

# STORM WATER EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL & MCLEAN COUNTY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



THE ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER HAS COMPLETED THE FOLLOWING TASKS AS PART OF THE STORM WATER EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROGRAM AGREEMENT OF FEBURARY 1, 2019.

## **2020 TOTAL REACH: 218,645 INTERACTIONS**

DIRECT (PROGRAMS, EVENTS, PHONE INQUIRIES): 1,213

INDIRECT (NEWSPAPER, RADIO, SOCIAL MEDIA, WEB): 217,432

## **EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**During the first quarter of 2020 we held our traditional in-person classroom clean water programs.**

### **Clean Water 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Classroom Programs**

- Bloomington
  - Sheridan Elementary School; 3 classes, 57 students
  - Pepper Ridge Elementary; 3 classes, 54 students
  - Washington Elementary School; 3 classes, 65 students
  - Stevenson Elementary School; 2 classes, 46 students
  - Cedar Ridge Elementary; 4 classes, 77 students
    - **Total: 4 schools, 15 classes, 299 students**
  
- Normal
  - Epiphany Catholic School; 1 class, 30 students
  - Fairview Elementary; 2 classes, 50 students
  - Calvary Christian Academy; 1 class, 15 students
    - **Total: 3 schools, 4 classes, 95 students**
  
- McLean County
  - Tri-Valley Elementary School; 4 classes, 87 students
    - **Total: 1 school, 4 classes, 87 students**

### **Classroom Clean Water Programs**

To continue elementary outreach despite school closures during the coronavirus pandemic, we created new alternative outreach, "Elementary Online" programs which launched in May.

*Watershed Down StoryMakers* is geared toward children ages 7-12. Each small group session starts with a basic story, and participants are asked to make decisions, and invent new elements to add to the story, and roll a few dice to create unique adventures in the wonderful world of our watersheds.

- Watershed Down StoryMakers held 6 sessions reaching 19 students

*The Wonder Ears Book Club* is a read-aloud experience for children ages 5-12. Just like a grown-up book club, participants are invited to share their ideas, ask questions, and discuss the reading. Story topics include clean water, recycling, and energy conservation.

- Wonder Ears Book Club held 7 sessions in this quarter with a story about water conservation reaching 17 students.
  - Videos of the Wonder Ears Book Club are also posted on YouTube and were viewed 59 times.

## INFORMATIONAL EVENTS – COMMUNITY-WIDE

- Presentations about storm water runoff pollution, clean water, and watersheds:
  - Presentation for Epiphany Jr. High on watershed health and EAC's clean water programs reaching 2 classes (35 students)
  - Presentation to the Lexington Ladies' Club about watershed health and EAC's clean water program for 12 attendees
  - Presentation about Yard Smart gardening techniques at Home, Lawn and Garden Day with 20 attendees
  - Presentation to Tri-Valley sixth grade classes about watershed health and sources of water pollution for 4 classes (88 students)
  - McLean County State of the Environment Webinar which featured multiple guest speakers, including an aquatic ecologist from the Nature Conservancy who spoke about their work to protect McLean County Watersheds working with farmers to reduce agricultural runoff. 52 attendees participated in real time, with 654 views of the video after the live event.
  - EAC Earth Day Live event promoting EAC programs including Clean Water. 132 participants attended in real time via Facebook Live and YouTube with over 1,800 views in the days the followed the event.
  - Children's Discovery Museum Day of Play – the museum distributed take-home packets which included a nature scavenger hunt activity from the EAC emphasizing environmental stewardship – distributed to 1000 households reaching approximately 4000 residents.
  - Miller Park Zoo Zoosday after school program – Presentations/discussions on how water stewardship practices like minimizing usage of household/lawn and garden chemicals, keeping storm drains clean, and cleaning up after pets can positively affect particular animals and their ecosystems for Zoosday after-school program
    - Week 1 (15 attendees)
    - Week 2 (15 attendees)

- Week 3 (13 attendees)
  - Week 4 (13 attendees)
  - Week 5 (11 attendees)
  - Week 6 (12 attendees)
  - Week 7 (14 attendees)
- Informational tables sharing information about clean water and EAC's related programs:
    - Information table at Home, Lawn and Garden Day promoting the Yard Smart, rain barrels, and composting – 30 visitors

## SUGAR CREEK STEWARDS

Sugar Creek Stewards is designed to raise awareness about Sugar Creek as an important community storm water system and ecosystem. The EAC works with volunteers at designated sites to improve the overall health and aesthetics of Sugar Creek through invasive species control and removal, allowing native species to thrive.

