

Niagara River Riparian Restoration Program

Presentation to the Niagara River
Greenway Commission's
Ecological Standing Committee
June 23, 2011



Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper

Our mission is to protect and restore the quality and quantity of our water while connecting people to water



Goals of the Program

Three year grant to establish demonstration riparian forest buffers and educate waterfront landowners....

- Outreach targeting private landowners on several levels: education, stewardship training, participation
- Plant ecologically sound restoration projects
- Target certain subwatersheds for restoration
- Create partnerships with public agencies
- Engage volunteers
- Maintain the restoration projects through maintenance agreements

Review of Grant Deliverables

1. Up to 25 small-scale riparian restoration projects along the Niagara River and its tributaries with easements and/or long-term maintenance agreements for each site;
2. A landowner stewardship training program including power points and a user-friendly *Riparian Landowner Stewardship Guide*;
3. A comprehensive website targeting the urban and suburban landowners that compliments the training program;
4. 5 site assessment tours that educate landowners on potential enhancements to their property and to demonstrate to other landowners best practices;
5. Development of up to 5 grant proposals to leverage funding with other habitat restoration funding programs; and
6. Up to 250 volunteers engaged in restoration of the Niagara River's buffers.

Progress towards Grant Deliverables

1. Up to 25 small – scale riparian restoration projects

Status: Nine sites started and/or completed to date, 2000 plants on 1900 linear feet of shoreline.

2. A landowner stewardship training program including power points and a user-friendly *Riparian Landowner Stewardship Guide*;

Status: *Native Plants Guide for Buffalo Niagara* and training sessions on invasive species, forest buffers, and native plants are developed

3. A comprehensive website

Status: Riverkeeper has established the habitat restoration website for the NRRRP program and is constantly adding new subject matter

4. 5 site assessment tours

Status: Tours will begin in 2012 after restoration projects are established

5. Development of up to 5 grant proposals

Status: Grant proposals have been submitted to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Community Grant 2011 (declined), National Fish and Wildlife River Academy Grant 2010 (awarded), US EPA GLRI (awarded for Seneca Bluffs Site), Royal Bank of Canada (notification pending), NYS DEC Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program (notification pending), and US Forest Service GLRI Forestry Grant (grant writing in progress)

6. Up to 250 volunteers engaged in restoration

Status: 200 registered and 155 have participated

Highlights

- Development of formal application process for landowners to apply, Selection Criteria, and rating process. Targeted mailing and workshop held in 2010 to recruit projects for 2011. 34 landowners have been contacted to date.
- Two coordinators hired.... The new Watershed Restoration Project Manager, Larry Brooks, and AmeriCorps Forestry Volunteer Coordinator, Emily McAndrews, were hired early 2011;
- Partners—Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Erie and Niagara County have provided site plans (see examples in Attachments D & E of report);
- The pace of plantings has picked up: seven projects started and/or completed this planting season;
- We are receiving landowner applications by word of mouth and interest generated by existing plantings;
- Volunteers—both individually and in groups—have been approaching us without solicitation, looking to be involved in our project. RestoreCorps—our group of volunteers—now has over two hundred people registered and, as of today, 155 individual people have participated in our events.

Program Development

- Researched various other buffer programs to gather input on development of program;
- Researched various literature on buffer installation to disseminate to the public;
- Site visits to all watersheds and sub-watersheds (Upper and Lower Niagara River, Buffalo River, Two-Mile Creek, Scajaquada Creek, Tonawanda Creek, Cayuga Creek, Gill Creek) throughout the Greenway;
- Solicited and received input from eight staff and several friends of Riverkeeper as to what native and naturalized plants should be included in our plant guide. The guide is ready to be printed and should be available for distribution by June 30th. We've also begun a native plant database;
- Researched and established relationships with several New York State and Pennsylvania nurseries as sources of native plants. We are also researching ways our volunteers can propagate native plants in the area;
- Research and writing of a Landowner guide will commence in July.

Outreach and Recruitment

- Person-to-person visits—34 to date—with landowners in response to restoration consultation on their property continue;
- AmeriCorps Coordinator has been actively recruiting volunteers for planting project. Most recently we received a two-day-a-week, eight week commitment from the church group Youth Works to help us at our sites;
- AmeriCorps volunteer coordinator regularly sends newsletters to the list of registered and participating volunteers;
- The AmeriCorps coordinator designed a badge we give to those who participate in our program. We hand out these badges to our volunteers as they complete our plantings;
- AmeriCorps Coordinator created online albums of photographs of planting events. They can be found at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bnriverkeeper/with/5808589964/>
- Staff continues to refine and update the Program and RestoreCorp website pages: <http://bnriverkeeper.org/programs/habitat/habitat-restoration-projects/> and <http://bnriverkeeper.org/get-involved/volunteer/restorecorps/>

Restoration

Nine sites have been started and/or completed:

1. Seneca Bluffs, Buffalo River, Buffalo
2. Taylor Devices Property, Niagara River, North Tonawanda
3. Wallace Property, Niagara River, Grand Island
4. Harbison Property, Woods Creek, Grand Island
5. Duling Property, Niagara River, Youngstown
6. Forest Lawn Cemetery, Scajaquada Creek, Buffalo
7. Ellicott Creek Park Canoe Launch, Ellicott Creek, Tonawanda
8. Buffalo Scholastic Rowing Association Property, Buffalo River, Buffalo
9. Hoke Property, Niagara River, Niagara Falls

...leaving sixteen more. We are scheduling ten more this season, leaving six for the spring of 2012.

Budget

Details can be found in the printed report but to summarize:

- 61% of personnel and fringe costs have been expended
- 30% of contractual costs have been expended
- 54% of the total program budget has been expended to date

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- Difficult to find personnel with both technical skills and ability to work with partners and landowners
- Review contract upfront and get signatures on key points
- Mown lawns and viewscape—anti-tree
- Planting in the rain is a good thing

Next Steps

- Recruit remainder of landowners
- Complete plantings in Spring 2012
- Hire new Volunteer Coordinator January 2012
- Implement training program & tours
- Finish and print Landowner Stewardship Guide
- Continue grant writing to leverage funding
- Invitation to GESAC & Greenway Commission to tour projects

Press Coverage



Press Event

Tonawanda Island, August 2010



RestoreCorps Volunteers



For more information...

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