

# Citizen's Guide

To Starting A Local  
Watershed Group



# Purpose

*Dip a paddle, run a rapid, cast a fishing line, hike along a stream, or just sit under a tree on a creek bank. Our streams provide special places for recreation and aesthetic enjoyment, as well as essential habitat to wildlife and a source of drinking water. They are a valuable resource that we must protect and manage wisely.*

*Many Loudoun County streams have been harmed or are under threat by human activities. We cannot rely solely on state and local governments to protect our local streams.*

*Loudoun Watershed Watch promotes using citizen stewardship as an integral part of managing and protecting our water resources. Organizing a local watershed group, or a “friends of a stream group,” is a proven method of educating and involving local residents. This Citizen’s Guide provides suggestions on how concerned citizens can get started.*

Kayaking on Catoctin Creek



# Organize

Although each local watershed group reflects the personalities of both the citizens initiating the group and their local community and its needs, some common elements characterize successful citizen groups.

## Core Group

A small group of individuals concerned about the health of a local stream is needed to start a local watershed group. To begin, one person needs to take responsibility for getting members together to form the core group. Typically these individuals then provide the initial leadership and planning. Once the group is functioning, however, consensus will be necessary regarding leadership.

These individuals also need to reach out to the wider community to form partnerships with existing key groups and individual supporters of a watershed organization. Examples include riparian landowners, homeowner associations, local environmental groups, scouts, civic and service organizations, schools, local businesses, and agricultural groups.

## Assistance and Support

Need help getting started? Technical and financial assistance is available from citizen environmental groups in Loudoun County.

### Environmental Organizations in Loudoun:

Loudoun Watershed Watch

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

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy – [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)

Loudoun Stream Quality Project – [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)

Audubon Naturalist Society – [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org)

Rust Sanctuary – [www.audubonnaturalist.org](http://www.audubonnaturalist.org)

## First Meeting

At the first meeting, it is very important to establish trust and open communication. During this meeting you will want to:

- Learn each other's background, skills, and interests.
- Begin building rapport by recognizing each other's strengths and interests.
- Set ground rules and explore organizational structures.
- Build a consensus by modifying options or seeking alternatives.
- Begin to develop mission and vision statements.
- Provide an opportunity for informal, social interaction so that members of the group will begin to feel comfortable working with each other.

## Missions, Vision, and Goals

Carefully worded mission and vision statements serve as yardsticks for decision-making and for measuring progress. They also provide motivation for making changes and help keep the group on track.

- Determine what motivates people and make sure these motivations are met.
- Get individual "buy-in" by receiving input from everyone in the group.
- Start with a few short-term goals that have a good chance for success. Be sure early projects are doable and will be seen as "winners" in the eyes of the partners.
- Build the group around members' interests and strengths.

## Organizational Structure

Volunteer groups often start small and grow into larger organizations that need more structure, such as officers and committee chairs. When a more formal structure is needed, choose one that supports the needs of the group. Becoming a

nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation often comes later when grant funds are sought. Until a group assumes a formal entity, a small group can partner with a larger nonprofit one.



Monitoring stream aquatic insects



Tree planting along stream in Ashburn

Bank erosion restoration  
(waiting on email image  
from Darrell)



Taking pictures to  
document the  
absence of silt  
fencing  
at construction  
site in Ashburn

### Loudoun Watershed Watch Contacts:

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# Identify Needs

An early task of the group is to assess the problems, issues, and needs of the local water resources; collect available information on the condition of the streams in your watershed; learn the role of state and local agencies; establish contacts and begin to form partnerships. This step will help prepare you to set your goals and priorities.

## Initial Information Gathering

**Watershed Map** — Maps of your stream and watershed can be obtained from the Loudoun County Office of Mapping and Geographic Information Systems; or create your own map online at [www.loudoun.gov/omagi](http://www.loudoun.gov/omagi). This database provides information about land uses, topography, forest cover, and floodplains under the environmental map layer.

## Water Quality Data

- The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provides data regarding water quality standards, designated uses, location of stream monitoring stations, and monitoring results at [www.deq.state.va.us](http://www.deq.state.va.us).
- **Impaired Stream Reports**  
The DEQ website also lists streams that do not meet water quality standards (impaired), the reason for the impairments, and reports of pollution sources.
- **Loudoun Watershed Watch (LWW)**  
LWW has information on water quality conditions in each watershed in Loudoun County at [www.loudounwatershedwatch.org](http://www.loudounwatershedwatch.org).

**Hydrologic Data** — US Geological Survey provides stream flow and precipitation data at [water.usgs.gov](http://water.usgs.gov).

## County Information Resources:

- The Loudoun County Soil and Water Conservation District has data about water quality and agricultural land use for most county watersheds at [loudoun.vaswcd.org](http://loudoun.vaswcd.org).
- The Loudoun County General Services, Department of Stormwater Management has information about stormwater controls at [www.loudoun.gov/genserv/stormwater](http://www.loudoun.gov/genserv/stormwater).
- The Loudoun County Department of Building and Development, Erosion and Sediment Control Program, has information about sediment and erosion control requirements for development projects by calling 703-777-0397.
- The Loudoun County Sanitation Authority has information about drinking water source protection and sewage treatment facilities at [www.lcsa.org](http://www.lcsa.org).

## Stream Walk

Members of the group should walk, drive, and/or canoe the entire stream to document water and riparian land use conditions. Observations should be recorded on maps and data sheets, and documented with pictures. Instructions for conducting a stream walk are provided in the EPA document, [Volunteer Stream Monitoring: A Methods Manual](#) available online.

