

## AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

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# Environmental efforts earn Master Watershed Steward program high honors

*Projects recognized with 2022 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence*



Launched in 2018, the Street 2 Creek project has generated 15 pieces of artwork to help educate the York community about the connection between the drains that capture stormwater runoff and local creeks. **Credit: Courtesy of Jodi Sulpizio, Penn**

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**MAY 17, 2022** By Alexandra McLaughlin

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — The [Penn State Extension](#) Master Watershed Steward program played a significant role in two of the 15 projects recently honored with a 2022 Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence.

The York County Master Watershed Steward program secured an award for Street 2 Creek, an annual contest in which artists paint environmentally themed murals around storm drains. The artwork is aimed at raising awareness about the harmful impacts of stormwater runoff on waterways.

Launched in 2018, Street 2 Creek has generated 15 pieces of artwork to help educate the York community about the connection between storm drains and local creeks. The painted drains lead from the Codorus Creek, a waterway that runs through York, to Royal Square, a lively arts and shopping district.

“We want residents to have a connection to the waterway,” said Jodi Sulpizio, natural resources extension educator and Master Watershed Steward coordinator for York County. “With a connection, you’re more likely to appreciate and take care of the waterway.”

The mural-painting often attracted attention from passersby. A Master Watershed Steward volunteer stood near the artist to answer questions and distribute stormwater publications. During YorkFest — an annual art festival that attracts thousands of people — volunteers led tours of the decorated storm drains and provided stormwater education in Spanish and English.

“So often, you walk by a storm drain and don’t think about what it is,” Sulpizio said. “Our stormwater in York is discharged right into a waterway.”

Stormwater sweeps up pollutants such as nitrogen, phosphorous, litter, road salts, animal waste and fertilizer. These pollutants can degrade the water quality of Codorus Creek, the Susquehanna River and eventually the Chesapeake Bay.



The artwork created as part of the Street 2 Creek project is aimed at raising awareness about the harmful impacts of stormwater runoff on waterways and aquatic habitat. **Credit: Courtesy of Jodi Sulpizio, Penn State Extension. All Rights**

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What can the average citizen do? Sulpizio recommends picking up dog waste, limiting or eliminating the use of fertilizers and herbicides, checking the car for leaks, and keeping streets free of litter.

Coordination with the city of York was vital to the project's success, Sulpizio said. Road crews prepped the storm drains and managed traffic. Other partners included the Lower Susquehanna River Keeper Association, the Watershed Alliance of York and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The York Water Co. helped fund the project.

The other award-winning project grew from a collaboration between the Master Watershed Steward program and Nurture Nature Center. The [Watershed Friendly Property Certification](#) program is designed to educate property owners about how they can protect water resources and to expand the number of watershed-friendly properties throughout Pennsylvania.

Modeled after the Penn State Extension [Master Gardener](#) program's [pollinator-friendly garden certification](#), this project applies the idea to watersheds. "The goal is to unite landowners across Pennsylvania to improve and maintain the quality of our water resources," Sulpizio said.

[Master Watershed Stewards](#) statewide worked with Nurture Nature Center to develop criteria and a scoring system for the online application. To earn certification, property owners answer questions about stormwater runoff, pollution, water conservation and wildlife habitat. For example: What percentage of your yard is garden? How often do you use fertilizers? How much of your property is covered with an impervious surface, such as a patio or walkway? If applicants are unfamiliar with rain barrels or other concepts, the application provides links to educational resources.

Practices such as establishing rain gardens, cultivating native plants, reducing pollutants and conserving water contribute to the health of Pennsylvania's watersheds. Certification earns owners a "Watershed Friendly Property" yard sign.

"It's sort of bragging rights for all the hard work toward best management practices that people implement on their property," Sulpizio said. "The sign helps educate neighbors and raise awareness of how people are improving water resources."

So far, the program has certified 270 applicants and distributed 250 signs in 49 counties throughout the state. Initially limited to property owners with fewer than 15 acres, the program recently received a grant to branch out to larger properties, such as parks and campuses, Sulpizio noted.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection presents the annual Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence to schools, businesses and community organizations around the state for creative and innovative efforts toward environmental protection.

“It’s very exciting that we were recognized for both projects,” Sulpizio said. “Master Watershed Stewards are phenomenal volunteers. I always say they’re some of the best citizens because they have such passion to make a difference in the community.”

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