

# Grant sought for work at wetland-education area

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The Lebanon County commissioners yesterday approved the county Conservation District's request for permission to apply for a wetlands project grant.

Naturalist Leigh Beamesderfer and Mark Chegwiddden, the district's agricultural-resource coordinator, told the commissioners they will apply to the state Department of Environmental Protection for a Chesapeake Bay Program grant of \$13,500 to make improvements to the Quittapahilla Educational Wetland Preserve off East Walnut Street in South Lebanon Township.

About \$11,500 will be spent to construct a riparian buffer zone along the banks of the Quittapahilla Creek, which runs the length of the swampy 7-acre area adjacent to the Lebanon County Career and Technology Center.

Another \$2,000 will be used to reduce erosion and sediment caused by floodwater that is carried in a drainage pipe running underneath Birch Street and which drains into an impoundment pond in the wetlands. The force of the water has created a foot-wide, 6-inch deep gully, Chegwiddden said.

Making the improvements should improve the health of the wetlands and increase its biodiversity, Beamesderfer explained.

"We've been doing quite a few aquatic studies and things out there, and there's very little life in the creek, even though it is at the headwaters," she said.

"We don't know if it is a major nutrient problem or if it is just the habitat is not there."

The riparian buffer would be 35 feet wide on both sides of the creek and include a variety of shrubs and trees, both deciduous and evergreen, Beamesderfer said. Trees with a diameter of about 1 inch, instead of seedlings, will be planted to give them a better chance of survival.

"So hopefully it will increase wildlife diversity," she said. "We are hoping it will also increase water quality because it will reduce the temperature of the stream because it will be shading the creek."

Reducing sediment from the drainage pipe should also help more species to thrive, Beamesderfer said. That will be done by constructing a rock spillway and building a 380-foot-long shallow swale to slow the water as it flows towards the impoundment basin.

The educational park was constructed in 2004 and is used each year by county school districts, many of which have a representative on the wetlands oversight committee.

Before it can apply for the funds, the Lebanon County Career and Technology Center must also approve the project, said Beamesderfer, who was scheduled to meet with its board today.

The Conservation District has taken good advantage of Chesapeake Bay Program funding in the past, Chegwiddden told the commissioners.

The county should learn if it receives the grant in May, and work would begin in the fall, when newly planted trees have a better survival rate, he said.

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