

Wildlife Finds New Home Thanks to Local Efforts

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Some local wildlife is getting settled into its new home thanks to the efforts of a Sidney couple and a Delaware County agency.

A couple of months ago, Ray Lewis and Loddie Marsh received a visit from state and federal agency representatives. They were interested in the work the two have been doing on their 191-acre property and their involvement with the Delaware County Soil and Water Conservation District since 2003, officials said.

The first step in the establishment of wetlands on the site was to create water buffers for animals, started with help from the state Agricultural Management System program, which includes an inventory of farm resources, such as livestock access to streams, said Conservation District special programs technician Karen Clifford. The couple's work with the Conservation District was then used to plan conservation practices, she said.

The wetland created on the Sidney site was the first such project completed in the county, Clifford said.

The barriers that will keep animals out of the stream and wetland will be built by the spring.

"It greatly enhances the property," Lewis said. He was initially concerned about land-use restrictions, which he had agreed to as stipulations to receive funding from various sources, but he said they now seem insignificant, especially when compared to environmental benefits, he said.

The couple rent about one-third of the land to an area dairy farmer. In addition to promoting wildlife, another benefit of the wetlands, he said, is that the area absorbs nutrients associated with farming and collects rainwater, slowing the runoff into Carr's Creek.

The federal payments he will receive for his commitment — more than \$1,000 — also helps, Lewis said.

"It is a win-win situation," Clifford said.

Her agency helped coordinate the various local, state and federal organizations helping to fund the work, meaning there was no cost to the couple, she said.

"It's nice to see how much farmers are doing to protect the environment," said Jeff Lape, EPA director of the Chesapeake Bay Program who visited the farm with others in December.

The Agricultural Management Program is voluntary and involves farmers that want to help ensure water quality, Clifford said.

The agency is working with about 150 farms in the Susquehanna River Basin and below the New York City Watershed on the process.

About 25 farms are involved in the implementation of these types of stage-four projects to protect the environment, she said.

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