



Spring Grove High School

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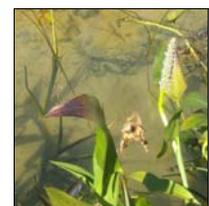
The Spring Grove Area School District opened a new high school during the 2008-09 school year. A growing population base and an outdated existing school were the driving forces behind the need for this new facility, which accommodates 1,400 students and over 100 staff members. This facility shares the expanded 230-acre “campus” where the district’s Middle, Intermediate and newest Elementary schools exist.

The need to preserve natural environments on this campus was a key concern to many since the inception of the design phase. Protecting and preserving the woodlands and wetlands for their educational as well as environmental benefits continues to be a focus of the educators in this district. These landscapes are incorporated into learning opportunities for students, creating outdoor learning centers from what some considered problem areas that should be cleared or filled-in, seeded and then mowed.

Specifically, environmental science students at the new high school work to enhance the existing wetland environment, making it an extension of the classroom, available to all in the community. Such involvement benefits students, who often experience nature only from a distance, if at all. In a society where nature must compete with electronics and a sedentary lifestyle, now more than ever before, this is a benefit which is hard to put a price on.



There are 3 wetland sites that are the focus of current activity; one is on the side of the building that borders a housing development, one is between the student parking lot and the physical education practice fields, and the other is behind the practice fields, bordering a farm. To convert these wetlands into outdoor classrooms, areas of improvement included erosion control for steep hills, removal of invasive plants such as multiflora rose, and restoration of wildlife habitat by reclaiming areas filled in from construction. A key lesson learned from working on this project was to never underestimate runoff from a sloped grade. At the site closest to the building, the major adjustment came in the form of a retaining wall to support the bank from the drainage and runoff. Through the creative efforts of many people and organizations, this unbudgeted expense was constructed successfully to support the area behind the wetland (*as seen in photo below*).





Access to the site nearest the building was created in a way that has minimal impact on the wetland, yet also provides students with a means to study the plants and animals residing there. Recent on-site student projects include water and soil testing for contaminants (*see photo below*), macroinvertebrate identification and building a succession timeline. This wetland ecosystem also offers opportunities for authentic outdoor learning experiences beyond those obvious in science. Population studies have connections to math class, journaling with English, construction of bird boxes and benches by Tech Ed. students, surveying for Physical Education, and connecting to nature for health class. Two students even took it upon themselves to build bridges as their graduation project. These extensions of the traditional classroom allow students to take information taught in the classroom and apply and explore them in natural surroundings.



Spring Grove is a rural community in south-central Pennsylvania, about half way between York and Hanover. The school has a strong sense of community and we are very proud of what has been accomplished with this new facility. Students are simply in awe of the new surroundings, yet one of the initial challenges was to help them find ways to take ownership of the brick and mortar structure; one more “thing” that adults have provided them. If current participation is any indication, these students consider this “their wetland.”

That is a very real benefit of the wetland habitat from the staff’s perspective; providing students the outlet to invest their individual and collective time and efforts into improving their own schoolyard. Designing, planning, negotiating, compromising, waiting, sacrificing, getting dirty, sharing, promoting, educating—these are all areas of involvement where the students will become personally vested in the success of this wetland, and of giving back to the community.

