Tapping Homeowners Associations for Successful Stormwater Management Projects

Watershed Congress Along the Schuylkill River

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Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

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The Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) **protects and restores the NATURAL & BUILT ENVIRONMENTS** through innovation, collaboration, education and advocacy.

PEC believes in the value of partnerships with the private sector, government, communities and individuals to improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

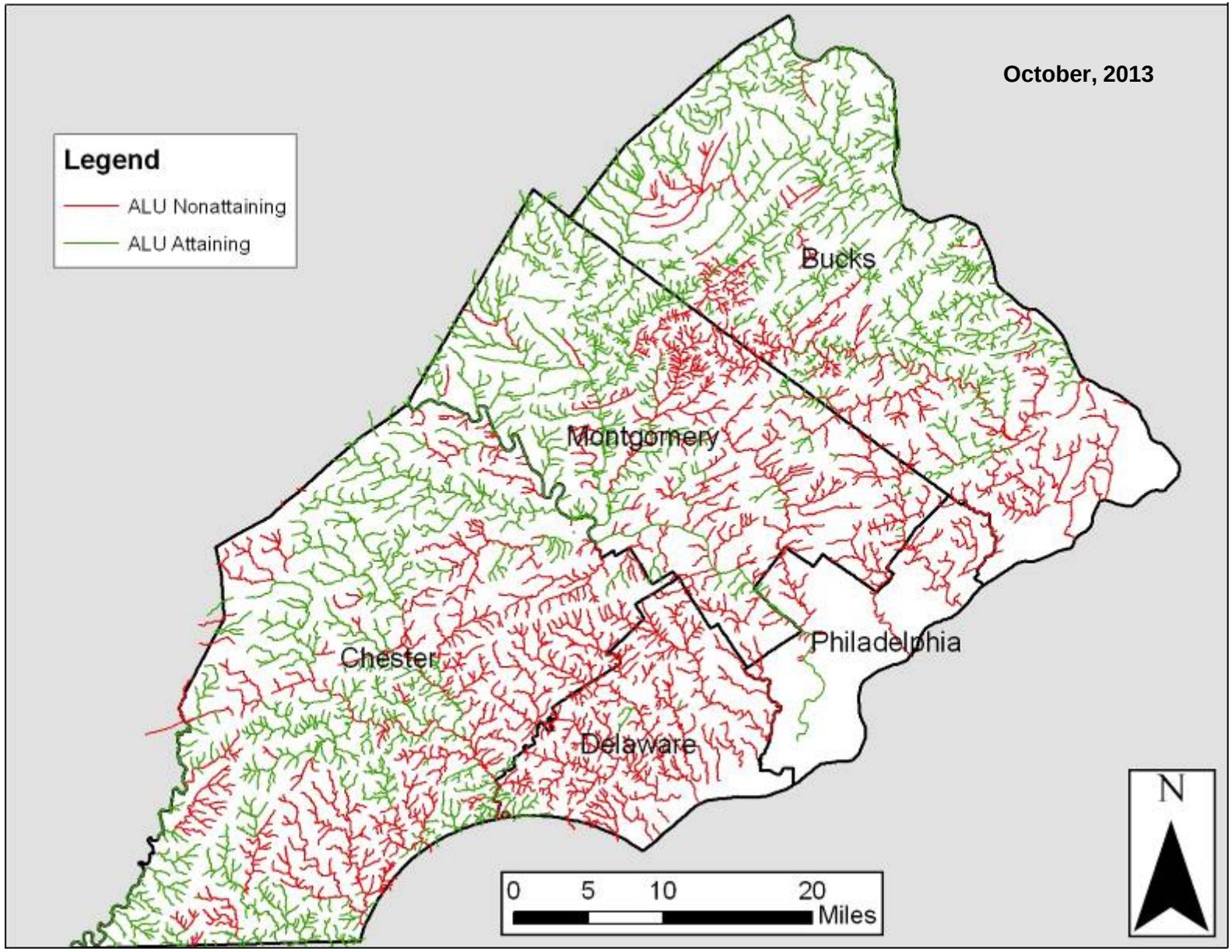
Celebrating 50 years 1964-2014

Dedicated to serving the people and communities of the Perkiomen Watershed by conserving and protecting land and water resources through commitment to and leadership in environmental education, watershed stewardship, and conservation programs.

Why Do This?

Increased collaboration to
minimize non-point source pollution and
improve watershed health.

ALU Assessment, PA SER



Sources of Impairments

- Sediment
- Siltation from urban runoff, storm sewers and habitat modification due to non-point source pollution and wet weather stream flows

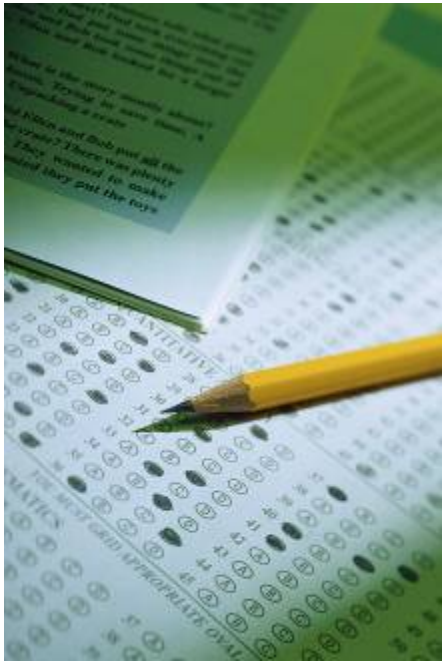
What's the Connection?

