



Column: Well Managed Stream Restoration Vital to Reston

Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Ten years ago when I was on the Reston Association Board, we began to recognize the deteriorating state of our streams. Streams' ecosystems were dying and erosion was eating away at trees, pathways and sewers and creating a costly downstream problem of silting in our lakes. Residents demanded action. But, while we had anecdotal evidence, we had neither the necessary analysis nor financial resources to address the problems systematically.

Now we have both. Over several years, the necessary studies were done and a marvelous cornucopia of funding appeared to not only fund restoration but also related infrastructure and more.

The money is paid by developers for wreaking havoc on wetlands elsewhere. Rather than mitigating at the site, they buy credits from a bank for wetlands restoration elsewhere—like Reston. Reston's watersheds, the Snakeden and Glade, badly need restoration after decades of devastation from water pouring off impermeable surfaces created by careless development, poor regulation by the county and by careless residents.

The stream restoration project is the largest our Reston Association has ever undertaken, and it has gone smoothly until recently. Wetland Studies and Solutions, Inc (the main contractor) and RA obtained the necessary permits from state and federal environmental agencies as well as our Design Review Board. And RA publicized the project via the local press and TV, mailings to every household in our non-Town, dozens of community meetings, and more. Yet, recently, after two thirds of the work in the Snakeden was completed, howls of protest have arisen from some neighbors near the project work.

Most of the outcry seems to have little merit, and some has been uniformed, even disgraceful. At a meeting hosted by RA last Tuesday, a few people actually said they had not been informed of the project before it began. Their defenses are apparently as impervious to information as the parking lots are to water. Some suggested that nature should just be allowed to take its course in the watershed. While a couple thought RA Board members "have a conflict of interest", suggesting that these caring folks who work for us all as UNPAID volunteers are somehow profiteering from the work. Fortunately, the folks making these remarks are not representative of the community—nor are they to be found volunteering their own services to the community.

While stream restoration's benefits are seen in the medium and long term, the process is not pretty while being carried out. Still, some valid criticisms requiring attention have arisen from more thoughtful residents. They involve the criteria for and process of tree removal, inventorying and preserving animal habitat, and RA project management. With improvements in implementation, I am confident that in a few years we will be rewarded with the return of more robust stream ecosystems and we will agree restoration was a most positive investment.

By John Lovaas

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