- Bloomington
  - The January volunteer work day was cancelled due to icy weather. EAC staff spread seed mix shade tolerant native plant seed mix to the section of the creek bank south of Jersey Avenue at Ewing Park.
  - The February volunteer workday was cancelled due to weather.
  - The July workday was held at Ewing Park removing honeysuckle – 3 volunteers.
  - The September workday was held at Ewing Park removing honeysuckle – 10 volunteers.
  - The November workday was held at Ewing Park removing honeysuckle and other woody brush – 4 volunteers.
  - The December workday was held at Ewing Park seeding previously cleared areas with native, shade tolerant plant seeds – 1 volunteer.
- Normal
  - The August workday was held at Fairview Park removing honeysuckle and teasel heads – 4 volunteers.
  - The October workday was held at Fairview Park removing honeysuckle and other woody plants along with west side of the creek – 3 volunteers.



From March – June workdays were put on hold per the Coronavirus stay-at-home order.

## YARD SMART PROGRAM

The Ecology Action Center promotes gardening and lawn care practices that reduce storm water runoff and the need for chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. In the spring and summer the EAC offers rain barrel workshops and hosts an annual Yard Smart Garden Walk. Extensive time went into re-creating these events and educational programs to comply with COVID-19 social distancing and “stay-at-home” restrictions.

- Rain Barrels
  - While EAC staff were unable to hold traditional rain barrel construction workshops in this quarter due to coronavirus restrictions, we began production of a series of rain barrel tutorial videos. Staff created an online store for residents to purchase pre-built rain barrels which were delivered to residents in Bloomington and Normal at no additional cost. A total of 31 low-cost rain barrels were distributed this way.
  - The EAC partnered with the West Bloomington Revitalization Project to install rain barrels for 7 west side residents. The WBRP provided funds for the rain barrels and the EAC installed the rain barrels and educated residents on the benefits of rain barrels and proper use and storage.
- Virtual Yard Smart Garden Walk - The EAC hosted our first Virtual Yard Smart Garden Walk on July 22. The event featured pre-filmed tours of a home garden in Bloomington, a home garden in Normal, the West Washington Street Mom's Garden, the Refuge Food Forest, and a large restored prairie home garden near Secor, Illinois. We also featured a tutorial on proper mowing techniques from the City of Bloomington Parks Department staff. The video tour was followed by a live zoom panel discussion featuring guests from the City of Bloomington Parks Department, the Nature Conservancy, and Illinois Prairie Wild Ones. Panelists discussed the work they do and how it relates to clean water and environmental conservation, and then took questions from the audience. The event was broadcast on zoom for pre-registered participants, and was streamed live on the EAC's Facebook page. 102 people registered and participated through Zoo, an additional 25 on Facebook Live, and 32 other people viewed the event after it was posted on YouTube.