- HOAs represent landowner group not previously targeted for stormwater management outreach or education
- All owners within an HOA are collectively responsible for maintaining certain real estate or facilities
- HOAs control large number of stormwater basins
- Municipalities not required to maintain, but ultimately responsible for flows directly entering municipal stormwater systems
- Opportunity to assist in management of other sensitive lands owned by HOAs

Common Interest Communities

- Ownership and access to common land and facilities are shared
- Owners automatically become members and are subject to Association rules
- Owners are responsible to pay a regular fee or assessment to the Association that is used to maintain common land and facilities
- HOAs: 50%, Condos: 45-48%, Cooperatives: 3-5%

Pop Survey!

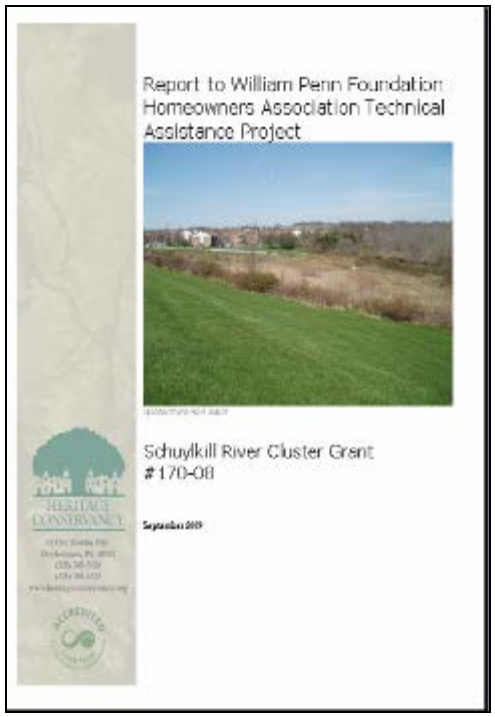


Statistics*

- 1970: 10,000
- 2006: 286,000
- 2012: 323,600 (24% of US homes)
  - 25.9 million units
  - 63.4 million residents
  - PA – 6,400 HOAs, representing about 1.5 million residents in 512,000 housing units.

*Foundation for Community Association Research, “Statistical Review 2012”

