

# The Potomac Highland Steward

JANUARY 2005

## LAND PLANNING

### THE EDGE EFFECT

With more and more people looking for a pre-retirement home or just a nearby quiet place to enjoy the week-ends, a lot of stress is being placed on the native forests in the Appalachians. The "Edge Effect" is cited as a major cause of this degradation, as woodland on the boundaries of building sites, roads, and even fields suffers from invasive weed infestation, wind and water erosion, and a hotter microclimate due to deeper penetration of wind and sunlight. The smaller the parcel, the greater the effect due to the increased proportion of surface area, but even larger parcels are affected.

How can landowners protect against these effects? The first step comes with proper development planning. If separate properties share a continuous swath of forest, the negative effects on wildlife activity and soil microorganisms can be mitigated. If a site is developed properly, houses may be fairly close together. In this case they may enjoy a smaller line-of-sight buffer, but a large, relatively communal area of undisturbed forest. This may not sound optimal to some, but there are advantages such as easier access and less road building and maintenance - a non-trivial hassle.

OK, what happens if your land purchase has already been divided and homebuilding has begun in your subdivision? First, don't automatically agree to having your property lumbered. While in some cases this may be a good initial management technique, the equipment can be quite damaging and unscrupulous persons can leave you with nothing but a poor stand of trees for an unfairly low price. Always get a second estimate from a reputable source. An extension agent or professional forester can help. Secondly, don't make the mistake of clearing too large an area for your homestead. Maintaining an over-sized lawn is not what you are there for, and it is harmful to a forest. You will want an area large enough to provide a proper firebreak around your house, however. Thirdly, plant only native species on the edge of your open space. If you have invasive species present, such as ailanthus, multiflora rose, or japanese honeysuckle, you may be able to use animals instead of machines to eradicate them. Sheep and goats are good choices for this, and they can provide some soil nutrients and charm as well. Last, relax and don't do too much leaf-raking. Forest "litter" as it is called filters rainwater, protects the soil from erosion, and provides substrates for beneficial microbes and plant growth.

If you follow these recommendations and learn more about forest stewardship, you can turn the Edge Effect to your advantage by mitigating harmful effects and creating a natural, interesting, and biodiverse area of native plant and animal species.

## CELL TOWERS

### MANAGING PROGRESS

Progress comes to Hardy County, but with a catch. Cingular Wireless is proposing to introduce cellular phone service to the county sometime in 2005. For economic reasons this service will initially focus on Corridor H and will not provide county-wide service. In other words this new service will primarily benefit travelers through, rather than residents of, Hardy County. While county residents do not begrudge their visitors good fortune, they hope that in time service will be extended to the county as a whole. Residents are somewhat skeptical, though, since the 911 cell towers that were established in 2003 were intended to also be used by cell phone providers but as of yet this hasn't happened.

Concerns have been raised about the location of the Cingular towers. Right now, there are three planned; one is an existing tower owned by Washington Gas on South Branch Mountain. Two proposed new towers are in Baughman Settlement on Homman Mountain, and alongside the Cacapon River just west of Wardensville. While the South Branch and Baughman Settlement towers have raised few objections, the Wardensville site seems quite egregious. At 300 feet and with a flashing strobe light, this tower will be in the viewscape of many Wardensville residents [Note: towers under 200 feet do not need lights]. Some of the most immediately affected landowners have raised their concerns with the Hardy County Commission and have proposed alternative sites. In particular, placing the cell on the existing Wardensville water tower would make it less visibly intrusive, would cost Cingular less, would provide the town some income, and might provide wider cell coverage.

“Landowners have proposed an alternative site that would be less visibly intrusive, would cost less, and might provide wider coverage”

Stewards had provided advice and moral support to these landowners and will monitor future tower proposals with an eye to limiting their negative aesthetic impact.

