

## **The Shelly Company: First Oldcastle Company With a WHC *Corporate Lands for Learning* Site**

The Shelly Company is the first Oldcastle Materials company with a certified Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) *Corporate Lands for Learning* site. They received international recognition for their commitment to environmental stewardship and increasing native biodiversity for their work at the Dresden Wildlife Habitat Site in Ohio. Shelly's Ashley DeVault, project manager, and Kevin Cooperrider, property manager, accepted the program certification at the WHC's 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium Awards Banquet on November 18, 2008.

The Dresden Wildlife Habitat Site is a 96-acre former aggregate mining facility adjacent to the Muskingum River in southeastern Ohio. Previous mining practices resulted in the creation of several lakes and ponds that are interspersed with riparian flood plain forest and seasonally wet meadows. Riparian zones, forests and grasslands provide habitat for a number of species, including great blue herons, kingfishers, osprey, bald eagles, beaver, river otters and white-tailed deer. Typical plant communities include species common in southeast Ohio, such as cottonwood, sycamore, willow and silver maple. Understory plants common in the region include equisetum, poison hemlock, and Virginia creeper. Open field grasslands are populated with smooth brome grass and tall fescue. Low-lying, seasonally wet areas include a variety of sedges and rushes.

To achieve greater biodiversity at the site, the wildlife team, along with numerous community volunteers, identified goals for each area available for enhancement activities. The goals include the creation of native prairie habitat, maintenance and enhancement of temporal wetlands and permanent water features, protection and restoration of portions of riparian forest, and partnership with local schools to improve a neighboring piece of land for wildlife enhancement and education.

Native prairie habitat creation efforts began in April 2006, when employees prepared a six-acre portion of the site for planting. Following disking and removal of undesirable vegetation, volunteers installed warm season grasses and wildflowers native to Ohio. Over 40 volunteers helped to plant switchgrass, ox-eye daisy, wild quinine, New England aster, wild bergamot and Indian grass. Additionally, volunteers constructed and placed nesting boxes and created a blue bird nest box trail to further enhance the prairie habitat.

To improve lakeside habitat for wildlife species, employees and volunteers provide basking logs, brush piles and platforms in and around water resources. Several grass and tree species were also planted to control bank erosion in wetland areas. Fish management plans were created based on creel surveys to help identify the diversity and health of fish within the lakes and ponds on site.

The Dresden *Corporate Lands for Learning* program provides environmental-based education to schools, scouts, extra-curricular groups and organizations for all ages to raise awareness, improve leadership skills and encourage responsible behavior towards natural resources and wildlife. The Dresden team, aided by the environmental clubs and science teachers at Tri-Valley Schools have developed curricula that incorporate Project WILD lessons conducted at the site to support the academic goals of the schools.

Dresden Wildlife Habitat Site was one of 214 sites recognized at the 2008 Symposium for creating a *Wildlife at Work<sup>SM</sup>* program. In addition, 97 *Corporate Lands for Learning<sup>SM</sup>* programs reach thousands of learners from schools and scout groups to master gardeners and university researchers. Since 1990, WHC has certified 489 programs worldwide. The certification program recognizes outstanding wildlife habitat management and environmental education efforts at corporate sites, and offers third-party validation of the benefits of such programs. Certification requirements are strict and require that sites apply for periodic renewal.