2009 HOA Study



Schuylkill Action Network

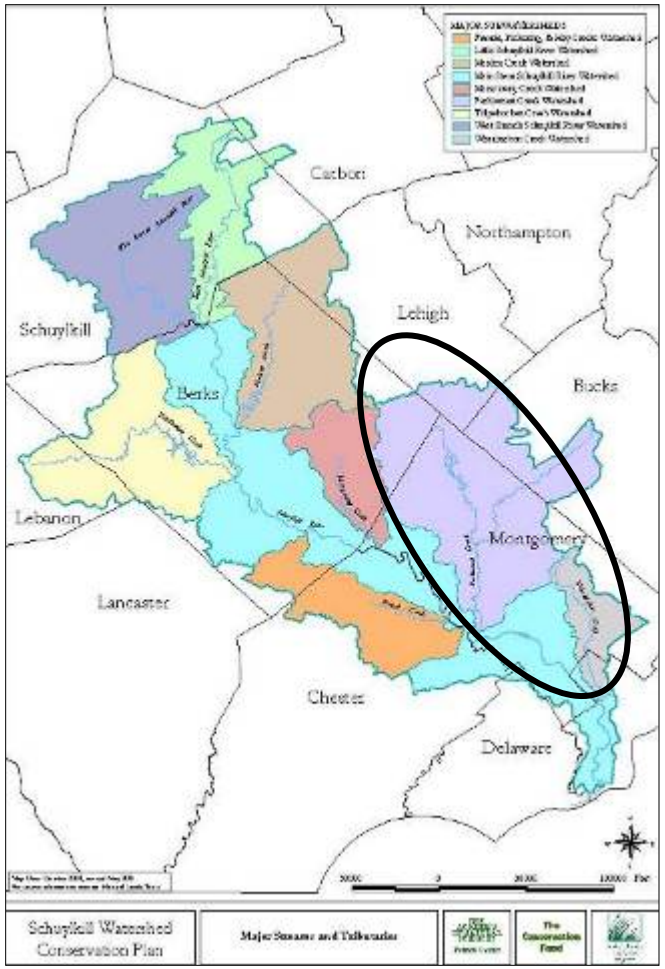
HERITAGE CONSERVANCY

ACCREDITED LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION

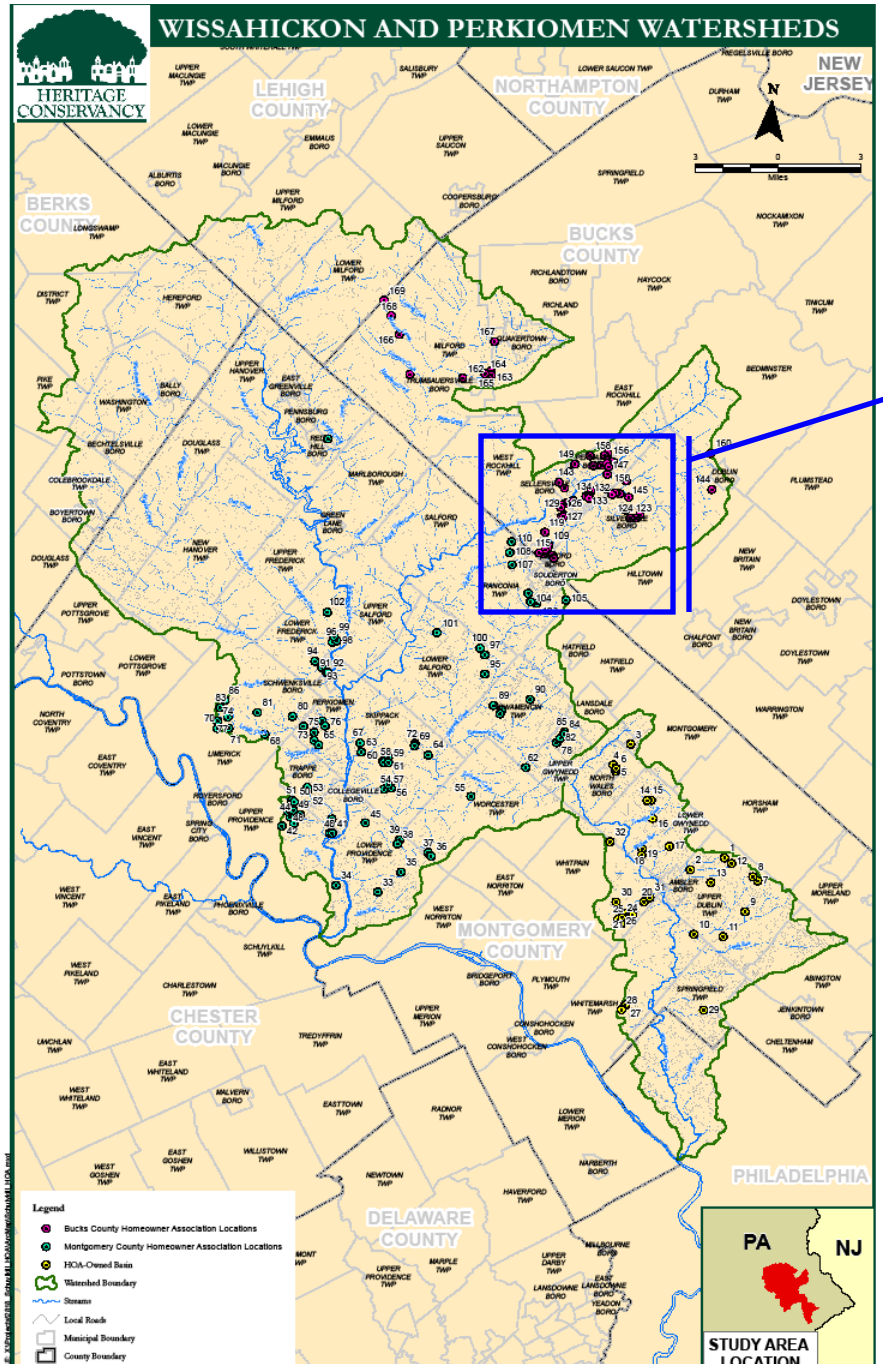
WISSAHICKON WATERSHED valley ASSOCIATION

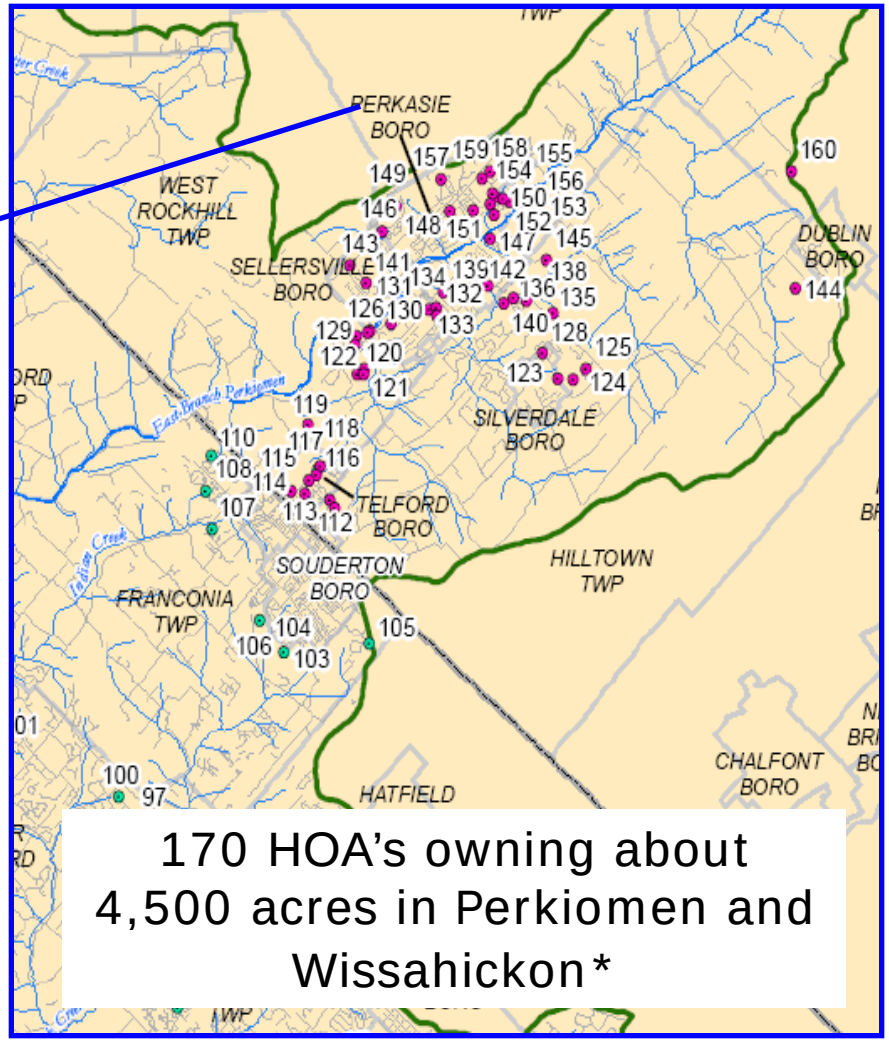
Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

