



SECOND EDITION

This is the second edition of the newsletter for the Urban Biodiversity Information Node (UrBIN). UrBIN, as a Node on the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) – www.nbio.gov, aims to supply urbanizing communities with the information and tools needed to make sensible decisions about conservation issues. This newsletter is intended to keep stakeholders informed and encourage their involvement in UrBIN projects.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

HANGING WITH BOB

Bob Slusser likes to get things done, and he should be a happy man right now. Bob is a key part of the staff for the NBII UrBIN pilot, and his work is going extremely well thus far. Currently he is developing a database for stakeholders in the project, a database for ongoing related projects in the Holmes-Tripps Run watershed region, and a database identifying funding sources for UrBIN. Bob is also working closely with the city of Alexandria and local governments to rehabilitate lower Holmes Run, also known as Cameron Run.

In Bob's own words, "I'm basically working on a series of three databases right now. The first one is for stakeholders, and is almost complete." This database will be a resource for anyone involved with the Holmes-Tripps Run watershed, providing information on who is working in the area, and detailing the type of work being done. Part of the goal of the UrBIN project is to build a community around the issue of urban biodiversity. This database will be a powerful tool in bringing people together. "The database of course will be updated in the future as we bring more and more people into the project". As UrBIN grows, and community organizations, governments, and scientists get involved in the project, it will be extremely important to have a one-stop shop for people to locate one another.

The second database is still being developed. "It's meant to identify ongoing or

soon-to-be initiated projects in the watershed area by community organizations or local governments. There are so many things going on in Fairfax County that we want to bring these activities into one place." Bob once again is providing an important tool for the Holmes-Tripps Run watershed community and UrBIN. The UrBIN pilot is being conducted to meet the needs of the stakeholders in the community, and these needs can only be met by working with ongoing community projects.

The third database is aimed at identifying funding sources for the UrBIN pilot. This can be tricky business. Many budgets have changed significantly since last year, and organizations' funding sources have changed as a result. This database will ensure that UrBIN continues to mature and meet its goal of becoming a more independent community resource.

If this were the extent of Bob's work, it would be impressive. (Hopefully his wife has a moment of his time as well). But Bob is conducting additional work with the city of Alexandria. Part of UrBIN's work is supplying information to make the watershed a healthier biological habitat with "naturalized streams." Currently much of the stream bed runs through cement runoff ravines constructed in past flood control projects. The cement substrates impact forest aesthetics, and they are not terribly fish-friendly. Bob has worked closely with a number of state and local government officials to improve this situation.

His first step was to meet with Bill Skrabak of the Department of Transportation and Environmental Services to present a proposal for fish passages on Cameron Run. But, as Bob recounted, "Bill wanted to meet with an expert in the area before he did anything, so I brought in Jim Cummins of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin." Bob describes Jim as a guru. "He's been working in the lower Potomac for the past 15 years and has successfully put fish passageways in both the Anacostia River and Rock Creek. He knows this subject area as





well as anyone.” With the local guru in place, Bob and Jim will now be working with Alan Weaver (Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries) and Bill Hicks (Alexandria Division of Transportation and Environmental Services) to write a proposal to the city of Alexandria for a fish passageway on Cameron Run. This project could be a most positive step in making the Holmes-Tripps Run watershed a more valuable natural resource, and a more livable habitat.

These projects are exciting because they demonstrate that the nascent UrBIN pilot is already making a difference. A focus of UrBIN is identifying the stakeholders, interacting with the stakeholders, identifying their needs, and meeting these needs. The database development will be a primary tool in making this process a reality. Bob’s example illustrates the process and ingenuity that we hope will characterize UrBIN in the future. Good job Bob!

Project Highlight **Creative Solutions from Grad Students**

As stakeholders, you may get a phone call from a student named Monica Lipscomb. She is part of a larger educational cooperative effort with the UrBIN project and Virginia Tech. She is interviewing watershed organizations to understand their roles and functions, and will be writing a report on her findings. Monica is a student of one of our most important partners, Professor Margaret Bryant.

Margaret is absolutely integral to the development of the educational and landscape characterization components of UrBIN, and Monica is one of many students involved in this exciting work. Margaret’s graduate studio course in landscape architecture is also an exciting participant in UrBIN activities. Margaret has been working with this class for about six weeks, focusing on landscape characterization and watershed issues in the Holmes-Tripps region.

As part of their work, the class has developed a series of 12 posters on water quality, mapping, biodiversity, recreation, culture, and history. The posters follow a general layout of presenting problems, potential solutions, and methods of getting involved. They can be utilized for illustrating education projects underway, exhibiting UrBIN, and other purposes. The class is also writing reports about major watershed issues, which will be extremely helpful in shaping the focus of UrBIN in the future.

Margaret and her doctoral students are also conducting an in-depth GIS analysis to characterize land use in the watershed, which will help identify mitigation needs and potential projects. Other students are producing an inventory of data holdings to prevent redundant data collection efforts. Margaret has also taken her students to the watershed to familiarize them with the project, and will continue to involve herself with the UrBIN project in the future.

The work that Margaret and her students are doing is extremely exciting because it brings the UrBIN project into the classroom and involves students in the decision-making process. This is part of the overall strategy of UrBIN, and we hope to continue this work in the future.

Next Stakeholder Meeting

Following on the success of the first stakeholder meeting, planning is underway for a second one. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday April 19th. The UrBIN team will be sending out details and an agenda in short order, so be on the lookout.

