



Volunteers plant trees at DEC's Honeoye Inlet Wildlife Management Area this past fall.

TREES FOR TRIBS TURNS 10

Planting Roots for More Vibrant and Resilient Communities

By Sarah Walsh

It was a cold, rainy December day as we piled out of the vehicle at Brookwood Park in the Village of Herkimer. Beth Roessler, DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program's Stream Buffer Coordinator, led the way into the park, where earlier that fall DEC foresters and community members had planted trees and shrubs along a tributary of the Mohawk River. We were here to see how the plantings were doing: were they still healthy, and were they protected from the elements and predators like beavers and deer?

The newly planted vegetation was obvious, even to the untrained eye. Trees along the edge of the parking lot had tubes around their trunks and the new shrubs along the stream were surrounded by 3 ft. x 3 ft. black mats. The mats protect the shrubs from grasses and weeds that could strangle them before they have a chance to grow. Walking around, we were pleased to see the success of the planting effort—the trees and shrubs clearly showed signs of life despite the cold, wet weather.

The plantings are part of DEC's Trees for Tribs (as in tributaries), a

program in part funded by the Environmental Protection Fund, that works with local coordinators, like Beth, and municipal and community partners to restore streambanks with native trees and shrubs. Trees for Tribs provides trees at low- or no-cost, and also offers technical assistance to help ensure the success of planting projects across New York. It's truly a joint effort that would not be possible without the help of hundreds of volunteers who assist in replanting areas along New York streams each year.



SUNY Cobleskill students plant trees to improve wildlife habitat.

At Brookwood Park, the goal was to stabilize streambanks that were eroded by storms and flooding. This isn't an uncommon condition; in recent years, streambank erosion has threatened or destroyed houses, municipal buildings and land areas in many communities. By planting native trees and shrubs along these streams, the plant roots will grow deep into the soil and hang on when flooding occurs, holding soils in place and maintaining streambanks.

Native plants serve as a buffer between the land and water, slowing surface runoff and collecting pollutants before they enter the stream. This protects and improves water quality. In addition, trees and shrubs provide shade, which keeps the water cooler, helping to maintain water temperatures trout need. Furthermore, since wildlife use stream corridors to travel across the landscape—avoiding roads and other human influences—forested streams provide even more habitat and protection for bears, moose and other wildlife that require little or no human interaction.

During the past 10 years, Trees for Tribes has planted trees and shrubs at more than 590 sites, helping to stabilize streams to enhance their resilience in the face of extreme weather events. The program uses trees and shrubs from DEC's Saratoga Tree Nursery, which has been producing native New York seedlings for more than 100 years.



Beth Roessler: Planning and Planting to Protect Our Environment

When she was young, Beth Roessler could not have imagined she would one day serve as Hudson Estuary Trees for Tribes coordinator, and Riparian Stream Buffer coordinator (through a unique partnership between NYS Water Resources Institute and DEC). Those positions did not even exist. But she was a “science kid” who loved the outdoors (and still does), so it's no surprise she eventually ended up working in the environmental field.

Beth grew up in Elmira, studied math in college, and then served as an AmeriCorps volunteer in both Washington and Colorado. She later worked with people with disabilities and traveled the world on a boat, before earning her master's degree in Environmental Science and Policy, which led to her current role with DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program. Beth works closely with municipal partners and volunteers to plant trees that shore up streambanks to enhance the environment and protect communities from storms, flooding, and the effects of climate change.

Beth is proud of the positive impacts these projects have had on our natural environment. She fondly recalls a project in Newburgh near a housing complex that opened up outdoor access in the community, allowing residents to literally see the beauty and recreation opportunities on a nearby lake. She also takes pride in visiting a site in Hyde Park where years ago she and volunteers planted young trees ranging in size from two feet to five feet. Today, they stand 20-30 feet tall.