PENNSYLVANIA AND DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER community ASSOCIATIONS INSTITUTE



Finding HOAs



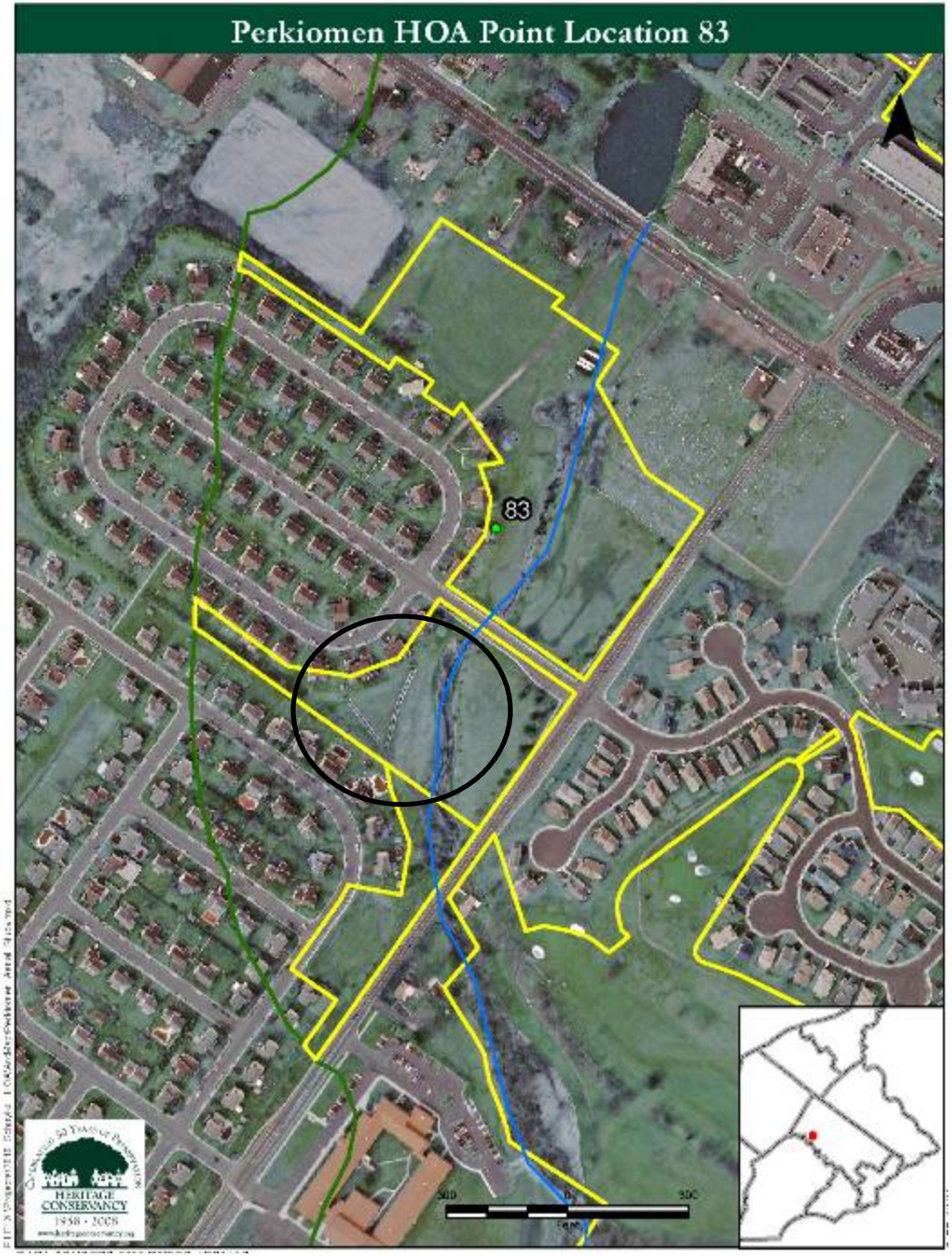


170 HOA's owning about 4,500 acres in Perkiomen and Wissahickon*

*Heritage Conservancy – 2009 Study

Study Findings

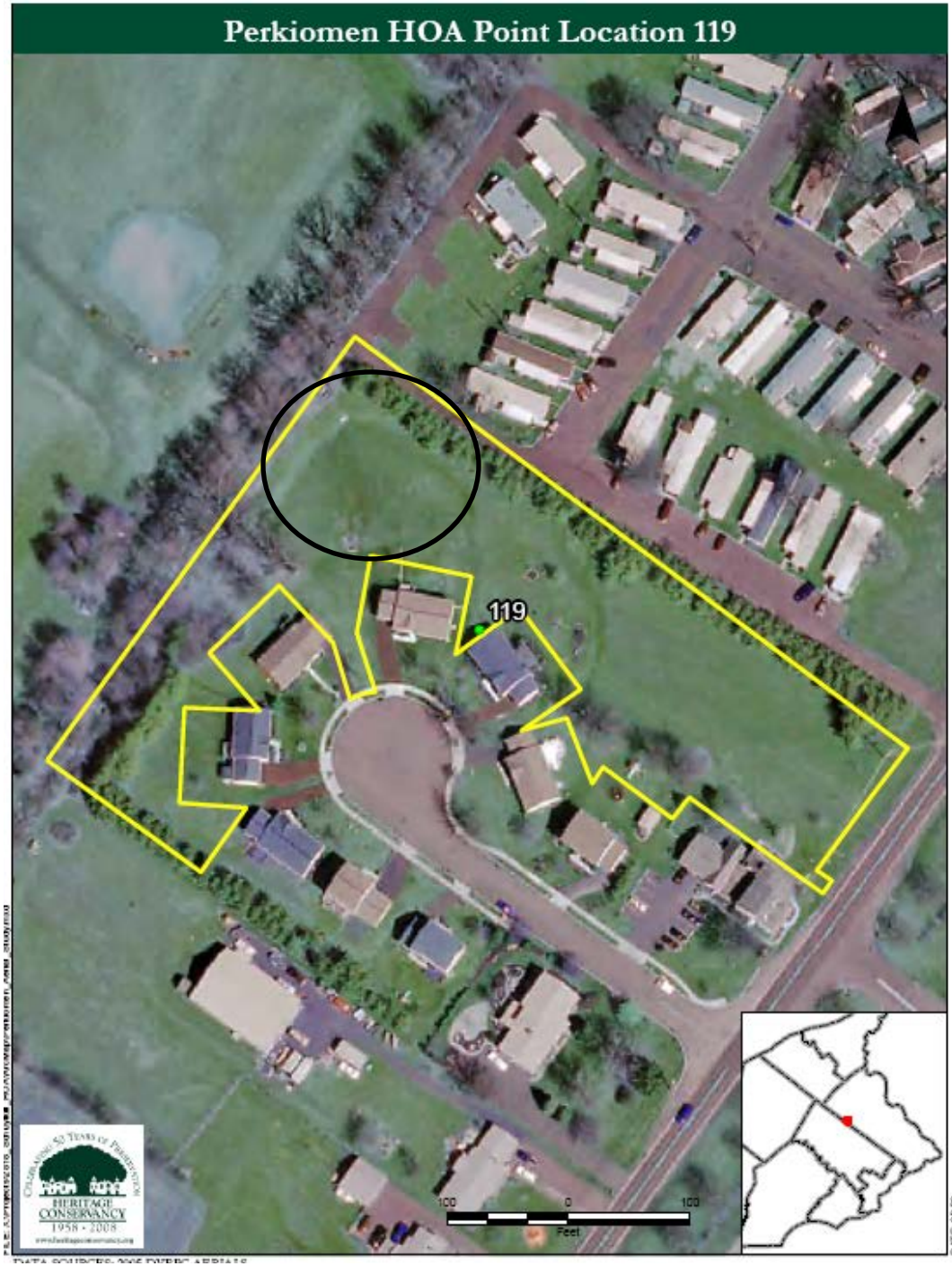
- Some HOA land holdings can be identified via tax parcel data.
- HOAs are responsible for hundreds of stormwater facilities and thousands of acres of land.
- HOAs rely heavily on their managers or management firms to make decisions.
- CC&Rs usually contain provisions for care of property.



HOA Example:

Dry bottom basin with concrete low-flow channel

*66% of HOAs had clearly identifiable stormwater infrastructure



HOA Example:

Dry bottom basin

Why Basins?

- Engineered to address large rainstorms only
- Do not address water quality issues
- Do not enhance infiltration
- Capture and concentrate storm flows, increasing velocity, volume and erosive power
- Sterile environments
- Expensive to maintain

Shortcomings of Traditional Basins

Concrete low-flow channels heat runoff and quickly transport it through a basin, without filtering it.

Mown grasses develop shallow root systems, which can lead to erosion in high velocity flows. Mown grass has little ability to filter stormwater.

HOA Basin & Land Management

- HOA or homeowner responsible for basin maintenance
- Mowing costs vary between 10% to over 50% of landscape budget
- Most interested in naturalizing basins
- Nearly all are interested in living in a community recognized for meeting environmental standards
- Most residents don’t know how open space is managed

HOAs: A Great Resource

- Impervious development
- Large tracts of open space/common property
- Own and manage stormwater infrastructure, much of which is out-dated
- Board able to make decisions for community
- Plenty of volunteers
- Ability to work with an entire community

Barriers

- No access to tax revenue that municipalities have to help fund maintenance of facilities
- CC&Rs may restrict certain sustainable land management practices (difficult to amend)
- Individual homeowners not familiar with naturalized areas (look or sounds)