## CORRIDOR H UPDATE

Travelers on WV 55 can see that work continues on Corridor H. The Department of Highways continues to estimate the completion of the Baker-Wardensville section by early fall of 2005. With the Moorefield-Baker section open to traffic and Wardensville-VA State Line on hold, the next section to be addressed is Forman-Moorfield. Stewards is challenging inadequacies of the drainage proposals west of US 220 before the WV Environmental Quality Board.

## CORRIDOR H EROSION

As each section of Corridor H nears construction through our region, the highway engineers prepare a plan to handle rain water flows off the mountains and the new road. The WV Department of Environmental Protection reviews and approves the plans as required by a general permit for all builders ([listenv.homestead.com/files/builders.htm](http://listenv.homestead.com/files/builders.htm)).

Comments on 159 acres of Corridor H north and northwest of Moorefield were written by the Stewards President and Treasurer, along with staff of the WV Rivers Coalition and the Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment. DEP agreed with us that some information was omitted and some maps were unclear for these 159 acres, and they agreed to improve this information in the future.

One issue unresolved was where the rain water flows to. This is a common problem with storm water plans, which collect water in a pond or ditch, and direct it onto a neighbor's land, instead of into a stream to carry it away. On the neighbor's land the water can cause erosion, flooding, or other problems, while it travels to the next stream. Stewards appealed the plans for this stretch of Corridor H in September, asking that the WV Environmental Quality Board order the highway engineers to route the rain water to streams, and include methods to slow the flow and control erosion. The Environmental Quality Board has already ruled in 2000 that discharges from a mobile home park must go to a stream, and we are confident they will agree again.

The Environmental Quality Board has had its budget cut by the Legislature, and senior staff have quit, so there is no hearing date for our appeal yet. Please tell your legislators that money for the Environmental Quality Board helps avoid much more in court costs, as well as protecting our environment.

Long time readers of *The Steward* will remember that we won a settlement in an earlier case which required the highway department to install larger ponds to catch rainwater. We also won a requirement that construction sites larger than an acre must post signs saying what is going on, and where people can see the anti-erosion plans. If you see a construction site without such a sign, or if you see mud-colored water flowing out of a construction site after a rain, report it, using the helpful information at the website above.

## SEPTIC AND SEWER SYSTEMS

This issue of *The Potomac Highland Steward* includes a reproducible flyer on living happily and frugally with a septic system. Many people in our region have septic systems, and there is a wide range of knowledge. We thought a flyer would be helpful. The many footnotes identified on the flyer are available on our website. Feel free to copy the flyer and pass it on wherever septic users may find it.

If the pipe out of your house goes to a centralized sewer instead of a septic system, the flyer is still useful to tell you what not to flush. Both centralized sewer and septic systems depend on bacteria to digest the sewage, so anything which kills bacteria or which they cannot eat hurts the system and risks water pollution at the other end. Sewer

systems are much more sensitive to failure than septics, since sewer effluent goes directly into streams, in very large volumes, while septic effluent goes into soil, where it is filtered and diluted before reaching streams.

Installation is not directly covered by the flyer. Septic systems need some distance from wells and property lines. They also need to be a few feet away from rock ridges, because effluent can seep along rocks underground and avoid being filtered and processed by the soil.

Centralized sewer pipes also break and leak, releasing raw sewage underground. Sewers are rarely monitored, and even well-designed new sewers can leak 1,600 gallons per day per mile into the ground (for typical 8" diameter pipes, according to state rules 47-31, App.B-A-2.2).

As reported in *The Potomac Highland Steward* last January, the whole Chesapeake Bay watershed, including the Potomac Highlands, must release less Nitrogen, to avoid algae blooms which use up oxygen in the water and suffocate other life. Septic systems release less Nitrogen per person than sewer systems, so septic systems are helpful. In the long term the sludge pumped out of both systems holds much of the Nitrogen. Spreading it in lieu of other fertilizer has health risks, while putting it in landfills is only a temporary solution until the landfill leaks and releases Nitrogen into the watershed again.

