

Fall 2013

Notes From Nanjemoy Creek

Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center



Charles County
Public Schools

Everything Changes: Goodbyes & Hellos

This school year has been a big year for changes at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center. We are looking forward to an exciting new chapter for NCEEC. We are bidding farewell to Environmental Resource Teacher, Paula Batzer and Environmental Education Assistant, Meagan Keefe. We wish Paula the best of luck as she steps into retirement. The center has grown and flourished under her guidance, and she will be missed. Megan accepted a position at Huntley Meadows in Fairfax, VA as Program Manager and Senior Interpreter. We wish her well in the new position.



We would like to welcome our new Environmental Resource Teacher, Timothy Emhoff. Tim has been a science educator with Charles County Public Schools for thirteen years at Indian Head Elementary School. He has a genuine interest in environmental education and has served on the CCPS Environmental Literacy Team. Tim has also co-facilitated several environmental institutes to help teachers increase their knowledge of environmental concepts and issue investigations. While the 5th grade program will remain our primary focus, Tim would like to continue to expand our program so that we are able to reach more students at different grade levels and promote environmental literacy throughout the school system.

We are happy to announce the arrival of our new Environmental Education Assistant, Audrey Blackburn. Audrey has been teaching in the field of Environmental Education for twelve years. She is thrilled to be teaching at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center because it allows her to be a part of a small staff of educators that strive to provide an excellent academic environment for the students of Charles County. For Audrey, teaching environmental education is not just a career, it's a calling.



We are also excited by the arrival of our new bald eagle. She was found in poor health wandering around a swimming pool in Wisconsin. After spending a few days in rehab, it was discovered that she was blind in her left eye. She stayed in rehab until she had regained her body weight. She was then transported to us by two pilots working with a volunteer group called Pilots N Paws, a group of pilots who use their personal planes to transport animals to new homes. A *big* thank you goes out to them for flying the eagle here in challenging weather.

The new eagle is immature which means that she does not yet have the classic white head and tail. It can take an eagle up to five years to finish acquiring its white feathers. We believe she is around one year old. She is fully flighted, and the center has plans to build a flight cage for her. We are looking forward to sharing her with the students who visit our center this school year!



“Understanding Sustainability”

by Audrey Blackburn

Sustainability is a buzz word that has been used often by politicians, the media, and non-profit organizations when discussing the environment.¹ While many people seem familiar with the word sustainable, most seem hard-pressed to define what

it really means. Where does the term sustainability come from? What does it really mean and how can the average person apply the concept to their daily life? A history of the word can be traced back to the 1600’s when the word sustain was combined with the suffix –able and was defined as “bearable.” In the late 1800’s, the word was slightly altered to mean “defensible.” It wasn’t until 1965 that the meaning of sustainability transformed into what we are familiar with today. It now can be defined as “capable of being continued at a certain level.”²

The word sustainable can be correctly applied to many areas such as sociology, economics, and technology, but it is most commonly connected with environmental science and natural resources. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, or the EPA, sustainability is based on a simple principle. Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability can help maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony. This can permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations.³

In layman’s terms, the concept of sustainability is important to make sure that we have the water, materials, and resources to protect human health and our environment for generations to come. It stands for the idea that something will last and that we “will not gobble up unnecessarily large amounts of natural resources, time, money or other finite materials.”⁴ An important consideration of sustainability is that when meeting our needs, we don’t limit future generations from meeting their own needs.

Googol Power, an organization that is committed to making learning a fun and enjoyable experience for the whole family, asked children to define the word sustainable. The children came up with insightful definitions such as:

- “Sharing what we have with others and not taking more than our share.”
- “Taking care of the air, water, land and those who live there.”
- “Thinking about what you need rather than taking what you want.”
- “Sustainability is not just cleaning up your own room – it’s about keeping tidy an even bigger room that belongs to everyone!”⁵

Sustainability doesn’t need to be a complicated problem seen only on a global scale. It can be applied to a person’s everyday life by making choices to improve quality of life and reduce one’s negative impact on the environment. Oregon State University points out that “the decision to live sustainably is intensely personal. Some people make changes to save money; others make changes to protect the environment; still others make changes to allow more time to pursue other things in life. It really doesn’t matter why we choose to adopt a sustainable behavior because the end result—a more sustainable life, community, and planet—is the same. Each and every reason is valid and contributes to the individuality of this process”.⁶

