**Teens as Planners Youth Work to Improve Local Park**

**Summary**

Teen’s assistance improved local park inspection rating.

**Situation**

The Bowman Community Park was created between August 1984 and June 1987 with a Development grant in the amount of $20,456 from the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). A second Redevelopment grant was awarded in June 1993 in the amount of $11,400. The park has received a total of $31,856 from the Land & Water Conservation Fund. The LWCF Act states that properties acquired or developed with LWCF funds are to remain usable park land in perpetuity unless approval is granted by the Secretary of the Interior. The Act also states that at least once every five years, an inspection of the LWCF assisted sites shall be performed.

Bowman is a small community in Elbert County. The Bowman community just lost its elementary school. Their children are being bused to Elberton in order to save money. The community is full of families needing a safe outlet for their youth. Bowman is 17 miles from Elberton so transportation becomes an issue that keeps these families in Bowman. The Bowman Park is about 3 blocks from the town square.

**Response**

The Teens as Planners (TAP) group considered several service projects before selecting the Bowman Community Park as their community service project. The youth have brainstormed possibilities for the park and participated in a Design Charrette at the University of Georgia with the College of Environment and Design. The Charrette provided a starting point for the parks plan. After the Design Charrette, the youth spent time ranking possibilities and considering costs associated with the different projects. Brian Barth, a graduate student in the College of Environment & Design, took all the pieces from the Charrette and the planning meetings with the youth and Pete Gibbons, City Council Member Bowman, and began drafting a plan.

The draft plan allowed the youth to begin looking at where to start. The teens began focusing on the items they felt were the most important and the least expensive since available funds are limited. Five of the TAP teens participated in Youth Summit September 8-9, 2012 at Rock Eagle. The youth’s focus at Youth Summit was on the Bowman park project. Attending Youth Summit made them eligible to submit a grant request for $500. The youth were awarded $250. A second grant application was submitted to Lowe’s Charitable & Educational Foundation program for almost $14,000 to assist with the conversion of one baseball field to a soccer field and the development of the walking trail. The youth will not know if they have received the Lowe’s grant until January 2013.

First steps taken to begin the park beautification project were to rake and clean-up the front entrance of the park, to bleach all playground equipment, picnic tables, and the bathroom facilities, as well as pick up trash. The City of Bowman was able to purchase a much needed tennis net and the youth also assisted with the installation of the
new tennis net. Recently, the youth worked on cleaning the grounds up in front of the amphitheater at the park. The bathrooms are in desperate need of repair. The search is on for a plumber who is willing to assist with the bathroom upgrades. In addition to the bathroom repairs, the youth will be working on developing a walking trail and new signage for the park.

Impact

Park Rating

The LWCF Act states that properties acquired or developed with LWCF funds are to remain usable park land in perpetuity unless approval is granted by the Secretary of the Interior. The Act also states that at least once every five years, an inspection of the LWCF assisted sites shall be performed. The park received a “good” rating. One item noted as needing improvement is the required LWCF Program assistance acknowledgment sign is not posted.

July 23, 2012 - According to Mayor Pro Tem, Pete Gibbons, “A special thanks to the Elbert County 4-H and the Teens As Planners UGA Cooperative Extension for a good day cleaning up the City Park. The new tennis net has been installed. The bathrooms were bleached and cleaned. Limbs were picked up. Several areas were raked and swept. I am looking forward to our next clean-up day. We still have plenty of work to do and it won't be easy but we will give this City a park to be proud of again.”

August 6, 2012 - According to Mayor Pro Tem, Pete Gibbons, “Today, we received a copy of the recent inspection of the City Park by the Department of Natural Resources. Since the park was created with grant funds, it must be inspected every five years. The Park received a grade of "Good" (excellent, good, fair, and poor are the possible grades). The inspection made note of all the recent maintenance and repairs that have been done. I want to again thank Ms. Christa Campbell of the Elbert County Extension Office and the Teens As Planners group for all their hard work in making our park a "Good" place to spend the day. We had another busy work day in the park today and will continue the work until we can bring you an "excellent" park to enjoy.”

Georgia Youth Summit:

The Georgia Youth Summit is a statewide Youth Leadership Summit sponsored by the Department of Community Affairs as a project of the Georgia Rural Development Council’s Youth Leadership Initiative. Built around the latest research on Positive Youth Development, the Summit focuses on engaging youth in the improvement of their local communities. Youth research local issues, enhance their planning and communication skills and connect with resources in their community, region and state that will assist them. Participants returned home with a plan of action for engaging partners and addressing local issues. They also applied for a $500 mini-grant to help their park project.

September 9, 2012 - According to Mayor Pro Tem, Pete Gibbons, “The Elbert County delegation to the 2012 Georgia Youth Summit at Rock Eagle was made up of members of the Elbert County Teens As Planners program and myself. During the weekend, we attended various courses dedicated to promoting leadership in our communities. Topics of the training courses were economic development, health and safety, and education. We then used the knowledge we gained in these courses to create a presentation detailing our plan to help resolve an issue in our community, the Bowman City Park revitalization plan. I am proud to say that Elbert County gave one of the best presentations of the day (as told by several judges). We first gave our presentation to our class and was recommended by our Instructor to go before the panel where 2 presentations would be chosen (out of 170 groups) to be performed at the closing ceremonies. While we didn't finish in the top 2, the judges were impressed
with our youth and said we were very close to being chosen. These kids did an amazing job and I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.”

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