

Conservation group receives grant

Natural Biodiversity, a Johnstown-based organization committed to restoring nature's diversity in Pennsylvania's Alleghenies, has announced that it has received federal funding through a renewed cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to continue their mission of controlling invasive plants and restoring a diversity of native plants and wildlife throughout the region.

The \$100,000 award to Natural Biodiversity will support one half of the next year as they prepare for their upcoming spring projects, with an additional \$138,000 committed for the second half of the year to implement these projects.

Natural Biodiversity's partnership with APHIS was initiated in 2003 by Congressmen John P. Murtha, who recognized the ecological and economic importance of biodiversity and obtained a congressional appropriation for the organization through APHIS and continued doing so for the following two years.

In 2006, however, APHIS became the champion of Natural Biodiversity's mission by taking the initiative to include the organization in its budget for the fiscal year. Natural Biodiversity takes this as a sign not only of their growing success, but also of a sustainable working relationship and hopes their partnership will continue.

The funded project, titled "Strengthening Landscape Conservation," reflects Natural Biodiversity's growing mission to engage the public in restoring healthy and diverse wildlife habitats. In the upcoming year, the APHIS partnership will allow Natural Biodiversity to not only continue native plant restoration and invasive plant control projects on public lands, but also provide such services to private landowners as site vegetative health assessments, invasive control plans, and planting schemes.

By working to restore balance to the region, Natural Biodiversity is not only creating healthier, thriving habitats for wildlife, but also helping to make outdoor recreation more accessible and enjoyable.

The organization's work can be seen in many locations throughout the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin, such as the Saltsburg section of the West Penn Trail, where they have eliminated 98 percent of the highly invasive Japanese knotweed, and at the Park of 1889 in St. Michael, where they are working to create a site which is both an enjoyable campsite for visitors as well as a healthy environment for wildlife.

For more information about Natural Biodiversity, its 06/07 projects, and services available to your community, check out the organization's Web site at www.naturalbiodiversity.org or call 532-5049.