Making Connections

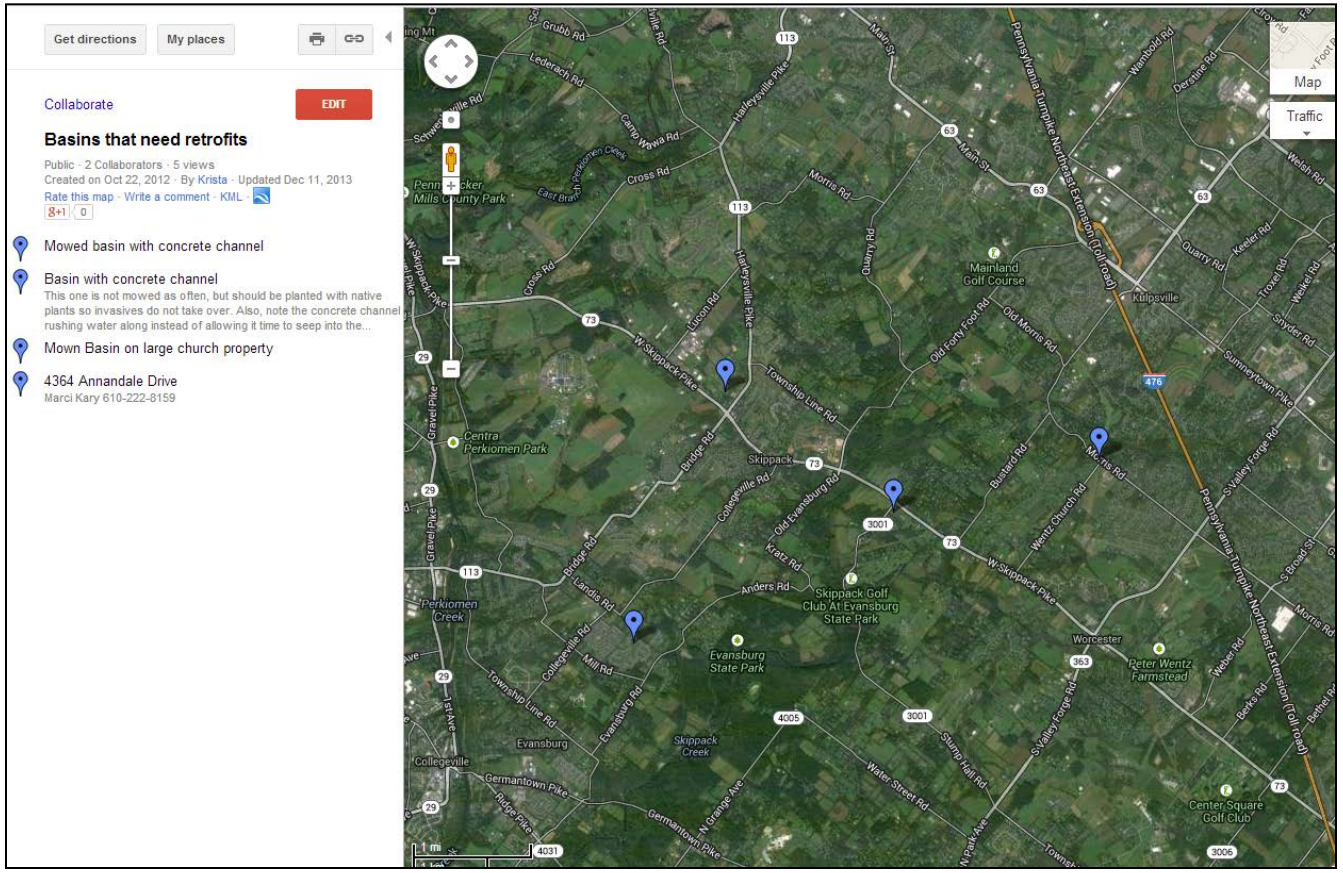
- Host a meeting to educate HOAs
- Invite them to partner

Incentive for HOAs

- Better water quality
- Improvements to community infrastructure for little or no cost
- Decrease in maintenance costs
- Designation as an environmentally friendly community
- Aesthetic and recreational benefits

