

Belvidere Environmental Commission

Riparian Protection Project-ANJEC Congress Award 2013

The Belvidere Environmental Commission (BEC) received a grant from NJ American Water to work on two public education projects fostering watershed stewardship and protection:

- storm drain marking,
- and riparian buffer protection with interpretive signage.

Storm drain marking-First, the BEC assisted the Town engineer to map all of the storm drains and outfalls within the town. The Commission partnered with the fifth grade at Oxford Street Elementary School to re-mark storm drains because watershed protection is part of that grade's curriculum. The BEC decided to create an inexpensive stencil to mark the drains that could be used as often as necessary to keep the message visible. The stencil's message was "Keep it Clean -- Drains to River," accompanied by a fish icon, as a friendly reminder to residents and public works employees that the storm drain was connected to a waterway.

Riparian Buffer Protection- Belvidere has been flooded several times in recent years. The BEC wanted to stress the critical role healthy riparian areas play in keeping sediments and pollutants out of the river by encouraging "no-mow zones" near waterways. The town has a heavily used recreational area in the flood plain of the Pequest River; this was identified as a good area for establishing a riparian buffer with educational signage. The BEC worked with the town to install 5 interpretative signs, and to establish a 1200-foot-long buffer about 150 feet from the river. Each sign has a QR code that can be scanned with a smart phone directing the user to a NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) web site with additional information about stream protection, wetlands and buffer areas. The signs also help establish a clear demarcation of the buffer area and raise awareness of use restrictions in flood plains.

The result of the project is that Belvidere now has a map of all of the storm drains; to date approximately 50 storm drains have been marked by fifth grade students; the BEC is planning to involve scouts and youth groups in future efforts. In addition, a 1200-foot-long riparian buffer now protects the river, along with interpretive signage in the Pequest River flood plain. The BEC feels that residents have a better understanding of the benefits of maintaining healthy riparian buffers, and are more aware not to dump trash in storm drains.

How did the Environmental Commission get municipal support?

The Environmental Commission chose to install the interpretive signs in an area where parents, children and others will see them while using the playground equipment or youth athletic fields. The project Chair first met privately with the mayor followed by a presentation to the entire Town Council to get their endorsement. The BEC found that it was easy to address challenges once the Council understood the benefits of the "no mow" message. The project Chair feels it was critical to the success of the project to involve the Department of Public Works supervisor, mayor and Youth Athletic leaders so they understood the purpose of the interpretive signs in helping to protect the health of the stream. In addition to the attractive photos and brief messages on the signs, QR codes provided a quick link to the NJ DEP web site for people who wanted additional information.