- **Report of Findings**  
Communicate observations and findings to group members, watershed residents, government agencies and others in a user friendly report format. Preserve records of the maps, data sheets and pictures to aid in strategic planning. These early findings also can serve as a baseline for future comparisons.

# Planning & Budget

It is useful to set goals and agree upon specific activities to conduct based upon the identified needs. Yearly planning is best accomplished at a retreat. The following guidelines can help your planning process:

- Get as many people as possible involved.
- Use a facilitator for brainstorming and decision-making sessions.
- Designate a leader and set a timeframe for completing any activity included in the plan.
- Develop a proposed budget along with the plan. Watershed groups can conduct fundraisers, seek donations, and apply for grant funds to finance projects.
- Review the plan at group meetings, and communicate progress to members.
- Start small, be realistic with your goals and resources, and include time for food, fun and socializing.

Examples of watershed projects that require little expense other than volunteer time include: stream cleanups, Adopt-A-Stream Program, sediment monitoring, and benthic stream monitoring. LWC and ANS provide benthic stream monitoring equipment and training to cooperating watershed groups. Projects involving modest costs include nutrient and bacteriological monitoring. The most expensive project is riparian restoration.

A variety of funding sources are available to watershed groups. Membership fees and fundraisers can provide modest funds. DEQ provides grant funds for chemical and bacteriological monitoring. Riparian restoration grants are available from a number of regional and federal sources. Other public and private grant sources are available for a variety of stream stewardship activities.

# Communicate

Honest, clear, and open communication is critical to long-term success of the group. Provide positive reinforcement and recognition of volunteer service, donors and other supporters. The following methods can be used to communicate your message:

- **Meeting Minutes** — Make minutes available to interested persons. Include information to track the groups activities including a 'to do' list noting responsibilities and due dates.
- **Email Newsletters** — Send a periodic electronic newsletter to members and supporters as a cost effective method of keeping them informed.
- **Website** — Provide educational materials, announcements, action alerts, publicity of group events and accomplishments, and other information to interested persons and potential members.



Planting native grasses and trees in a floodplain



Stream monitoring class

# Take Action

There are many activities that a group can do to protect and restore the health of the watershed. Choose one or two that best fit members' interests, and are achievable in order to maintain momentum, energy, and enthusiasm.

## Community Stewardship Activities

The following stream stewardship projects can engage the entire community:

- **Adopt-A-Stream Program** — provides guidelines and materials for litter education and cleanup campaigns. The program is sponsored by the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR).
- **Storm Drain Marking** — helps watershed residents make the link between stormwater runoff and their local stream.
- **Stream Cleanup** — brings public attention to the need to avoid littering and protect stream buffers. Scout, school, and homeowner groups can be enlisted to help. A stream cleanup can also include a storm drain cleanup.



Results of Boy Scout clean-up of Catoctin Creek

- **Citizen Sediment Monitoring** — helps the county's inspection program by watching construction sites for inadequate erosion controls. Loudoun County Department of

Building and Development trains volunteer monitors and provides follow-up on complaints.

- **Riparian Restoration** — involves citizens in repairing damage to streams. The Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District provides technical assistance with planting trees in floodplains and restoring stream banks.

## Stream Monitoring

Stream monitoring is an enjoyable activity that allows volunteers to learn about watersheds and streamlife. It also provides scientific data to help answer questions regarding stream health. The data collected gives the group a credible voice to address water quality issues in the community. Stream monitoring can include any of the following:

- **Benthic Macroinvertebrates** — monitor aquatic insects found in streams. These insects have different tolerances to pollution and can be an indicator of stream health.
- **Habitat Assessments** — identify riparian buffers, floodplains, and wetlands that need to be protected or restored.
- **Nutrient Monitoring** — provide data that can be used to support initiatives to clean-up the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- **Bacteriological Monitoring** — assess fecal contamination to help identify nonpoint pollution problems and track the success of state water quality programs.



Classroom training

# Resources

## Starting Partnership Groups

River Network, information on community building at [www.rivernetnetwork.org](http://www.rivernetnetwork.org). (Go to “library, then index and select Community Building).

Building Local Partnerships, the Conservation Technology Information Center.

Getting In Step, A Guide for Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns, Dec. 2003, EPA 841-B-03-002.

## Strategic Planning

The Canaan Valley Institute, information on planning at [www.canaanvi.org](http://www.canaanvi.org).

## Information Gathering

EPA Surf Your Watershed, information on local watersheds at [www.epa.gov/surf](http://www.epa.gov/surf).

DEQ Surface Water Monitoring Program, stream monitoring data at [www.deq.virginia.gov/watermonitoring](http://www.deq.virginia.gov/watermonitoring).

Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), information on nonpoint source pollution at [www.dcr.virginia.gov](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov).

State of Loudoun Streams: 2002, Loudoun Watershed Watch, available at [www.loudounwatershedwatch.org](http://www.loudounwatershedwatch.org).

## Stream Walks and Monitoring

DEQ Citizen Water Monitoring Program, information at [www.deq.virginia.gov/cmonitor/](http://www.deq.virginia.gov/cmonitor/).

Pennsylvania Citizens' Volunteer Monitoring Program Handbook, available from the PA Department of Environmental Protection.

Volunteer Stream Monitoring: A Methods Manual, EPA 841-B-97-003, November 1997.

Adopt-A-Stream Manual, available at [www.dcr.state.va.us/sw/adopt.htm](http://www.dcr.state.va.us/sw/adopt.htm).

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