Site-first Technique

- Locate landowners
- Harder to sell project and gain cooperation



Selecting Project Partners

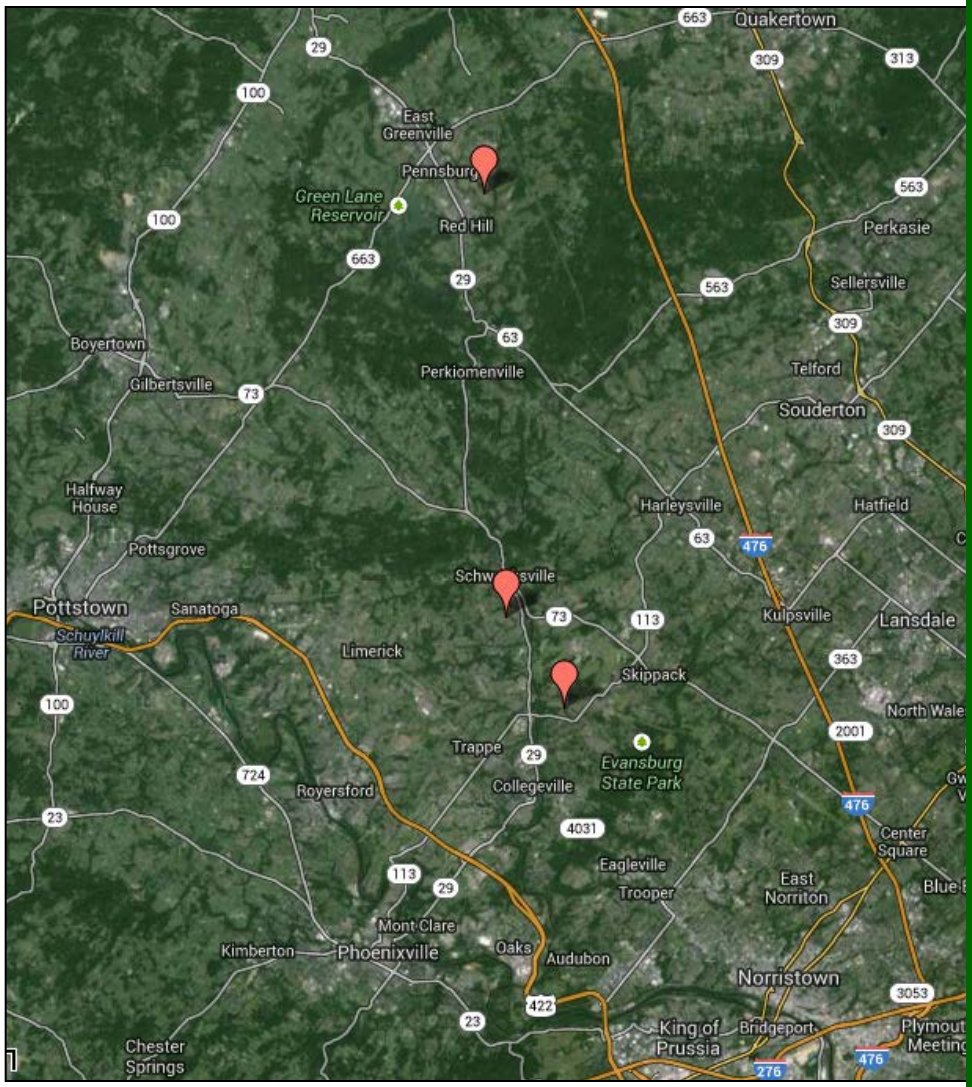
- Find out level of knowledge
- Entire HOA should be on board with the project
- Make sure they accept maintenance responsibilities

Funding

- DEP Growing Greener
- DEP Environmental Education
- Schuylkill River Restoration Fund
- WREN Watershed Grants
- Foundations, i.e. Cora L. Brooks
- Corporate Grants
- TreeVitalize Grants

Case Studies

- Vineyards Community
  Pennsburg, PA
- Skippack Meadows
  Skippack, PA
- Mayfield Estates
  Schwenksville, PA



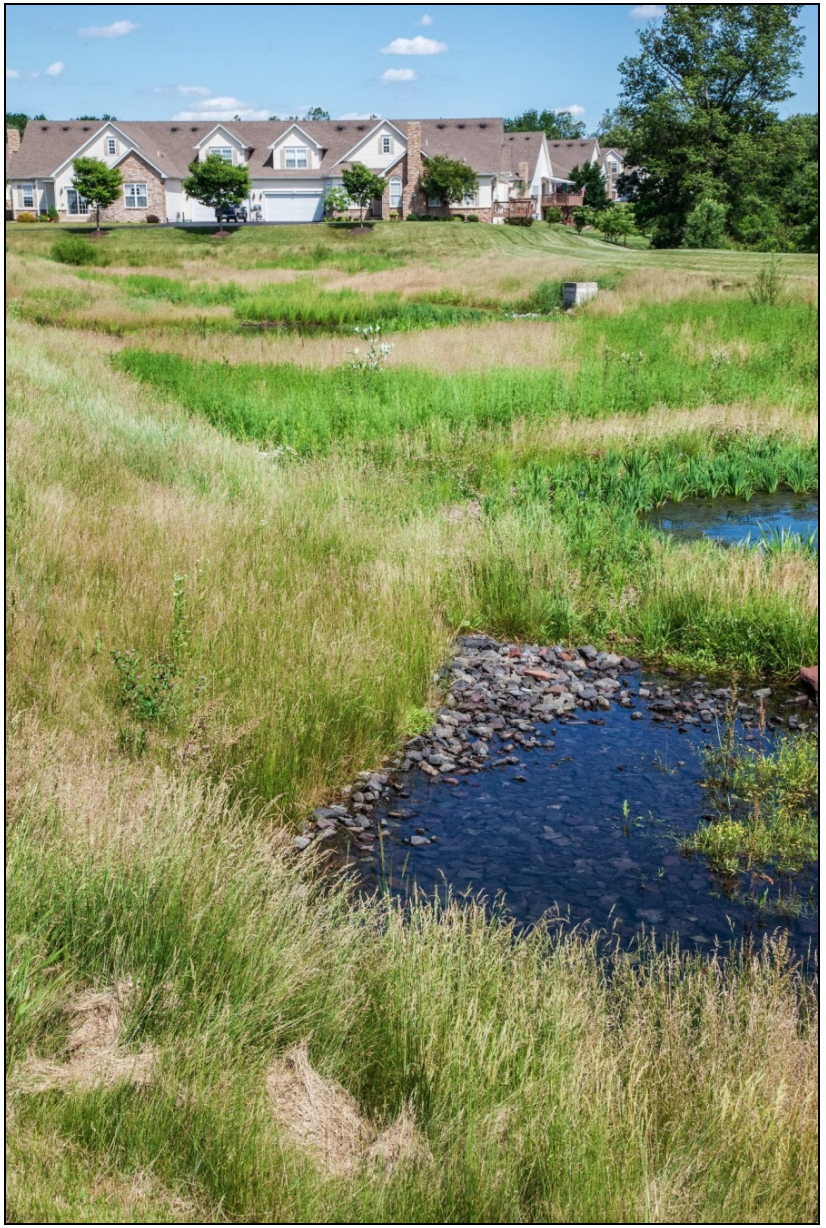
Vineyards Community

- DEP Growing Greener
- Re-graded and planted
  3 stormwater basins

Community Involvement

- Worked with HOA Chair and “Stormwater Basins Committee”
- Education components: survey, brochure, letter to residents
- Data collection done by residents
- 800+ volunteer hours from the community

