



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 26, 2009

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THREE YEAR ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH PROGRAM RECOGNIZES SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES AT YEAR-END CELEBRATION

West Virginia – As the third and final year of Project FLOW (Future Leaders of Watersheds) comes to a close, current and former grantees of the program will gather at the Bridgeport Conference Center on Thursday to reflect on their years of service-learning and the impact it's had on West Virginia communities.

Since the program's inception in 2006, more than 200 service projects have been completed by 21 grantees throughout the state, resulting in more than 180,000 student service-learning hours. These projects have helped improve watersheds by planting riparian buffers, establishing a green roof and rain gardens, introducing Zero Waste Lunch Days at schools, and facilitating recycling of hundreds of pounds of trash, just to name a few. Over the three year period, more than 1,330 disadvantaged youth provided at least 30 hours of service and more than 8,000 youth participated in the program.

The impact of Project FLOW in West Virginia communities is reflected not only in the multiple success stories submitted by grantees, but also in the results from surveys given to participating community organizations that benefited from youth involvement. The majority of community partners agreed that youth involvement made a positive difference in local watershed health (90 percent), youth are integrated into a system for future involvement in monitoring, assessing, and improving stream health (66 percent), organizations have increased their capacity to develop partnerships with youth (51 percent), and the improved ability to maintain or expand operations because of youth involvement in their organization (57 percent).

In 2009, Project FLOW coordinated its first *Day of Service*. The service day was held in conjunction with National Volunteer Week and Global Youth Service Days. Using VolunteerWVBlog.org as a communications medium, a T-shirt design contest for the event was promoted by placing designs on the blog and encouraging youth to vote on their favorite. The winning design was printed on the FLOW Day of Service T-shirt and given to all FLOW youth to wear on their service day event.

The following organizations have been Project FLOW grantees in at least one of the three years of the program. A brief description of their many successes follows.

- **Oglebay Institute, Wheeling, WV:** The Oglebay Institute originally set out to form watershed groups throughout the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia. That goal has been accomplished through the support of the WV Department of Environmental Protection, USDA Resource Conservation and Development, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service. The coalition is meeting with various municipalities in the region to help solve flooding challenges and look toward rehabilitation programs for watersheds. All of these efforts are a direct result of the partnership formed during the Project FLOW service-learning program, the Institute says. Another significant success from Oglebay Institute was the issue of recycling in regional schools. Although the school system had included recycling in strategic plans for more than 10 years, they had been unable to implement a functional program. Through the Oglebay Institute's hands-on service-learning programs with watersheds and litter clean-up projects, students began asking why people litter and where recycling programs were located in their counties. The result was a six-week recycling program that engaged multiple counties and thousands of children. When the six-week program commenced, students – mostly elementary level – were vocal about refusing to allow the county to stop recycling. Students produced videos and wrote letters to their school board and superintendent to advocate for the program and stopping the practice of using disposable Styrofoam trays during lunch. In the 2009-2010 academic year, schools will not be using disposable Styrofoam trays as a result of those efforts.
- **Potomac Valley Audubon Society, Shepherdstown, WV:** Students participating in this project grew native grass in the classroom and transplanted the grass, along with other native flowers, to an erosion control area at their school. Students from several of the programs focused on reducing and recycling waste in their schools. In three of the schools, students planned, advertised, and participated in a Zero Waste Lunch Day to encourage all classrooms to reduce the amount of lunch trash created. Also, by providing recycling bins to classrooms and insisting that students be responsible for collecting recyclables at home, many families became more involved with the watershed recycling program.
- **Indian Creek Watershed Association, Union, WV:** This organization coordinated a summer day camp program for middle school students that focused on improving youth voice in the classroom. The camp started with a field trip to the county courthouse, the local USDA office and the local newspaper to meet those who were directly involved in the protection of local water. After speaking with the officials, students discussed what they had learned and voted for one issue to focus on during the camp. The students agreed to focus on ways to prevent farming pollution from contaminating local creeks. Given Monroe County's rich farming heritage and the fact that several students want to continue the farming traditions of their families, this focus area indicates a positive impact on the protection of local watersheds and the future of local farms.
- **Piney Creek Watershed Association, Beckley, WV:** This program's success has been based largely on the many local youth-serving organizations with which it partnered. Each year the Piney Creek Watershed Association works with a group called The Environthon Students in addition to the Environmental Team from Shady Spring Middle School, various biology classes at Shady Spring High School, and with the boy and girl scouts. This year, a local girl scout group joined the program and focused on changing perspectives from disposable to reusable goods. The girl scouts planned and conducted a poster contest to bring attention to the need to end the use of disposable plastic and paper bags, focusing on the use of cloth bags. The posters were displayed in school and at the Piney Creek Festival. The scouts developed their own promotional

rap and organized and conducted a style show at the festival using various types of reusable bags.

- **Girl Scout of Shawnee Council, Martinsburg, WV:** More than 330 youth participated in the Science Discovery Service-Learning WET Clubs, a program developed through Project FLOW funding. The students brainstormed service projects after analyzing the communities' needs. They also utilized other resources and collaborated with other organizations whenever possible. For example, Musselman High School partnered with Cacapon Institute and local girl scouts to investigate the need for trees in a swamp area on the school's campus. The goal was to develop a landscape that would improve wildlife habitats in that area. As a result, Musselman High School's Science Discovery WET Club purchased and planted 20 trees as an Earth Day service project this past spring.