¹Wise Geek (<http://www.wisegeek.com/in-environmental-terms-what-does-sustainability-mean.htm>)

²Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sustainable>)

³Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm#sustainability>)

⁴Sustainability For Kids (<http://sustainabilityforkids.com/about-sustainability-for-kids/>)

⁵Googol Power (<http://www.googolpower.com/content/free-learning-resources/environmental-education/definitions-of-sustainability-for-children>)

⁶Oregon State University (<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pdf/ec/ec1614.pdf>)



Inch by Inch, Move Toward a Sustainable Yard

By Mike Callahan

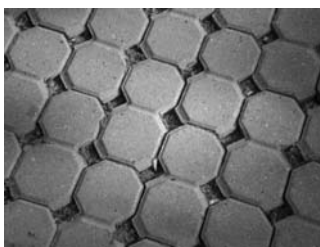


With spring just around the corner, it is not too early to begin thinking about your yard's spring gardening needs. In fact, you might consider returning your yard to a more sustainable state of existence. In order for your yard to be considered sustainable, it must work with and support the local ecosystem and use little or no chemicals. Whether we realize it or not, everything we do in our yard reaches far beyond our property line so even little steps can make a big difference.



Here are some suggestions to create a more sustainable yard. Plant a vegetable garden. This not only provides you with fresh produce, but it also reduces your carbon footprint because the vegetables will not have to be transported from a farm to the store and then to your home. You will also have control over what is put into the soil and on the plants and vegetables themselves. Instead of using commercial fertilizers, you can amend your soil by composting the fruit and vegetable waste and coffee grounds from your kitchen. If pests are a problem, consider using an organic pesticide and only use what is needed in the exact spot with the problem. This is called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). If weeds are a problem, cardboard sheets topped with mulch provide a handy weed barrier that can also help with retaining soil moisture.

For beautifying and landscaping your yard, plant native plants. Natives are adapted to the local environment, soils and climate. If you choose the right plants, you can have a colorful garden throughout the season and even all year long. Additionally, native plants require less watering, and they don't usually require chemical treatments. Another benefit is that they provide food and habitat to native wildlife. Many of our native beneficial insects, birds and wildlife are on the decline, and any help you can provide will contribute to a healthier biodiversity.



Another suggestion for a more sustainable yard is to create a more meadow-like habitat with wildflowers. This uses less gas and effort than mowing and increases rain water absorption while reducing runoff. Replacing impervious surfaces like asphalt and concrete with plantings and other materials, using gravel, pavers and other soft landscaping products allows water to get into the ground. If you are sold on having a grassy lawn, there are options that can include combinations of the above.

These ideas barely scratch the surface of what we can do. There are so many other things you can do to make that difference and move toward a more sustainable yard. Start small and work your way up by adding new projects and practices over time. You could become a role model of sustainable living for your neighbors and community.



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The mission of Charles County Public Schools is to provide an opportunity for all school-aged children to receive an academically challenging, quality education that builds character, equips for leadership, and prepares for life in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.



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Let's talk about your footprint. Most of us grew up with the idea that a footprint is created by your foot, but when we are talking about sustainability and sustainable development, there are two other kinds of footprints. The first is your ecological footprint and the second is your carbon footprint. To make it simple, your ecological footprint measures how fast you consume resources and generate waste compared to the planet's ability to regenerate what is consumed and to absorb the waste produced. It is usually measured in how many earths it would take to sustain you. A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide you produce on a daily basis, usually expressed in tons.

These greenhouse gases can have a direct effect on climate. Many companies are now getting involved in carbon offsetting. Carbon offsets are credits given to a company for reducing their carbon emissions at another location to offset what they produce at their main site. This might include the use of wind farms which create renewable energy and reduce the need for fossil-fuel powered energy. Try calculating your footprint at: <http://www.earthday.org/footprint-calculator>, <http://www.myfootprint.org/>, <http://www.nature.org/greenliving/carboncalculator/index.htm>

Nanjemoy Creek Fan Club
Would you like to help support the programs and projects that take place throughout the year at Nanjemoy Creek Environmental Education Center? Become a member of Nanjemoy Creek's Fan Club by completing the attached form and including a small, tax deductible donation to our center. Your donation helps us keep our program up to date with the latest advances in environmental education and supports care for our raptors and bees. In return for your support, you will receive our newsletter to keep you informed about what's happening at the center.

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