



UPPER RARITAN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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URWA Receives Merck “Champions for the Environment” Award Bedminster, New Jersey; May 16, 2008

Invasive plants are rapidly becoming one of the nation’s greatest threats to biodiversity as well as a serious economic problem (it is estimated that these plants cost the US \$142 billion annually). Invasive plants impact native plant and animal communities by displacing native vegetation and disrupting habitats as they become established and spread over time. Some 1,400 plant species are listed as invasive across the nation, and in New Jersey, 30 species have been identified as invasive. A prime example is Garlic mustard -- its white flowers are blooming in the woodlands and across New Jersey’s backyards now. Unlike most invasive plants, once garlic mustard is introduced into a new location, it persists and spreads aggressively monopolizing light, moisture, nutrients, soil and space depriving wildlife of the native plants they rely on.

The Upper Raritan Watershed Association (URWA), in partnership with Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space (FoHVOS) is spearheading an extensive program to find and remove invasive plants from several important sites in New Jersey’s Highlands and Piedmont regions. This project represents New Jersey's first comprehensive effort toward invasive species management through a public-private partnership. The partnership represents a broad coalition of public and private entities, including the NJ Division of Parks & Forestry, US Department of Agriculture, NJ Native Plant Society, Mercer County, National Resource Conservation Service, Hopewell Township, Tewksbury Township, Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association, D&R Greenway Land Trust, NJ Audubon Society, Tewksbury Land Trust, Hopewell Valley School District and Duke Farms. These organizations are pooling their expertise and resources to recruit and train volunteers to identify and eradicate 20 emerging populations of invasive plants on both public and private lands while developing holistic stewardship programs for the sites.

URWA is delighted to announce that the project has been awarded a “Champions for the Environment” award from Merck & Company. According to Executive Director Cindy Ehrenclou, the \$8,000 grant will be used to fund the educational component of the project. At a recent meeting of URWA’s Board of Trustees where she announced the grant, Ehrenclou said, “With Merck’s support we will develop educational guides and have the means to reach out and partner with landowners who are in a position to make a difference in the battle to control invasive species. Merck’s involvement is so important, as they bring a global perspective to the issue of biodiversity. We appreciate that they are willing to support a local effort that will be a model for many beyond the boundaries of the Upper Raritan Watershed.”

For more than a decade, Merck employees around the world have volunteered thousands of hours to work on environmental projects with local groups through its “Champions for the Environment” program. Through this program, Merck provides grants to support environmentally focused projects initiated by employees at its facilities in communities worldwide. With its corporate headquarters in Whitehouse Station, Merck employees have been involved in many URWA programs over the years. URWA is especially grateful to Merck employee Nancy Held, who works in the Neuroscience New Products/GHH division, for her leadership in successfully bringing this project forward for consideration. She will play a key role in recruiting a team of Merck volunteers who will assist with the project.

About the Upper Raritan Watershed Association

The Upper Raritan Watershed Association is a not-for-profit, membership supported organization working to ensure the protection of the Upper Raritan Watershed through education, advocacy, land preservation, and stewardship. Since 1959, the Association has been preserving and protecting natural resources throughout the watershed, a 194 square mile natural geographic region defined by the drainage basin of the North Branch of the Raritan River and its tributaries. The watershed, which includes 23 municipalities in parts of Somerset, Hunterdon and Morris Counties, is a vital link in New Jersey's water supply system and contains large areas of undeveloped, environmentally significant land.

For More Information, please contact:

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