The “science kid” who loved the outdoors found her niche. She realized there are “so many options to do what you want to do and also help the environment.” At work, she helps communities restore, beautify and protect the environment. And when she has time to enjoy her favorite pursuits like hiking, traveling and cross-country skiing, she further affirms her love of the outdoors and commitment to protect it.

Trees for Tribs continues to grow. During 2016, the program expanded to include Pot-Up Events at Saratoga Tree Nursery where the public is taught about the importance of forested streams and shown how to plant “bare-root” trees and shrubs into pots. The potted plants are cared for until they are ready to be planted at sites across the state.

If you are interested in participating in the Trees for Tribs program and reside within one of these six New York watersheds—Lake Champlain, Mohawk, Susquehanna, Genesee, Hudson Estuary or Croton—contact Sarah Walsh (DEC’s statewide coordinator) at treesfortribs@dec.ny.gov. If you do not live within one of these watersheds, but still want to help out, consider making a gift to DEC’s Tree Planting Fund by visiting www.dec.ny.gov/animals/77710.html. This fund supports the Trees for Tribs Program and the Saratoga Tree Nursery’s efforts to collect native seeds and grow trees to be planted across the state.

Sarah Walsh is the statewide coordinator for the Trees for Tribs program. She works in the Division of Lands & Forests in DEC’s Albany office.

Sarah Walsh



Saratoga High School students and community groups throughout Saratoga Springs assisted in potting bareroot trees and shrubs at the State Tree Nursery to prepare them for distribution across the state.

Robin Kuiper



Volunteers help pot trees and shrubs at the 2nd annual Pot UP event at the State Tree Nursery to prepare them for planting in fall. The 3rd annual Pot UP is planned for May 2017.



Trees for Tribes engages more than 1,000 volunteers each year in tree-planting activities.

Across New York

Through Trees for Tribes projects, local communities and residents help build and sustain beautiful, resilient communities across the state. Here are a few examples:

Hudson Estuary Trees for Tribes

(Hudson Valley) Launched in New York in 2007 by DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program, the Hudson Estuary Trees for Tribes Program was the first of its kind in the state. Under the program, 43,000 trees and shrubs have been planted along tributaries to the Hudson River Estuary. The program's success has served as a model for the expansion of Trees for Tribes into a statewide program.

Genesee River Basin Trees for Tribes

(Western New York) The Genesee River Basin Trees for Tribes Program, in partnership with the Wyoming County Soil and Water Conservation District, provides free trees to landowners in high priority areas. Program Coordinator Kim Falbo works closely with landowners to develop a planting plan for their property, and acquires native planting stock from the Saratoga Tree Nursery for local projects. Through 2016, this group has planted more than 14,000 trees and shrubs within the Lower Genesee watershed.

Upper Susquehanna Coalition

(Central/Southern New York) The Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC) is a network of 19 Soil and Water Conservation Districts across the Upper Susquehanna watershed in New York and Pennsylvania. With a mission to protect the important watershed of the Chesapeake Bay, this coalition has partnered with Trees for Tribes to plant riparian areas in parks and on private lands within the smaller tributaries of the watershed to improve water quality. During 2016, USC planted more than 10,000 trees and shrubs to stabilize streams and create wildlife habitat.

Friends of Scarsdale Parks

(Westchester County) During the summer of 2015, the Friends of Scarsdale Parks planted 285 trees in their riparian park area, and then followed it up in 2016, by planting an additional 275 plants to enhance this streamside reforestation effort. The Friends group consists of Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners and other tree enthusiasts, and hosts 150 volunteers at each planting event. The group has painstakingly removed Japanese knotweed by hand, helping to control this invasive plant that grows along streams and is very difficult to eradicate. The group celebrated its efforts by planting native trees and shrubs to restore their park. This small group was so enthusiastic, they held their own planting session in 2016, using the skills they learned from the previous year's planting to train their own volunteers for the second planting event.

To learn more about Trees for Tribes events in your area, visit DEC's webpage: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/77710.html. You can also follow DEC on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NYSDEC/, where the latest Trees for Tribes events will be posted and reported.

