Water Matters –March 2009
"Two Upcoming Community Events & Water Quality"

This spring, two local events will allow Page County citizens to get outside, get some exercise, and help their community.

The 8th annual Take Pride in Page County Week litter cleanup will be held April 6 – April 13, 2009 with prize money going to the top six teams who register for the litter competition and which pick up the most trash. Garbage can be collected from Page County roads or streams, taken to Battlecreek Landfill, and the teams which pick up the most amount of trash win prize money donated from local businesses.

"It's too bad that we have to clean up after those who don't know how to take care of their own trash," says Chris Anderson, Page County environmental coordinator. "Fortunately, we also have citizens who do care about the county and are willing to get out during this week and spring clean the roads and streams. Although registration for the litter competition ends April 3, you can still get out and pick up trash without registering. Even one bag will help!"

Trash that gets thrown out on roadsides often ends up in our waterways. In city limits and urban areas, stormwater systems are designed to collect all rainfall and dump it directly into our waterways. This means soda cans, Styrofoam, plastics, fast food containers and everything else not disposed of properly can get washed into the nearest stream, harming fish and wildlife-even drinking water for livestock.

The other event coming up this spring is a stream corridor assessment for the Mill Creek and its two main tributaries. Students from the geographical information system (GIS) classes at Page County High School and Luray High School will be joining volunteers from the Water Quality Advisory Committee, landowners and other local citizens to conduct a stream corridor assessment (SCA) of the Mill Creek Watershed. A professional with the Izaak Walton League will be training the volunteers on what to look for as they walk along Mill Creek including areas of erosion, pipe outfalls, condition of riparian buffers, in or near stream construction, channel alterations, stream crossings and other stream-related issues. The stream assessment will allow volunteers to rapidly assess the general physical condition of a stream system. The students will be gathering GPS location coordinates to accurately map all of the sites inventoried. The maps and other information gathered during the survey will support the future preparation of a watershed management plan for Mill Creek and guide subsequent restoration activities.

"We have successfully conducted stream corridor assessments in other portions of the Chesapeake Bay region and are excited about working in the Mill Creek Watershed," says trainer Leah Miller with the Izaak Walton League. "We received funding for the SCA through the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation and are now in need of local volunteers to help with the project." Local volunteers are extremely important to the success of the assessment and watershed plan.

Mill Creek is approximately eight miles long, from its headwaters in Stanley to its confluence with the South Fork of the Shenandoah River near Hamburg. Eight teams of about five people each will be walking along the stream in one mile increments, taking photographs and gathering data.

Volunteers are needed for both Take Pride in Page County Week and the Stream Corridor Assessment. For more information, contact Chris Anderson at 540-743-4808 or canderson@pagecounty.virginia.gov. This is the fourteenth in a series of articles addressing Page County's Water Resources and was written by Chris Anderson