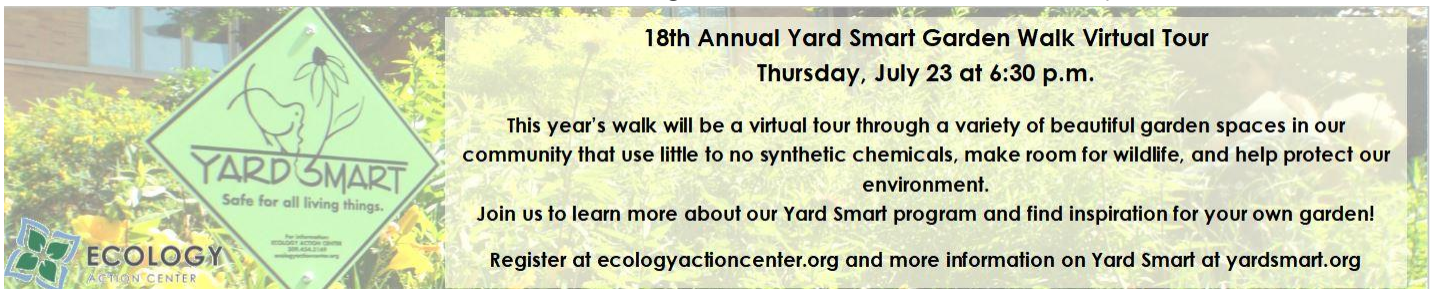
## COMMUNITY-WIDE OUTREACH EFFORTS

- Social Media
  - Weekly Facebook #WatershedWednesday posts to educate the public about clean water issues and storm water runoff pollution prevention – 65,041 impressions.
  - Weekly Twitter #WatershedWednesday posts to educate the public about clean water issues and storm water runoff pollution prevention – 16,108 impressions.
- EAC Newsletter
  - EAC's March electronic newsletter featured an article reminding residents that our water treatment systems cannot handle wipes being flushed; this newsletter was sent to 859 households.
  - EAC's Earth Day electronic newsletter featured information about the EAC's clean water efforts was sent to 857 households.
  - EAC's May electronic newsletter featured an article about Yard Smart and ways residents can keep their gardens environmentally friendly as they spend extra time at home during the pandemic; this was sent to 854 households.
  - EAC's June member newsletter featured an article promoting our online Yard Smart Garden Walk and an article about rain barrels; this was sent to 145 households.
  - EAC's July electronic newsletter featured articles promoting the Virtual Yard Smart Garden Walk and rain barrel purchase options. The e-newsletter was sent to 854 households.
  - EAC's August electronic newsletter featured an article about Yard Smart. The e-newsletter was sent to 851 households.
  - EAC's October electronic newsletter featured an article promoting proper disposal of fall leaves to prevent storm water pollution. The e-newsletter was sent to 848 households.
  - EAC's November electronic newsletter featured an article about different options for leaf management to keep them out of the storm drains. The e-newsletter was sent to 848 households.
  - EAC's December member newsletter featured an article about rain barrel winterization. The member newsletter was sent to 113 households.

- Websites [ecologyactioncenter.org](http://ecologyactioncenter.org) and [mCLEANwater.org](http://mCLEANwater.org)
  - EAC promoted clean water issues and strategies for water protection through resource-rich websites—15,033 visits.



- Radio Promotions
  - Radio Bloomington
    - WJBC - April Interview with Marc Strauss about the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day and the EAC's work, including our work in clean water promotion with our Sugar Creek Stewards and Yard Smart program reached approximately 1,000 listeners.
    - WJBC - June interview with Marc Strauss about rain barrels and promoting our Elementary Online programs reached approximately 1,000 listeners.
    - WJBC, WBNQ, WBWN – ran advertisements for a week reminding people they can curb, compost, or let leaves lie to keep them out of storm drains – reached approximately 45,500 listeners through live radio and streaming.
  - WGLT
    - Ran underwriting messaging for a week reminding people they can curb, compost, or let leaves lie to keep them out of storm drains – reached approximately 40,000 listeners through live radio and streaming.
- Newspaper Promotions
  - Pantagraph – ran a front page strip ad with a corresponding online ad to promote the Yard Smart Garden Walk – 81,000 average readers, and 20,401 online impressions.



- Advertised the Yard Smart Garden Walk in the David Davis Mansion Glorious Garden Walk brochure – 724 attendees.
- Answered 44 direct inquiries from visitors and callers about the Yard Smart program, rain barrels, and storm water issues.
- Ongoing participation by EAC staff in McLean County Greenways Advisory Committee, coordinating progress updates to McLean County Greenways Plan.