**Rain water is a serious concern when it carries mud to suffocate life in streams. Even the largest, very rare, storms have a limited size and can be managed. Here are the USDA estimates for our Potomac Highland counties:**

	INCHES OF RAIN IN THE HEAVIEST DAY OF RAIN EVERY...		
	100 YEARS	10 YEARS	1 YEAR
JEFFERSON	7.00	4.95	2.50
BERKELEY	6.75	4.80	2.46
HARDY	6.70	4.75	2.48
MORGAN	6.60	4.70	2.43
PENDLETON	6.55	4.70	2.46
HAMPSHIRE	6.55	4.70	2.45
GRANT	6.30	4.60	2.42
MINERAL	6.25	4.55	2.41
% OF 100-YR STORM:		72%	37%

## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK

OR TELL US IF YOUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED

We depend solely on your contributions. We are an advocacy group and we lobby to protect our Potomac Highlands, so we are not tax-deductible.

Please clip out this form (if your mailing label is correct on the back you do not have to fill out your name and address below), and make your check payable to **Stewards of the Potomac Highlands**. You may use the enclosed envelope or mail it to PO Box 455, Wardensville, WV 26851.

\_\_\_\$25 \_\_\_\$50 \_\_\_\$200 \_\_\_\$500 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email address:

Websites you'd like us to link to:

Talents & connections:

Areas of greatest concern:

## WHAT WE ARE

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) citizens group aiming to preserve open spaces, forests, farmland, rural communities and towns and foster stewardship of the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland. We promote ways to make a living in our area without destroying our air, soil, water, wildlife and scenery. We encourage community and transportation planning for sustainable economic development which will protect the environment, discourage sprawl, and support family and community cohesion, local business, local history and culture.

Stewards of the Potomac Highlands is networking among citizens in the eight northeastern counties of West Virginia. We will support and publicize existing group efforts. On certain issues, such as Corridor H, we will take the lead. We want to encourage all who labor so faithfully on behalf of their little corner of Planet Earth.

## OUR DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS

### **President**

Paul Burke, Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, 304-876-2227

### **Vice President**

Kirsten Weiblen, Yellow Spring, Hampshire County, 304-856-1211

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### **Treasurer**

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### **Board Member**

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**Advisor:** Bonni McKeown, 304-874-3887

We're always looking for board members and volunteers. Please email us at [info@potomacstewards.org](mailto:info@potomacstewards.org) or send a note to PO Box 455, Wardensville, WV 26851.



Stewards of the Potomac Highlands  
PO Box 455  
Wardensville WV 26851

[www.PotomacStewards.org](http://www.PotomacStewards.org)

## BARRELHOUSE BONNI

STEWARDS FOUNDER BONNI McKEOWN CHECKS IN FROM CHICAGO WHERE SHE'S BEEN PLAYING & TEACHING THE BLUES

Let's face it, as we struggle with personal losses, family dilemmas, and political situations, we need to be able to sing the blues to get stuff off our chests so we can survive. Blues songs can sometimes be sad and blue, but they can also be funny, lively, and danceable. That's how the African Americans survived: faith that God would eventually put things right, and, in the meantime, singing the blues. They boogied to survive. Just ask the folks in West Virginia who persist in gathering on front porches with their guitars, fiddles, and banjos. Just ask the Chicago West Side preteens in my Austin Town Hall after-school program, all clamoring to learn boogie-woogie bass lines.

It might seem like a lonely battle to those who are trying to preserve the clean air, water, history, scenery and community of the Potomac Highlands and Eastern Panhandle. But a lot of people around the world are very concerned about where our planet is headed. So we must stay together, pray together, and keep working for a better world. Take a moment to contribute a few dollars to help Stewards keep you informed. And be sure to thank the activists of Stewards and other citizens groups who, in the face of difficulty and repression, NEVER GIVE UP!

Peace be with you and yours.

Bonni



PRAY FOR PEACE  
WORK FOR JUSTICE  
BOOGIE TO SURVIVE