



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT: [info@bluegreenconnector.com](mailto:info@bluegreenconnector.com)

## Recent Floodplain Restorations Perform Well During Flash Floods

While many travelers familiar with the restoration projects on the Little Conestoga Creek at Harrisburg Ave and Marietta Ave may have wondered, project sponsors and engineering teams say they are pleased that completed floodplain restorations performed remarkably well during the flash floods. Heavy rain the week of June 30 left many areas underwater when rainfall totals exceeded 4" in an 8–10-hour time period. "The rising water spilled over the banks with more room than in the past, slowing the volume and limiting erosion," noted a project engineer. Young restorations where vegetation has just begun to fill in proved their resiliency and sustainability.

Travelers have seen the restoration projects unfold in recent months and many were understandably curious as to what would happen in a big rain event. What they saw was that flooding caused road closures along Marietta Avenue and Harrisburg Pike, with the creek surging above bridges and recent floodplain restorations, but project designers were not dismayed. They stress the purpose of the project is not flood mitigation. There are miles of unrestored creek banks upstream from the project, along the Little Conestoga Creek and its smaller tributaries, so all the flooding that comes from the watershed upstream of the project can't be managed in one location.

That doesn't mean the project has no impact. The purpose of the restoration work is to address pollution in the Little Conestoga Creek by removing legacy sediment, restoring historic wetlands and meadows next to the stream, and re-establishing functional ecosystems with native vegetation. New native plants and trees act to buffer the waterway, filter pollutants, and create habitat for wildlife. These changes also slow the velocity of the water. The restorations provide minor improvements in flood capacity and

prevent a significant amount of erosion from entering the stream system. However, they are not intended to mitigate flooding events.

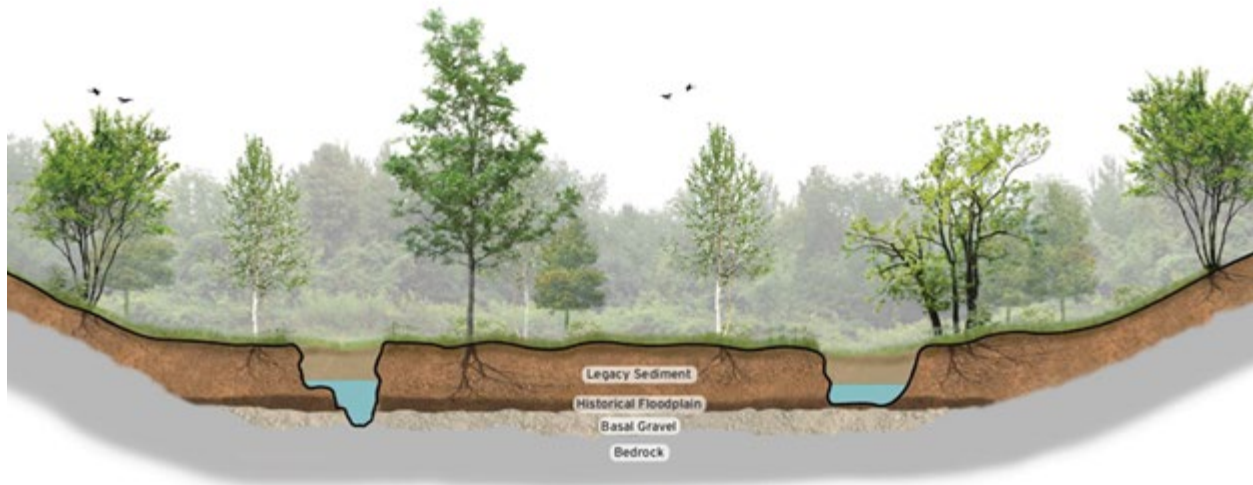
The restorations are part of six planned floodplain-wetland restorations totaling 25 acres along 1.3 miles of the Little Conestoga Creek, between Shreiner Station Road near Park City in the north and Marietta Avenue in the south. The project is part of a larger effort to restore the creek and install an ADA-accessible public trail called the Blue Green Connector. When complete, the project will provide annual pollution reductions of 4 million pounds of sediment, 1,541 pounds of phosphorous, and 7,752 pounds of nitrogen removed from the waterway per year. The intent is to prevent valuable Lancaster County soils from washing downstream to the Chesapeake Bay.

