

News from the

Plaster Creek Stewards

Fall 2012

Volume 3

Plaster Creek Stewards Fall Event: Loving our Downstream Neighbor



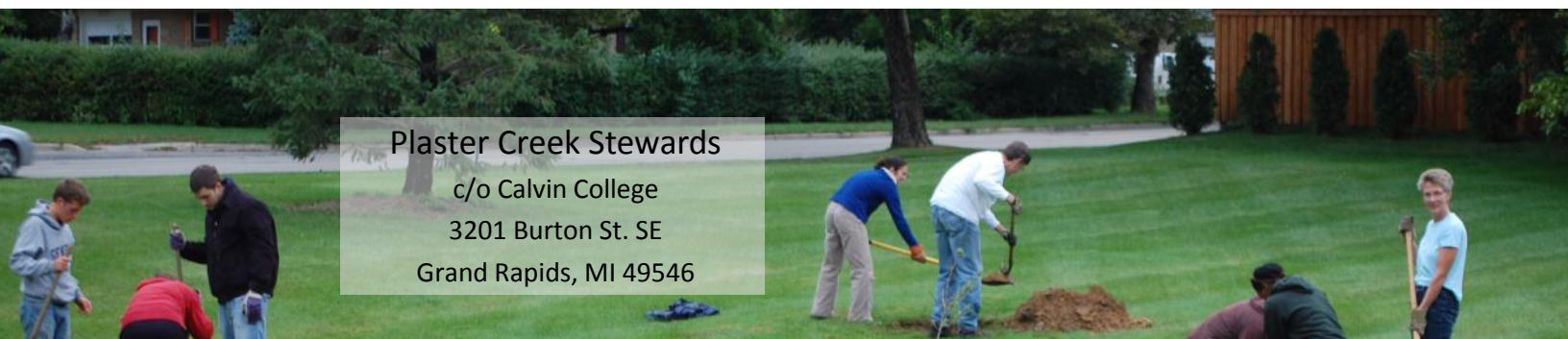
Federal dollars will focus on education, restoration

We are pleased to have been awarded a grant by Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. These funds, provided as part of the Clean Water Act, will allow us to lead significant watershed restoration and education projects for the next two years. The award totals \$375,662, and every dollar is earmarked for activities related to educating watershed residents and restoring the creek. On-the-ground restoration work will focus on four sites in different areas of the watershed. At three of the sites, we will be building bioretention areas (large, engineered rain gardens) to capture stormwater from parking lots that drain to Plaster Creek. These sites are located at Shadyside Park (in Dutton), behind the Mel Trotter Store on 28th Street, and on Calvin's campus near the Ecosystem Preserve. We will also be using native plants to re-vegetate Kreiser Pond, which retains stormwater from the Eastgate Neighborhood. Two of these projects will be underway during spring 2013, with the other two the following year. Partners in this project include WMEAC (West Michigan Environmental Action Council), the Kent Conservation District, and the Center for Environmental Study, who will help develop educational programs and workshops for teachers, farmers, and policymakers. We'll need lots of help, so stay tuned for volunteer opportunities!

On September 22, we held our Plaster Creek Stewards fall event. The theme of this event focused on being a good neighbor to those downstream—in our own community, the Great Lakes, and in Canada. More than 60 people of all ages gathered at the Bunker Interpretive Center at Calvin College to learn about watersheds in general and the connection between the Plaster Creek watershed and the St. Lawrence River watershed. After the educational presentation, we split into two groups to install rain gardens, one upstream and one further downstream. Rain gardens help absorb stormwater and decrease the amount of run-off that enters the creek. The first site was at Brookside Christian Reformed Church, where trees were planted as a first step for a rain garden which will be installed after the re-grading of their parking lot. The second rain garden, which will reduce stormwater inputs to an upstream tributary of Plaster Creek, was installed at Lakeside School in East Grand Rapids. Funding for these rain gardens was provided by a small Eco-Leadership grant from the Canadian Fulbright Foundation. Thanks to Professor Janel Curry for securing this grant!



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If you plant it, they will come! Why we use native plants in the watershed

By Dave Warners

One warm evening this summer, I was eating dinner with my 15-year old daughter Rachel on our backyard porch. Suddenly, a fluttering Giant Swallowtail butterfly grabbed our attention. In the 16 years we've lived in Alger Heights, I've only once before seen a Giant Swallowtail, Michigan's largest butterfly, in Grand Rapids. As the impressive black and yellow insect was slowly cruising around, I explained to Rachel that one of its only two host species in Michigan is the Hop Tree, just like the one growing beside our deck. Then we watched as the butterfly perched on a leaf of the Hop Tree after nectaring on a few of the blooming Asters in our wildflower garden. As soon as it flew away, Rachel ran over to check and see if it had laid an egg—sure enough, she found a small egg attached to the leaf where the butterfly had been. As she was standing there excitedly describing the egg to me, the Swallowtail returned and landed on another leaf less than two feet from Rachel's face. She stood perfectly still, and an amazed expression emerged on her face as the creature laid another egg right in front of her nose. It was a magical moment for the both of us.

