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## Fall Newsletter 2019

### Director's Update: Return on Investment

When you think about the term “return on investment or ROI,” what do you think of? An energy efficient appliance, retirement portfolios, or even a hybrid car may come to mind. We have been thinking about ROI's a lot here at WCO lately. But how do you compare very different solutions to improving water quality for cost effectiveness, much less calculate an ROI?

Fortunately, local leaders and brainy consultants have developed the Sustainable Return on Investment (SROI) model. This powerful tool quantifies the social, economic, and environmental impacts over the lifetime of the solutions analyzed. The SROI tool was developed out of the City, County, and City Utilities' deep ethic of spending limited municipal resources for water quality as effectively as possible. This herculean effort has afforded our community some regulatory flexibility to focus on what's most effective.

The outcomes of the solutions evaluated by the SROI model have been at times reinforcing, surprising, and even inspiring. Thankfully, the water quality education programs we have worked so hard to develop show a positive return. The results of pasture conversion from traditional livestock grazing to managed, rotational grazing recently came in, showing a whopping \$2.90 return for every dollar invested. This reinforces the idea that working with producers in our local watersheds is one of the biggest opportunities we have as a community to sustain and improve water resources. Our local Natural Resources Conservation Service and Soil and Water Conservation Districts have a track record of success in this particular endeavor, but they face funding and staffing limitations. Through partnership and innovation, we hope to capitalize on this tried and true investment.

We are thankful for the investments we've been able to make in our mission this year. The growing Watershed Conservation Corps, staff, education programs, solar energy generation, and investment time and effort directly on the land at the Watershed Center to name a few. The work of those before us is paying dividends, we aim to continue to invest, and we are really excited for the opportunities on the horizon!

Mike Kromrey, Executive Director

## Projects Update

### Little Sac Restoration and Improvement Project

The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks (WCO) was awarded a subgrant agreement from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources on April 1, 2014, for the Little Sac Restoration and Improvement Project. On June 21, 2018, a grant amendment was awarded, bringing the total grant funding to \$380,442 with a required \$225,222. The goal of this project is to improve the drinking watershed of Springfield and Greene County with implementation of best management practices (BMPs) that will reduce nonpoint source pollution.



*Dave Wise and Zeke Kuehn at Little Sac Streambank Stabili-*

The WCO has been working to update the Upper Little Sac Watershed Management Plan. This plan is an EPA nine element plan that identifies sources of pollution, estimates the load reductions, and describes the management measures to be implemented in critical areas to help reduce those pollutants over a 20-year timeframe. The plan is currently in the process of being submitted to EPA for review.

The grant has implemented several projects throughout the five years timespan, including installation of five prescribed agricultural grazing systems, installation of three bank vegetative buffers strips, improvements to riparian corridors, completion the Longitudinal Peaked Stone Toe Protection streambank stabilization project, and collection of water quality data at five locations in the watershed.

We are very thankful to our community partners that have made these projects possible, including the landowners, the grant steering committee, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Greene County, Missouri Department of Conservation, City Utilities of Springfield, the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District.

### Sac and James River Watershed Conservation Outreach Project

The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks was awarded the USDA Conservation Technical Assistance Grant for \$49,000 on September 15, 2018. The project is to promote public awareness and implementation of Farm Bill activities, especially in historically underserved communities and in watersheds critical to drinking water supply.

As part of the grant WCO has created a survey to understand the knowledge farmers, producers and growers have of the farm bill practices and cost share programs currently available. On September 9th the survey was first conducted at the Cedar/Dade county grazing school in Greenfield, MO and on October 15th the survey was conducted at the Greene County Grazing School at the Darr Agricultural Center.

A Soil Health Workshop was held at the Sac River event center on Tuesday September 24 featuring speakers Keith Burns Co-owner/Operator of Green Cover Seeds in Bladen, Nebraska and Jimmy Emmons a row-crop/livestock producer from Dewey County Oklahoma. Topics discussed included carbonomics-what can carbon do for you, how to select cover crop species, applying soil health principles on your operation, and integrating livestock into your covers. The workshop was sponsored by the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. — Stacey Armstrong Smith, Projects Manager

## Watershed Center Update

### Field Trips

Fall is a favorite season for field trips to the Watershed Center. Students from numerous public, private, and home school groups along with local colleges and universities have been exploring nature and water related issues here at the park. We had students visiting the park on field trips almost every weekday throughout September and October. Our goal is to provide all students in the region with quality field experiences that develop and nurture a life-long appreciation of our fantastic Ozark water resources.



