Now, another major battle is being waged and won at Redbud Run. Impassioned partners from local, state, and federal agencies and organizations—along with many dedicated individuals—have been actively collaborating since 2001 to protect this rich wildlife corridor and historical site from threats of mounting urban development in the Winchester-Frederick County region. Jim Lawrence, who manages grant-funded projects for The Opequon Watershed, is working with Winchester Trout Unlimited (TU), Shenandoah Valley Battlefield Foundation (the Foundation), Civil War Preservation Trust (the Trust), and the Department (DGIF), and takes a central role in organizing the efforts involved. He describes the overall mission as a “multi-faceted watershed management project,” a greenway with the goal of providing “protection, access, and interpretation of natural and historical resources” along the entire Redbud corridor. “The importance of managing this watershed cannot be overstated,” said Lawrence. “From an awareness perspective, it serves as our region’s Chesapeake Bay.”

Humble Beginnings

Redbud Run’s headwaters arise from modest springs in northern Frederick County and converge in the nearby 221-acre Fort Collier Industrial Park. This upper watershed primarily contributes storm drainage during dry periods to Redbud and represents a major line of defense for the trout fishery in the lower stream.

Keenly aware of the effects that rain and stormwater runoff from developed areas can have on stream health, Fort Collier Group owner and
The Core Battlefield

Flowing out of Fort Collier into the core Third Winchester battlefield, Redbud Run receives a major infusion of cold water from Fay and Semple springs. Over 140 acres of the Foundation’s protected lands surround these springs. Here, early in the Redbud conservation campaign, partners utilized the USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program to exclude livestock and restore the ecology of the riparian zone by establishing buffers and planting trees. The Department re-introduced native brook trout. More recently, the Foundation and Winchester TU obtained grants to remove a culvert crossing that was restricting fish movement from potential spawning areas upstream.

Once large and sprawling, the battlefield has been greatly degraded, even destroyed, by rapidly expanding development. The last intact, contiguous parcels of high-integrity battlefield land bordering Redbud Run (975 acres in total) have been purchased from willing landowners by the Foundation and the Trust, with generous support from Frederick County. The result is a history-filled sanctuary of pristine oak-hickory woodlands, lavishly strewn with redbud, serviceberry, and numerous mushroom species. Meadows, fertile farmlands, cattails, and mud flats provide habitat to plentiful bird species—blue and green herons, kingfishers, songbirds—along with beaver, muskrat, fox, and deer. All provide a glorious treasure for people to explore, to experience nature, and to gain an appreciation of the history and sacrifice occurring on this land.

The Civil War Preservation Trust’s 222-acre portion of Third Winchester Battlefield features five miles of low-impact walking/hiking/cycling trails with interpretive kiosks that guide visitors through the causally events of September 1864. Standing on the rustic wooden bridge over Redbud Run at the battlefield’s heart, you might feel goosebumps as you look eastward over a picturesque riparian landscape toward the Foundation’s newly acquired 209-acre Huntsberry Farm. It was on this property that Union leader Col. Rutherford B. Hayes and his men charged into the stream, slogging through waist-high mud to engage enemy fire. Chase Miller manages land conservation for the Foundation. Reflecting on the enthusiasm of the partners to protect Redbud Run and Third Winchester Battlefield, he said, “Our primary goal is to protect both the natural and cultural resources of the Huntsberry Farm. We’re currently clearing invasive species and debris from the property so that we may undertake archaeological studies and further restoration work to protect and interpret the farm’s historic landscape.”

Trout Fishery

Leaving the quiet farmlands of the Foundation’s Huntsberry Farm, Redbud Run benefits from the lush canopy of tall sycamore, box elder, and walnut trees that shade its riffling water. Here, before its confluence with Opequon Creek and eventual flow into the Potomac, another 33 acres—including 1.3 miles of Redbud Run access—were part of yet another conservation effort won by the partners and accepted for ongoing management by DGIF in 2005. Although this area might be smaller than many DGIF-held properties, it illustrates the Department’s deep commitment to stream and habitat conservation, as well as its

Rain provides essential moisture for living resources and replenishes water levels in streams. Unfortunately, in urban settings significant negative effects also occur: Stormwater running off of sidewalks, roads, and roofs can carry petroleum products, animal waste, fertilizers, pesticides, and household chemicals into our streams and impact fisheries. Runoff volume and pollutants increase, water quality decreases, and water temperatures rise. Management of stormwater impact is an essential ingredient in the battle to protect Redbud Run and a major need for many streams in Virginia.

Install rain gardens! They mimic some of the valuable functions of riparian areas along streams. Rain gardens use native plants and grasses to capture the first “flush” from rain events. You will gain groundwater recharge, increase beautiful and helpful vegetation in your yard, and provide more habitat for wildlife. You can collect runoff from your roof in practical, purchased or homemade rain barrels. Be creative and have fun.

Join the battle: There are many ways you can help protect your local watershed and, in turn, save larger watersheds downstream.
willingness to engage in collaborative efforts. Plans are to open a “Redbud Run Conservation Area” which will, in conjunction with the greenway, provide trails, walking paths, wildlife viewing, and fishing opportunities. The property is home to a millrace and a rugged old barn that one day could be renovated for an education center. The overall greenway project is receiving funding and technical assistance from the U.S. Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program, administered by the DOE.

Protecting and encouraging the delicate balance that is stream health requires patience over the long term, study, and planning. To this end, DGIF Fisheries Biologist Steve Reeser regularly monitors fish populations throughout the length of the stream. Using electrofishing methodology, fish are meticulously counted, weighed, and measured, with all data recorded for analysis.

The challenge at Redbud, Reeser explains, is its unique marl geology in which “precipitate from super-saturated calcium carbonate in the water impairs trout reproduction by filling in spaces between pebbles necessary for spawning and smothering eggs in redds. This geo-chemical phenomenon is natural but can keep trout populations from reaching maximum potential.”

Stream bottom macroinvertebrates, or the “aquatic insect populations, crustaceans, mollusks, and more—food sources for trout—can also be limited by marl,” said Reeser. Macroinvertebrate numbers serve as indicators of water quality. Here, Winchester TU shines in conducting regular studies of the benthic community. More meticulous counting! Saving streams is hard work.

The property, as well as locations around Fay Spring, provides opportunities for five Frederick County schools to participate in TU’s flagship “Trout in the Classroom” program. Spearheaded and funded by Winchester TU, students raise brook trout from fertilized eggs provided by the Department. Carefully monitoring water temperature and clarity, pH, and levels of oxygen and ammonia, participants learn the importance of clean water and environmental protection. Fry are released into Redbud Run.

Conservation Victory

The campaign for watershed conservation and historical preservation of Redbud Run is multi-faceted and stirring. Much has been accomplished, even skirmishes worked through. Tasks remain, but victory is in sight. The completed greenway will truly honor the men who perished here, but the highest honor to those fallen men is the ongoing dedication, commitment, and countless hours of hard work that each individual and organization contributes to make the Redbud vision a reality.

For More Information:

Civil War Preservation Trust, Third Battle of Winchester
www.civilwar.org/battlefields/third-winnerchtm.html

Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation
www.shenandoahatwar.org

Winchester Trout Unlimited and Trout in the Classroom
www.winchestertu.org/About_TIC.htm

Redbud Run Conservation Area
www.winchestertu.org/Red_Bud_Run.htm

DGIF Habitat at Home DVD—Native Plants
www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat/dvh/

Department of Forestry—Rain Gardens

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