My butterfly field guide says that Giant Swallowtails are 'not tolerant of urban development'. This experience with the Swallowtail in our backyard made me wonder whether it's really urban development these butterflies don't tolerate, or if it's *the way* we do urban development that contributes to their decline. Hop trees and Prickly ash (its other host species) are shrubs not typically used in traditional urban landscaping. But maybe these creatures would be more common in our urban neighborhoods if we planted more of the native plants that they depend on.

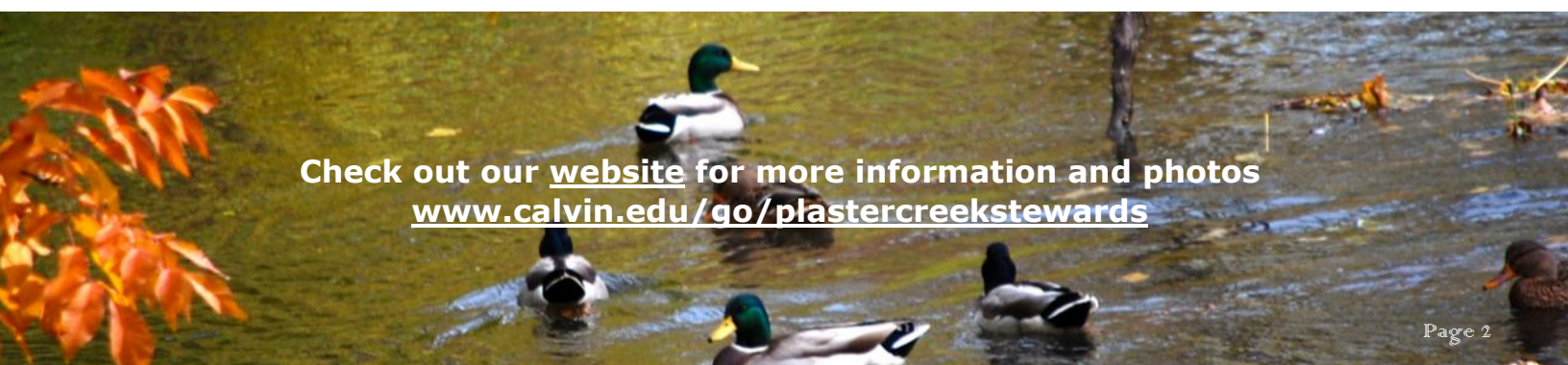
This is one of the main reasons Plaster Creek Stewards advocates planting native plants in the watershed - to benefit the native insects, birds, and other organisms that need these plants to survive. Because we have planted native plants in our home landscaping, our yard represents something of an island of native vegetation in a broader sea of houses, streets, parking lots, and turf grass. The closest Hop tree I know of is in Ken-O-Sha Park, over a mile (as the butterfly flies!) from our house. Yet our little backyard island was sufficient to benefit this one beautiful butterfly. More such islands would mean more benefits to Giant Swallowtails and to the other native creatures with whom we share this part of the creation – our Plaster Creek Watershed.

Exploring Plaster Creek's History

By Kristin DuMez, associate professor of History

During this fall semester Calvin students enrolled in U.S. Social and Cultural History have teamed up with the Plaster Creek Stewards to contribute to our community's understanding of the history of the Plaster Creek Watershed. Six groups of students are researching different aspects of this history, including the history of an upstream farm, a local industry in the watershed (Kelvinator), a suburban neighborhood (Alger Heights), a local park (Ken-O-Sha), and an urban neighborhood (Roosevelt Park). The final group, "History Happened Here," is experimenting with innovative technologies that can help make the history of the watershed more accessible to the public.

After a fabulous tour of the watershed led by the leadership team of the Plaster Creek Stewards, students are now hard at work writing historiographical essays on their specific group assignments. They will then work in groups to conduct local archival research and gather oral histories, and at the end of the semester they will present their research at the Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP) poster session, and turn their research over to the Plaster Creek Stewards in order to contribute to the ongoing study of the watershed. Thus far the students have benefited from the gifted leadership, helpful contacts, and excellent work the Stewards have already accomplished and students are eager to contribute new sources and perspectives to the project's growing understanding of the cultural history of the watershed. At the same time students are gaining critical practical skills (often in areas relating to their intended vocational pursuits) that will undoubtedly serve them well in their future endeavors. If you are interested in seeing the students' findings, join us at Calvin on December 6 between 3:30-5:00 in the Chapel Undercroft (basement) for the CEAP Poster Session.



Check out our [website](http://www.calvin.edu/go/plastercreekstewards) for more information and photos
www.calvin.edu/go/plastercreekstewards