental education in Pennsylvania. Since its inception, DEP has awarded \$12.3 million in environmental education grant funding to support 2,135 projects.

The 2022 program selected applications for the development of innovative formal and non-formal education projects that address grant program priorities of water, climate change or environmental justice; provide opportunities to expand the public’s understanding of Pennsylvania’s environmental issues; and develop skills required to make informed decisions.

Thirty-four local projects received mini grants of up to \$3,000; 28 projects with a broad or statewide reach received general grants of up to \$20,000; and one project, designed to engage students and teachers at the local, state and national levels, received a grant of \$65,710.

Local agencies to receive grants this funding cycle are:

- Columbia County Conservation District, \$2,833, to host multiple events for farmers, landowners, K-12 students and the public utilizing rainfall simulator kits and a slake demonstration kit to promote water quality protection through proper soil management.

- Snyder County Conservation District, \$2,580, to provide a hands-on camp experience for students in first through fourth grades involving rotating environmental stations.
- Pennsylvania Envirothon, \$65,710, to implement a statewide project that encourages high school students' exploration of environmental issues and provides them with tools for creating healthy communities through stewardship actions.

“These grants help provide the foundation for environmental education for people of all ages,” DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell stated in a news release. “This year’s Earth Day theme is ‘Invest In Our Planet’ and each of these projects represents an investment into furthering the environmental education of Pennsylvanians.”