Plantings last step for shoreline

By PETER HECK
pheck@chespub.com

Kent News 12/3/09

[redacted] — The living shoreline at Wilmer Park is getting its final touches.

Monday, a crew finished planting the native marsh grasses that will hold the shoreline intact and provide habitat for birds, fish, frogs, turtles and other small shoreline creatures.

Kees de Mooy, the town's zoning assistant, and Tom Leigh, the Chester River Association Riverkeeper, watched workers from Environmental Concerns, the site contractor, install the plantings. Leigh, one of the original advocates of the project, was there to lend a hand in its completion.

"It's going to be a significant improvement, both biologically and esthetically," Leigh said on Wednesday. "Time will tell what the plants will do for the runoff and the habitat," he added. He said the project was one of several along the river's length, including one at Eastern Neck, another near the mouth of Langford Creek, and one on the Queen Anne's side, near the mouth of Corsica River.

The conversion of the "hard" bulkhead to a living shoreline was funded by $115,000 in grants from the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the Keith Campbell Foundation, NOAA and the Maryland Department of the Environment.

A steady drizzle began shortly after the start of work, and turned into a solid rain by late morning. It definitely reduced the number of volunteers, although de Mooy singled out Brenda Strange and Andy Goddard as two who "put their heads down and went to work." Also, he said several school classes that had expressed an interest were unable to come

See PARK
Page A13

PARK

From
Page A1

because permission slips hadn't been completed in time, partly because the planting came so soon after the Thanksgiving holiday.

Still the plantings went smoothly in spite of the weather. About 10 volunteers came out, and the main planting work — almost 10,000 plants in approximately 500 feet of shoreline — was done by noon, de Mooy said. He said he was pleased that it had gone so smoothly.

Environmental Concerns workers had prepared the riverbank for planting by removing the decaying creosoted bulkhead and dredging up several decades' accumulation of rubbish (including a large selection of antique bottles) that covered the bottom just below the waterline. A fine net was laid over the bottom to contain the remaining debris. Workers then covered the mud flats that used to appear at low tide with a gently sloping sandy beach.

At the riverside edge of the new beach, a low stone sill was put in place to minimize erosion caused by storms and the wakes of passing boats. Along the shoreline near the college boathouse, a set of low concrete steps was installed to provide a launching area for canoes and kayaks. Leigh said he thought the launch would encourage people to develop a more active relationship with the river, making them more aware of the need to protect it.

The planting routine was simple. One worker used a gasoline-powered auger to bore one-inch holes in the sand; a second placed a small scoop of fertilizer in the hole, and a third dropped in the grass seedlings. The grasses are to cover the entire width of shoreline between the stone sill and the park surface.

The crews planted two different varieties of spartina. On the lower beach, just inland from the rock buffer, the choice was smooth cordgrass (*spartina alterniflora*), which does well in wetter conditions and grows between three and five feet high. Higher up the slope, the workers planted salt marsh hay (salt meadow cordgrass or *spartina patens*), which is between one and two feet high when mature.

Both species protect against erosion, and are also a favorite food source for ducks. Also, the larvae of some species of butterflies and moths feed on cordgrass.

Above the spartina is a zone of mixed vegetation, including switchgrass. That zone reaches to the edge of the park itself, where the walking path is to be replaced to complete the restoration.

After a lunch break, the workers installed string fencing to protect the plants from ducks and geese until they reach their full growth. Leigh said the low grasses should be well established by this time next year. The taller grasses will take two years to reach their full growth, and the switchgrass will probably require three years to reach its full growth, he said.