Martinsville Bulletin, Inc.
P. O. Box 3711
204 Broad Street
Martinsville, Virginia 24115
276-638-8801
Toll Free: 800-234-6575

Students plant streamside trees

Back

Thursday, March 21, 2013

Students from Magna Vista High School and a Future Farmers of America group plant Black Willow trees Monday along Bowen's Creek at Philpott Lake. (Contributed photo)

Magna Vista High School's AP Biology students and Future Farmers of America (FFA) group spent a damp Monday morning planting 55 Black Willow trees along the stream bank near Bowen's Creek at Philpott Lake.

They were participating in the "Streamside Trees in the Classroom" (STIC) program sponsored by the Dan River Basin Association (DRBA) in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Philpott Lake.

According to a news release from the DRBA, the willows were grown by students in various classrooms. They brought their rooted willow shoots out to be planted along a waterway that needed streamside trees to prevent erosion and help with pollution mitigation.

While growing plants in a classroom may not be unusual for some schools, these students "took their participation to another level," the release added.

Magna Vista science teacher Joel Bunn encouraged creative thinking and experimentation for his students. He had then run various experiments on the willows to see which growing media types they best responded to. While this meant the loss of some of the trees, it was a learning experience for the students and proved that willow shoots could be successfully rooted in the classroom and then transferred to use in stream bank repair and enhancement.

The students found that the willows grew well in plain water as opposed to certain soils. This proved to be useful as the willows were planted alongside a creek in wet areas that hold lots of water.

The Streamside Trees in the Classroom (STIC) program is a unique environmental education program in which students learn about the importance of streamside vegetation, referred to as a riparian buffer, primarily for the positive impact it has on water quality.

Good riparian buffers keep rivers and streams healthy by reducing runoff and bank erosion while capturing pollutants that wash in the river and providing habitat for wildlife.

Blue Ridge Soil and Water Conservation officials also came out for Monday's planting to set up a display and talk to the students about erosion. The display included a demonstration model of an area with no crop covering and exposed soil and another area that included a covering of various grasses and wheat.

As the rainwater ran through the areas, the demonstration showed that the area with no plant cover allowed large amounts of sediment to be passed through and the area with good, thick plant cover did not allow the water to come through too quickly, thereby reducing sedimentation that would get to the stream.

"Even though the day was overcast, rainy and chilly, the students didn't mind being outside and getting that outdoor classroom learning experience. There are some things you just can't show them in a classroom," said Krista Hodges, education outreach coordinator of the Dan River Basin Association.

"Several of the students had never planted a tree before, and hopefully, being a part of that experience and learning about the importance of streamside vegetation will encourage them to become better stewards of the environment," said Dan LaPrad, park ranger at Philpott Lake.

The program will be offered again next year to the Henry County Public Schools, the release said.

To learn more about the program or how to become involved, contact Hodges at khodges@danriver.org.