Great Swamp Watershed Association

Program: GSWA Loantaka Brook Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan

Who we are

Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) is a 501(c)(3) environmental conservation organization based in Morristown, New Jersey with over 40 years' experience working with our local communities to benefit our regional waters. Our mission is to protect and improve the health of the Passaic River through science, education, land preservation and stewardship, and advocacy.

The program we are proposing

The GSWA Loantaka Brook Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan (the Plan) seeks to improve and restore Loantaka Brook, a major tributary of the Passaic River.

In its headwaters, the brook is negatively impacted by stormwater runoff. It is inadequately protected from pollution due to the degraded condition of the local surrounding parks and forests. This proposal will allow GSWA to work with Morris County, communities, and residents in the Loantaka Brook watershed area to develop a restoration plan that will improve water quality.

We will address issues such as elevated bacteria (fecal coliform) and nutrient (phosphorus) levels which currently impair the brook. We will partner with Rutgers University to develop a Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan, and with Morris County Parks Commission (MCPC) to complete two riparian restoration projects within Loantaka Reservation. We will remove invasive plants and replant over 150 native trees and plants along Loantaka Brook. The restoration will better support wildlife, reduce erosion, and improve water quality. This program encompasses Morris Township, Morristown, Chatham Township, Madison, and Harding--all Morris County communities. Somerset, Essex, Union, and Passaic counties will be impacted also, as these counties have communities along the Passaic River.

What makes this a high-impact program

This project will have a deep impact on Loantaka Brook, a major tributary of the Passaic River, which is our most impaired stream within the Great Swamp sub-watershed. Loantaka Brook requires urgent attention to manage its water quality issues. This section of the stream experiences elevated bacteria levels during the summer, is affected by road salt, runoff, and effluent discharges, and lacks diverse habitats for macroinvertebrates. The Plan will address these impairments and provide a roadmap for managing them. Two riparian restoration projects identified by MCPC will address issues of storm water runoff and habitat loss and will provide many ecological benefits.

The Plan will serve as a blueprint for future projects within the Loantaka watershed to improve water quality and for other watershed projects in the future. This project will ultimately benefit 76,000 local residents, approximately 1,000,000 annual park visitors, and support clean drinking water for 2,000,000 people.

How we will make it happen

GSWA will lead a collaborative initiative bringing together county and municipal entities and local community members within the Loantaka Watershed to formulate and execute a strategic plan for restoring the stream's health. In year one of the project GSWA will work closely with Rutgers to develop the Plan, which will require the largest portion of the project budget. This will include coordination with our municipal partners, engineers, and MCPC to determine our partners' needs regarding the Loantaka watershed, stormwater management, public meetings with community members, and volunteer engagement.

Once the Plan has been completed, we will partner with these communities to implement the projects identified, with the balance of the budget to be used for materials, permits and outreach. GSWA will lead the development of these projects in conjunction with the MCPC. We will secure the necessary permits and organize contractors and volunteers to complete the work.

How we will measure success

Success for this project means a healthier brook and communities that are invested in their brook and their local parks. We will prioritize future projects in the Plan; track community meeting attendance; track volunteer engagement; measure long-term water quality changes; and visually assess stream habitat for overall improvement.