*SPS Hawk students studying stream life*

### Greener Greenspace Expands Again!

Our collaborative program with Springfield Public Schools has expanded to include all nine middle schools. Almost 1,900 seventh grade students in these schools participated in two field trips to the Watershed Center. Teams of students were challenged to come up with solutions and improvements to environmental problems they identify in their community. During their first visit, students learn about topography, watersheds, water quality issues, and best management practices. The second field trip focuses on stream ecology, invasive species, native plants, and rain gardens. An added element this year is a third field trip to the Springfield Sanitary Landfill and Ritter Springs Park where students learn about recycling, solid waste disposal, karst topography, and groundwater resources. Students use the information they learn in the classroom along field experiences to create presentations to share with their classmates. Students with the top proposal will receive funding from the district to implement their plan.



*A closer look at Sanders Branch*

### New SPS Collaboration

This fall kicked off the start of a new collaboration with Springfield Public Schools. Hillcrest and Glendale High School students are now participating in the College & Career Academies program. This new model offers a preview of college and career options to help students plan their futures. WCO is working closely with SPS to develop the Environmental & Natural Resource Management pathway offered at Hillcrest. The focus of this pathway is to teach students how to properly manage land, water, soil, plants, and animals. The classes have a focus on how management affects the quality of life for both present and future generations. During this inaugural year, participating sophomores enrolled in Environmental Science. This course is designed to introduce students to the concepts of applied ecology and incorporates a variety of field experiences as well as interactions with professionals in the environmental and agricultural fields. Future courses will be offered at the Junior and Senior level include Watershed Science and Restoration Ecology along with a major focus in agriculture.

Jeff Birchler, Watershed Center Coordinator

## Watershed Center Update (Continued)

### Volunteer Program

As our volunteer program grows, we've welcomed new volunteers to our team nearly every week this fall. Many of these volunteers are interested in the educational component of our mission and are eager to help with our numerous field trips, especially Greener Green Spaces. Although most of the volunteers had never worked with middle school students or in a classroom setting before, all of them enjoyed their experiences and several of them have expressed their newfound desire to continue teaching in the future.

Also among the new faces, we're lucky to welcome two groups from the Drury Summit Park Program to our team. Each Summit Park group has four students who are required to live together for a year while completing a year-long service project at a non-profit of their choice. Our volunteers have come to work on establishing the native plant nursery next Spring. In the meantime, they've been dedicating their time to harvesting native seeds and removing invasive species from Valley Water Mill Park. Through these experiences, the Summit Park volunteers are learning how devastating invasive species can be once established while learning to identify and harvest their own native plant seeds.



*Drury Summit Park volunteers gives thumbs up for native plants*

Kelly Owens, Watershed Center Assistant Coordinator

## Watershed Conservation Corps Update

The Watershed Conservation Corps has had a busy and successful season! From 10 acres of glade restoration at Lake Springfield Park to boardwalk construction at George Washington Carver National Monument, 11 young adults successfully completed 14 watershed improvement projects in Springfield and across the Ozarks. More recently, our Corps has continued our work to improve erosion-prone sections of the North Fork Trail on Mark Twain National Forest. Asked to serve as the lead trail consultants, the WCC led Conservative Anabaptist Service program members (CASP) in a .35 mile re-route on the Ridge Runner Trail at Lake Noblett in October and November. CASP provides alternative places of employment that are approved by the U.S. Selective Service System. Each year, volunteer men work on several pilot projects just as if there were a draft. Apart from giving Anabaptist young men an alternative to war, these rebuilding and forestry projects are meant to serve as infrastructure development for rural parts of the Midwest. We were honored to have the opportunity to work with these hard-working young men.

