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Federation Gets EPA Grant for School Rain Gardens

OCEAN – The N.C. Coastal Federation received a \$20,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to build rain gardens to help control polluted runoff at three schools along the coast.

The federation will use the money, along with grants from private foundations, to expand its school rain garden program by building gardens at First Flight Middle School in Kill Devil Hills, Tiller Elementary School in Beaufort and Bradley Creek Elementary School in Wilmington. That will bring to 13 the number of rain gardens the federation has helped build at coastal schools. Work on the new rain gardens will begin during the next school year.

“This grant will allow us to expand this very popular program,” explained Sarah Phillips, one of the federation’s coastal education coordinators. “We’ll be able to not only help improve water quality but also help children understand why controlling stormwater is so important.”

The EPA money was among the almost \$1 million in grants that the agency and its partners in the Five Star Restoration Program gave to 37 water-quality and restoration projects around the country. The federation’s project was the only one funded in North Carolina. The winners, who were announced today, were chosen from more than 200 entries.

Rain gardens are excavated and prepared depressions that are planted with native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers that help capture and infiltrate runoff before it enters a local creek or stream. Such simple measures can be effective in reducing polluted stormwater and coastal flooding. Rain gardens also can be pretty landscape features and provide natural habitat for birds, insects and other wildlife.

The federation also uses the rain gardens it helps build as workshops and classrooms. Adult volunteers help students build the rain gardens and learn about the gardens’ effects on improving

water quality. The federation provides about three-years of instruction with each rain garden. Its educators use the gardens to teach students about such things soil composition, plants, insects and runoff.

The planned rain garden at Bradley Creek Elementary School will be the last of four projects designed to control runoff from the 15-acre campus from further polluting Hewletts Creek, an impaired water, explained Ted Wilgis, the federation's coastal education coordinator in the Wilmington area.

"The grant will continue that commitment," he said, "and will enable us to work with over 60 third-graders to be active stewards of Hewletts Creek."