This project contributes to Lancaster's shared vision of clean and clear water by 2040 in the Countywide Action Plan, spearheaded by Lancaster Clean Water Partners. While more than 75% of Lancaster County's waterways are impaired, the Little Conestoga Creek has the highest severity of pollution in the entire Susquehanna basin. It ranks in the bottom quartile of a 0 to 100 score by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. The primary pollutants come from soil erosion and stormwater runoff. Between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the 65.5 square-mile Little Conestoga watershed is covered with solid surfaces such as pavement and buildings, forcing water to runoff instead of soaking in place. This stormwater runoff carries sediment, nutrients, fertilizers, lawn chemicals, road oils and salt, pet waste, and trash directly into the creek. When flash floods occur, the speed of runoff is very high and has greater potential to cause damage.

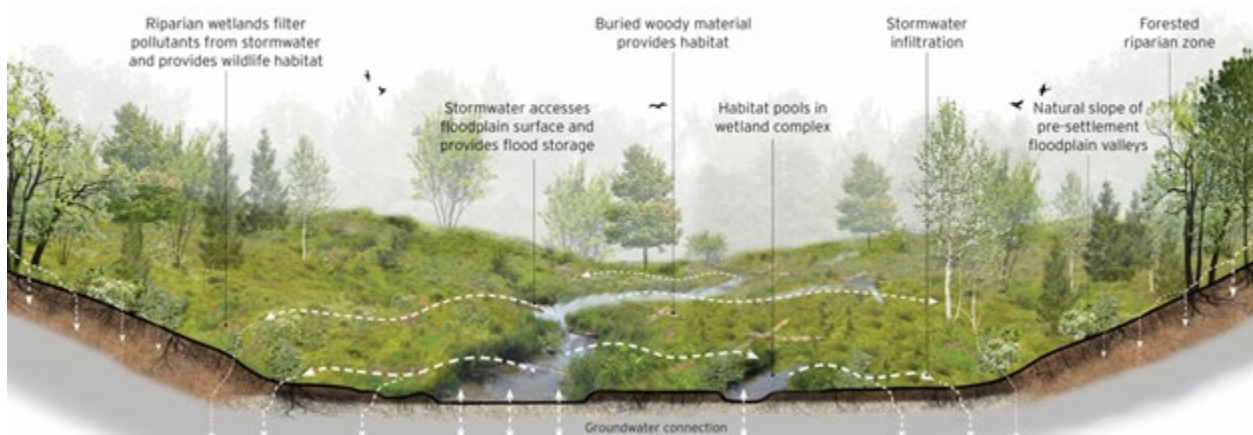
The recent flooding dramatically underscores the fact that local residents are connected within our watershed. Land use that minimizes hard surfaces, green infrastructure that helps water soak in place instead of runoff, and native plants and trees with deep root systems are all recommended solutions to this problem. Upstream and downstream neighbors can help each other stay safe and prevent flood damage. Group efforts toward sustainable land use and a healthier, resilient environment will provide dramatic benefits to water quality and flood reduction.

"We hope this incident catalyzes others to address water quality, ecosystem health, and sustainable stormwater management throughout Lancaster County," said Shane Zimmerman, CEO of the Steinman Foundation, one of the lead project sponsors.

Visual guide to restoration process. Renderings by LandStudies:



Pre-restoration conditions depict a channelized waterway with unstable, high banks of legacy sediment along waterways. During a typical rain event, soils erode from these banks and water velocity increases. In an extreme event, damage and flooding can be severe.



Post-restoration conditions depict a gradual slope to a widened floodplain. During a rain event, water can access the floodplain and its velocity is slowed. Water soaks in place and recharge the groundwater storage. In an extreme event, it exceeds capacity and flooding occurs.

For more information on the Little Conestoga restoration, visit the Blue Green Connector [project website](#). For more information about local water quality, visit [Lancaster Clean Water Partners](#). For research on legacy sediment and floodplain restoration, visit the [Chesapeake Watershed Initiative](#) of Franklin & Marshall College. ###