Simpson Park
Upper Allen Township, Cumberland County

Site Context

Simpson Park is a 20-acre park owned by Upper Allen Township and located along the Yellow Breeches Creek, near the Village of Bowmansdale. The community park was developed as Upper Allen Township’s first recognized Passive Park which features creek access, walking trails, picnic facilities, grills and restrooms. The site provides an isolated location for enjoying and learning about the environment as well as a second municipal access point within the Yellow Breeches Greenway. This park offers a variety of ecosystems, vegetation, topography, and other natural site features.

Project Overview

The overall plan of the park explores the site’s natural features including woodlands, hedgerows, soils, geology, and its focal point, the Yellow Breeches Creek. Native plantings were placed to fortify the existing riparian buffer and woodland stand, provide food and shelter for wildlife and connectivity between the various plant communities.

Sustainable Practices

Water- The approaches for stormwater management included protecting and restoring the riparian buffer, enhancing natural flow paths, and incorporating BMPs. In the initial phases of the park, native plantings were placed to fortify the existing riparian buffer. This vegetative area protects The Yellow Breeches Creek from nonpoint source pollution and provides bank stabilization as well as aquatic and wildlife habitat. Permeable surfacing was also used for the trails and walkways with various prairie grasses and existing flowers to provide infiltration and storm water control throughout the park. In May of 2015, Upper Allen Township partnered with Messiah College engineering students in the construction of a 42’ by 12’ rain garden in an effort to reduce the amount of runoff pollution from the parking lot. This project was intended to improve water quality of the creek, as well as provide a beautiful and functional flowering rain garden. Filled with primarily native species of plants, the garden retains and filters the water naturally before it continues into the creek. The projects also provided additional opportunities to educate residents and nearby communities on how BMP use could improve the creek’s water quality.

Natural Landscaping- Currently, this park site offers a variety of terrestrial habitats including woody vegetative cover such as forests and scrubland as well as herbaceous cover including grasses, wildflowers, etc. These various habitats offer both cover and food for invertebrates, mammals, and birds. It was equally crucial to encourage the re-establishment of native species so that exotic species were not able to gain a foothold within the site. Therefore, the site improvements involved invasive species removal and native buffer plantings. Various trees and native plants were added to the landscape to promote biodiversity along the trails and stream access areas. The agricultural fields were replaced with native grasses and wildflowers. Furthermore, bird feeding observation areas can be located throughout the park as well as a bird watching blind, a structure that allows visitors to watch birds without being seen. The bird feeding observation areas contain bluebird boxes that were provided by the Audubon Society. New trees are continuously added by the Boy scouts and additional organizational programs with signs depicting their species and benefactors.

Materials Selection and Construction- The park was designed with sustainability and energy conservation in mind. The intention of this park was to preserve the natural resources in and along the Yellow Breeches Creek. Before the construction of the park, the riparian buffer was only ten feet at its widest zone. In addition, the floodplain consisted of grass species and old agricultural crops. Consequently, the main objectives of the park’s plan...
**Sustainable Practices Cont.**

were to revitalize the riparian buffer and enhance the natural integrity and environmental value of the land. The natural habitats that were in existence at the time of the project were preserved to the largest extent possible by proper placement of the proposed facilities and limiting disturbance required to create the facilities. All walking trails and a portion of the parking areas are aggregate, providing increased capability of infiltration that helps maintain runoff. Also, curbs and gutters were eliminated to allow runoff from parking areas into adjacent lawn and swale areas. To achieve the goals of this project, the Township received a $100,000 from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to help pay for some of the improvements made to the park.

**Connect People to Nature**- The goal of this natural park was to balance the community’s active park system with a genuinely passive park, where the park’s various features would provide landscapes for learning. An informal amphitheater was developed near the park entrance to accommodate an outdoor classroom seating area. Interpretive signage is proposed throughout the trails to provide self-guided educational value to the park system. A canoe launch, and stabilized creek access areas provide defined areas for fishing or entering the Yellow Breeches Creek. A bird watching blind, included in the park, was designed to allow visitors to see birds undisturbed in nature. Additional facilities include handicapped accessible walking trails, picnic pavilion, warming hut with fire place, informational kiosk, and primitive camping area with fire rings. Passive recreation amenities consist of a sand volleyball court, play area using a natural rock formation theme, and horseshoe pits to complement picnic activities. There is a diverse number of civic, athletic, and church clubs in addition to community organizations that utilize the park. Some of these organizations comprise church youth groups, Upper Allen Women’s Club, Conewago Canoe Club, The Appalachian Audubon Society, Boy scouts of America and The Yellow Breeches Watershed Association.

**Operations and Maintenance**- Services performed by the Parks and Recreation Department consist of specific maintenance tasks and support of special events and park reservations. Stormwater management, evaluation, and ongoing maintenance of the rain garden have been undertaken by the Township with a Rain Garden Maintenance Manual, which was created with the assistance from the Messiah College engineering students. Additionally, staff performs regular mowing and trimming along pathways and other areas. The informational kiosk is continuously updated by the Yellow Breeches Watershed Association. Also, an annual Yellow Breeches Youth-Powered Creek Cleanup, coordinated by the Yellow Breeches Watershed Association, provides a great deal of assistance in maintaining the creek from litter and debris. Additional operation areas include general park maintenance, rehabilitation and development of native plantings, park building and facility maintenance, irrigation, and buffer management.

**Environmental Stewardship**

**Messaging**- Simpson Park is well known as a passive park dedicated to education and to the preservation of the site's diverse, natural habitats. Although the Township has numerous recreational parks, no other park in the Township also serves as a learning and conservation site. This site was planned as a natural community park and trailhead for the Yellow Breeches Creek Greenway. The park now serves as a hub of environmental education for the municipality and complements the pond and small stream ecology offered at Grantham Park. The amphitheater was developed immediately adjacent of the pavilion to accommodate overflow seating or as an outdoor classroom. In addition to the outdoor facilities, Simpson Park houses materials that are complimentary to environmental and the Yellow Breeches Creek learning programs. These materials include displays and pamphlets at the information kiosk, along with factual signage labeling specific tree species and their scientific names, available to help answer visitor’s questions.

Information provided by: Megan McNamee, Special Projects Coordinator, Upper Allen Township

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**For more information**

Upper Allen Township  
http://www.uatwp.org/?page_id=5168

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Greening Parks and Sustainable Practices  
http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants/greening/grreeninggrants.aspx

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**Native plantings**

**Rain garden filled with native species of plants**