

River Group Will Play Watchdog Role

As Duck River Watershed Association (DRWA) conducted its kickoff membership meeting at Henry Horton State Park, a member of another watershed group told what's done to protect a river near his home. "We find violators all the time and report them," said Michael Cain, watershed assessment and restoration coordinator for the Franklin-based Harpeth River Watershed Association (HRWA), who indicated similar steps could be taken for the Duck River.

When area residents tell the HRWA about what they believe is a source of pollution to that river, the association guides them to the right person at the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Cain said. A river group member follows up by calling the state several days later. While Cain and Mayor Wallace Cartwright (Shelbyville, TN) weren't talking directly to each other during a wide-ranging, two-hour discussion in the state lodge, it was clear that Cain was talking about silt fences and other devices that prevent storm water from carrying mud and other pollutants to a river or stream. Separately, Cartwright said he'd noticed places that didn't have the orange or black plastic barriers around excavation.

Cartwright quizzed organizers of the DRWA about silt fences and the federal law mentioned by Cain that requires an MS4, a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System. Decades after Congress enacted the Clean Water Act of 1972, lawmakers and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials interpreted the law to mean that devices are required to clean storm water flowing from pavement and construction sites. It's an interpretation of the law that requires licenses for sewage treatment plants.

Members of the DRWA will decide whether or not the group takes on the type of watchdog role modeled by the Harpeth River group, according to Sherry Beard of Primm Springs, an organizer of the new association. "We don't have an agenda on what our goals will be," Beard said. "That will come from the membership."

Former Bedford County Tennessee Commissioner Wayne Tucker said he attended as a property owner interested in the health of the river. Tucker indicated that a balance is needed between conservation and demand from a growing population.

Cain acknowledged the biggest impact of MS4 would be on developers, but said if municipalities adopted various regulations on development, then they may not have to spend taxpayers' money in the future to counteract pollution from storm water.