

Watershed Stewardship: Marking Our Storm Drains

Lexington's Watershed Stewardship program was established 3 years ago as a partnership between the Lexington Conservation Stewards and the Town's Conservation Division and Engineering Divisions, with the goal of monitoring and tending to the health of Lexington's twenty streams. Happily, the program is well off the ground, with projects to date including: educational presentations made to civic groups about Lexington's watersheds; three stream survey days conducted, with reports on findings produced and follow-up cleanups organized; and assistance in the development of a professional stream management plan for Lexington's Charles River and Shawsheen River watersheds.

While these important projects have involved teams of volunteers often working unseen out in the field, our most recent project is very visible publicly – which is precisely its point. This is our Storm Drain Marking project, an effort to raise public awareness about the connection between storm drains and the health of our local streams.

It turns out that a surprising number of people do not realize that storm drains lead directly into streams, with the contents completely untreated. To help folks understand this link, the Watershed Stewards have undertaken the task of installing attractive "Don't Dump, Drains to Stream" markers on sidewalk-edge curbs adjacent to storm drains throughout town (as far as finances and volunteer energy allow). We hope these markers will effectively inform passersby not to toss things into the drain and to be careful about everything that finds its way into roads.

In the spring of 2011, we targeted Lexington Center as the first area to mark. The area covered runs from the Minuteman Statue to Woburn Street, roughly east-west, and from just beyond the Bikeway to Forest Street north-south. This area was chosen because of the high foot traffic, which maximizes visibility. All the water (and other "stuff" that gets picked up by it) that lands on or drains into the roadways in this area goes directly into the Vine Brook, which runs beneath Lexington center in a pipe and reemerges to daylight near Hayes Lane. After it leaves Lexington, Vine Brook eventually joins the Shawsheen River, whose water is used by some downstream communities.

With flyers posted around Lexington center calling attention to the coming installation,



Watershed Stewards affix a storm drain marker in Lexington center to help educate citizens about the connection between storm drains and streams.

volunteers were invited to participate in the installation on a quiet Sunday morning in May. Turnout was just right, so we could divide the area into four teams of two or three each. Armed with markers, a map of drains to be done, gloves and glue guns, the teams did a great job applying 68 markers.

Although the markers are guaranteed to last for 30 years, that doesn't ensure they will stay firmly affixed for any period of time. It is a pleasure to report, though, that all remain soundly in place six months later. Based on the success of this pilot effort, we certainly will expand the program to other appropriate neighborhoods throughout town. Such neighborhood projects should lend themselves well to scout, church youth, school and other interested groups.

Thanks for this successful new educational/outreach program go to the Watershed Stewards, to Engineering for their support and for budgeting money for materials, and to Conservation for help coordinating the program and for help with outreach. And a special thanks is due to the volunteers who applied the glue.

- Stew Kennedy, Steward Director