Step by Step, Charleston, WV: As a result of Project FLOW funding, an Earth Day Block Party was organized for the community of Big Ugly. Students from Logan, Lincoln and Kanawha counties were joined by AmeriCorps VISTAs and Earlham College volunteers for discussions, presentations and community service. More than 80 volunteers and students participated. Project FLOW sites gave short presentations to the Earth Day Block Party attendees. The presentations covered information about septic tanks and wells, among other water quality issues. Community members and youth then worked on service activities that included stream clean-ups and tree planting on stream banks. Youth and volunteers picked up 236 pounds of garbage and 75 pounds of recyclables. More than 150 riparian (stream bank) trees were also planted. Volunteers also interviewed community residents and recorded their thoughts about local water issues. Project FLOW teens will use this information to create videos that highlight community concerns over water quality.

- **Fayette County Education Fund, Inc., Fayetteville, WV:** Using Project FLOW funds, the Fayette County Education Fund helped add an environmental education module to the curriculum of the area's Leadership Fayette County program. As plans for a local Birding and Nature Center continue to develop, service-learning opportunities have increased involvement of youth as advisory committee members. These youth assist in developing youth-focused programming that will be offered at the Center. Youth also have begun to work on a trail that is being constructed at the Center that will offer opportunities for environmental education to the community.
- **WVU Research Corp., Morgantown, WV:** West Virginia University partnered with the Morgantown Learning Academy and West Run Watershed Association to design a service-learning based watershed curriculum. Teacher and student workshops about mine drainage, watersheds and service-learning engaging youth were conducted. One of the activity included the "Creek in a Bottle" project, which allowed students to do hands-on experiments and compare their collected data to existing creek data. This activity helped illustrate creek chemistry to teachers and is being adapted for use in a WVU geology class.
- **Friends of Deckers Creek, Morgantown, WV:** Friends of Deckers Creek's Youth Advisory Board greatly benefited from a Project FLOW-funded summer camp at the Mountain Institute. The training brought the group together, taught them how to work more effectively with each other, and gave them a larger sense of ownership for Advisory Board, cleaning up the local watershed, and protecting natural resources in general. Before the camp, the Advisory Board was a mixture

of home-schooled students and Monongalia and Preston county high school and middle school students. After the trip, all youth seems to be a cohesive unit of friendship and determination. Additionally, Friends of Deckers Creek volunteers worked with Mountaineer Challenge Academy cadets this year. The spring class showed a unique interest in volunteering with their local watersheds. Each cadet signed up for more information on joining the organization's Youth Advisory Board and volunteering with the organization. One cadet told staff that he had never really considered his personal environmental impact and vowed to be more aware of his day to day habits. Project FLOW funds also enabled the organization to develop an educational greenspace area along the Deckers Creek Rail Trail in Sabraton, West Virginia. This project brought together a wide range of community volunteers, both young and old. A variety of youth groups, boy scouts, college volunteers and youth volunteers participated in the project. Local businesses and adult volunteers contributed over \$40,000 in in-kind services and donations for the project. Finally, the organization teamed with Morgantown's Board of Parks and Recreation *Arts in the Park* summer camp. Campers from the ages of 6-12 learn about Deckers Creek and how they, as youth, can make a change in their community through educational public art projects, conservation, and volunteering. The dedication of the greenspace is on November 8th in the afternoon in Sabraton.

- **Girl Scouts of Black Diamond, Charleston, WV:** This organization's Water Drop Service-Learning Project has generated great enthusiasm from participants. An Elkview troop of 18 girls continued on with the project far beyond the required 30 service-learning hours. The troop's leader vowed to work on the "Linking Girls to the Land" patch. The Elkview troop conducted stream monitoring activities, educated themselves about man-made lakes and dams and learned about how they could partner with the Little Sandy Watershed Association. Other groups did similar service activities and held special watershed service-learning activities for Black Diamond's annual Girl Scout Jamboree. A council-wide service-learning project is planned for the 2009-2010 membership year.
- **High Rocks Education Corp, Hillsboro, WV:** The High Rocks organization took a group of girls from rural Greenbrier, Pocahontas, and Nicholas counties on an Eco-Action trip through the northern panhandle of the state and into Pittsburgh this year. The purpose of the trip was to showcase the natural resources in the area and how they contribute to the industrialized areas of the state and region. The girls found opportunities to do "eco-action" and help out in the areas where they traveled. They were able to sit in on a discussion from the Upper Monongalia Watershed Association in Morgantown and learn about non-point source pollution and gas well drilling. The girls also worked with children at an afterschool center at Laughlin Chapel to plant seeds for a community garden project. This trip not only gave the girls a broader understanding of regional watershed concerns, but also gave them the confidence to be of service among unfamiliar people and places.

To learn more about Project FLOW accomplishments, contact Sherry Swint at 304-558-0111 or email [.L.Swint@wv.gov](mailto:L.Swint@wv.gov). Information can be found on [.volunteerwv.org](http://volunteerwv.org).

Project FLOW is a program of Volunteer West Virginia, the state's Commission for National and Community Service. Volunteer West Virginia challenges West Virginians to strengthen their communities through service and volunteerism. The agency identifies and mobilizes resources, promotes an ethic of

service, and empowers communities to solve problems and improve the quality of life for individuals and families.

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