## Watershed Conservation Corps Update (Continued)

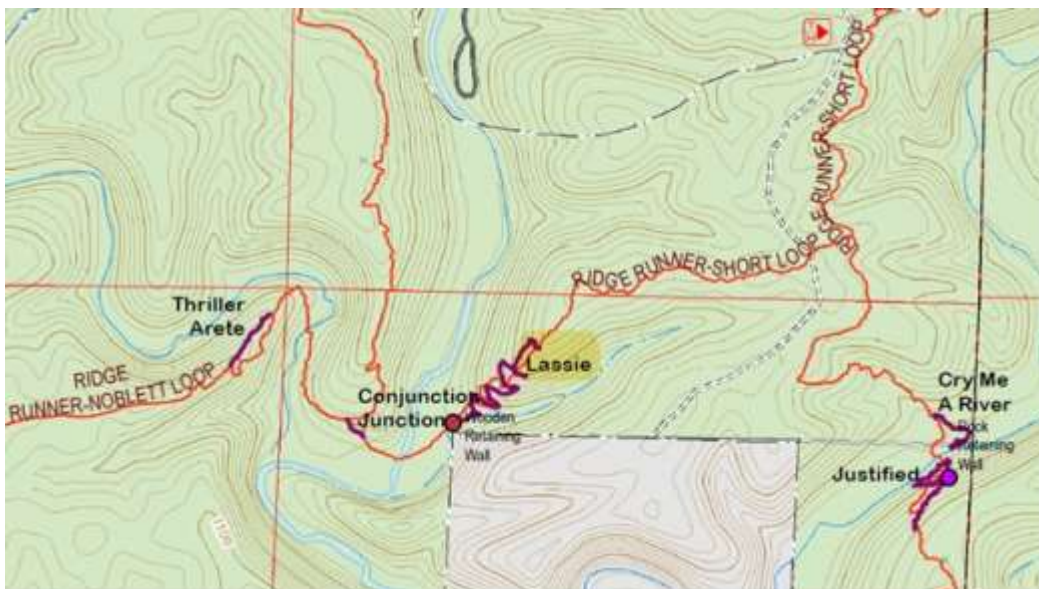
As we wrap-up 2019, the WCC looks to the future. In 2020 we will be doubling our WCC team as we work to provide our program's services to our region's land managers—and we will be sending out job announcements very soon! So please reach out if you or someone you know would be interested in working for this exciting and growing program. [caleb@watershedcommittee.org](mailto:caleb@watershedcommittee.org)

Thank you for your continued support!

Caleb Sanders, Watershed Conservation Corps Director.



*CASP Members*



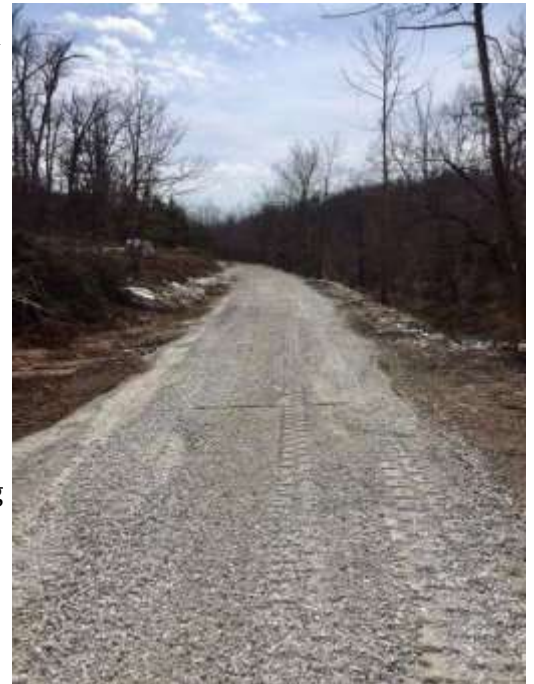


2400 E. Valley Water Mill Rd.  
Springfield, MO 65803

## Coca-Cola Dear Future Community Challenge Grant

The Coca-Cola Company and its family of 68 independently owned bottlers across the country invited young Americans to help deliver a better tomorrow through the “Dear Future [Community] Challenge.” Locally, Ozarks Coca Cola Dr. Pepper Bottling Company and Watershed Committee of the Ozarks teamed up to ask students and young adults at Drury, MSU, and OTC their ideas “to protect and restore Ozarks water resources.” After reviewing many submissions, an award of \$30,000 went to Ashley Cusic for her idea to protect and restore waters by preventing erosion and planting native plants. WCO served as a mentor and fiscal agent to help Ashley actualize her idea.

WCO surveyed local partners for “needs” or projects that might align with Ashley’s idea. Ashley decided the best fit was a project need of Ozark Greenways. A section of the Frisco Highline trail, located within Springfield’s water supply area, was eroding badly. With the investment from Coke and Ashley, Ozark Greenways was able to fund the work to stabilize the stream bank with stone and native plants. This unique project provided the opportunity to engage many students, build a relationship with Ozarks Coca Cola Dr. Pepper Bottling Company, and our student partner Ashley, as well as fix a problem and make the water cleaner.



Repaired section of the Frisco Highline trail