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TOP STORY

## Conservation district, SCRA receive environmental education grants

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HARRISBURG — The Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) and Northumberland County Conservation District are the beneficiaries of environmental education grants awarded by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

The Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) was awarded \$3,000 for a field day trip for middle and high school students focused on coal mining history and water quality during which students will plant trees, erect bird houses and install signage at the Kulpmont Memorial Sports Complex.

The conservation district was awarded \$3,000 to engage the community in planting native trees and shrubs to help mitigate the impacts of acid mine drainage, and provide awareness through educational signage at Claude Kehler Community Park in Shamokin.

Judy Becker, district manager of the conservation district, explained that residents of the City of Shamokin along with members of the Shamokin Community Gardens have expressed interest in planting a riparian buffer and installing educational signs highlighting the impacts of acid mine drainage, the importance of riparian buffers and the significance of pollinators at Claude Kehler Community Park.

“An event will be advertised for the community to sign up to participate in the planting of a riparian buffer with trees. The Northumberland County Conservation District will order the tree from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation’s 10 Million Trees program,” Becker said. “There will be stations set up with educational exhibits and information as part of the event. The planting event will be held where Carbon Run and Shamokin Creek meet, focusing on the impairments of acid mine drainage, bare stream banks and very little canopy cover.”

Becker said a root structure will reduce erosion and slow down and filter urban runoff. The buffer, she continued, will also provide the shade and desired plant matter for the streams.

“Our hope is to get more people in the community involved with improvements to the Shamokin Creek Watershed,” she said.

Kulpmont Councilman and SCRA director Steve Motyka said previous field trips have involved students of Our Lady of Lourdes Regional and Mount Carmel Area comparing pristine and degraded watersheds by visiting the Roaring Creek Tract of the Weiser State Forest and Kulpmont Memorial Sports Complex.

Students have learned of past mining history and current water improvement efforts, and rolled up their sleeves by planting dozens of saplings at the sports complex.

“When you look at grants of \$3,000, they look small, but if you look at it as six successful years and \$18,000 it looks a little more substantial,” Motyka said. “The real impact is the hundreds of students that have participated. With more SCRA members and community support, we will make Shamokin Creek flow clear and support aquatic life again.”

The SCRA and conservation district grants are part of a larger \$459,823 awarded to 51 projects addressing environmental justice, climate change and water quality. According to the commonwealth, 88% percent of grant funds will support projects that engage youth and adults living and/or working within environmental justice areas.

“These grants support projects that increase the environmental knowledge of community members statewide,” said Gov. Tom Wolf said in a news release.

Grants were awarded to schools, institutions, conservation districts and environmental and community organizations. Thirty-four projects received mini grants of up to \$3,000, 16 projects with a broad or statewide reach received general grants of up to \$20,000 and one project received a grant of \$80,219.