Before and After



One year later…

Reasons for Success

- HOA extremely involved throughout project
- HOA not worried about cost of maintenance
- Trust among partners (complete transparency)

Lessons Learned

- Stress patience to the residents
- Even when you educate ahead of time, some people will still oppose the project
- Monitor progress as much as possible
- Do not use wood chip mulch in a stormwater basin!

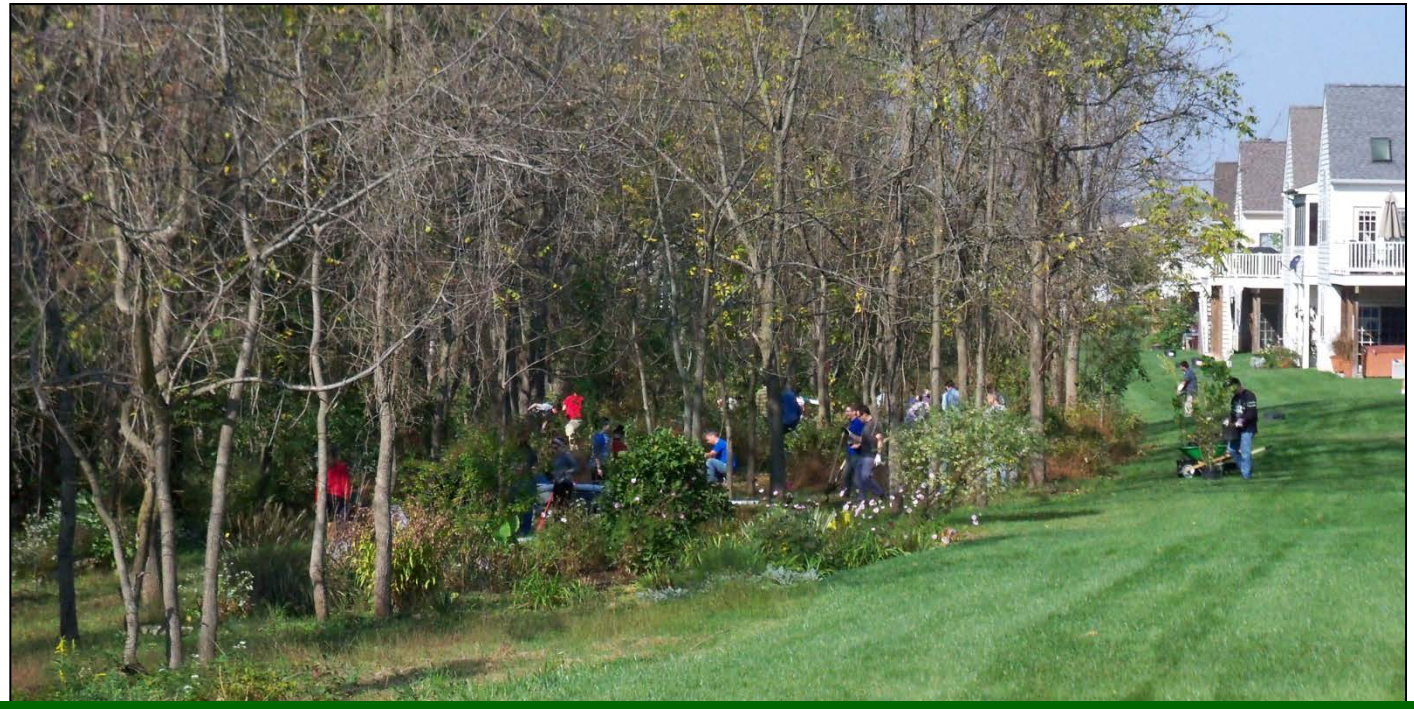
Environmental Award for Land Use

Skippack Meadows Community

- 3 TreeVitalize Grants 2010-2012
- Remove invasive plant species and plant 1000 native trees and shrubs along waterway

Community Involvement

- Worked with “Natural Lands Committee”
- Some education prior to planting
- Invasive removal
- Few planting volunteers



Lessons learned

- Invasive species
- Take-over of common space by individuals
- Rejection of trees…even with education
- Make sure HOA is ready to enforce rules

Mayfield Estates Community

- 4 TreeVitalize Grants
- Planted 7 stormwater basins with native trees, shrubs and perennials

Community Involvement

- Worked with HOA President
- Letter sent out to residents prior to planting
- Many residents volunteered to plant

Successes

- Recognized with Stormwater BMP Award
- Decreased mowing by 60%
  - $60,000 to $30,000 a year
- Community dues cut in half!
- Residents love naturalized area, wildflowers and birds

Lessons Learned

- Educate about yard waste disposal
- Younger communities may be less involved in the planning process but more accepting of change

Take-away Points

- Make lasting connections with HOA members
- Select willing and able project partners
- Stress the big picture when applying for funding
- Educate, educate, educate
- Leave HOAs with clear O&M Plan
- Monitor project sites and stay in touch with project partners


Questions?