

Protect & Preserve the Swamp Creek Greenway

"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."
-Rachel Carson-



Photograph courtesy of Ann Rhoads

Picture the 17-mile greenway that this stream flows through. See how it reduces flooding, lessens stream pollution, and offers enjoyable activities such as fishing and bird watching. Visualize this greenway as the backbone to the quality of life for the surrounding areas.

Now, envision this greenway under pressure from encroaching development. Unprotected, the watershed faces the threat of loss of vital habitat, an increase in water pollution and stream bank erosion, and a decline in the number and species of wildlife. The entire area feels the loss.

What you have just imagined is the *Swamp Creek* and its surrounding greenway.

This beautiful treasure – which has provided these benefits for so long – is now at risk. YET... there is a window of opportunity in which to act to preserve this natural jewel for generations to come. Whether you are someone who fishes from its banks, takes an occasional hike through its woods, has children who play along its edges, watches its birdlife, or who simply enjoys its scenic vistas while driving, **your participation and support of the Swamp Creek Greenway is vital.**



Great Blue Heron
Photo courtesy of Tim Block

Imagine a creek virtually unchanged since colonial times – a stream that provides habitat for an abundance of native plants and wildlife. Consider a watercourse rich in historic significance, which once served as rich hunting ground for Native Americans. Envision a stream that provided power for colonial-era mills and irrigation for a deep-rooted agricultural heritage still present today.

What You Can Do

- If you own a large amount of land (10 acres or more) rich in natural resources, consider contacting a land trust in your area to talk about preservation.
- Plant or preserve a riparian buffer.
- Learn and use best management practices for controlling stormwater.
- Join local groups that plant trees throughout the community.
- Encourage your local government officials to protect environmentally sensitive lands.
- Support your local land trust.
- Join your municipality's open space committee or Environmental Advisory Commission. Establish a committee if one is not currently available.
- Participate in clean-up activities in a nearby creek or in your neighborhood.
- Educate yourself about stormwater management and source water protection as well as other environmental issues affecting water quality.

Resources:

Perkiomen Water Conservancy & Montgomery County Planning Commission's *Improving Stormwater Basins, Naturally*

Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov/water
www.stormwaterpa.org

Pennsylvania Campaign for Clean Water:
www.pacleanwatercampaign.org/index.html

Montgomery County Lands Trust
www.mclt.org

If You Have a Yard...

- Store manure, loose soil, compost, trash, garden waste or grass clippings away from streams.
- Plant native vegetation and control or eliminate any aggressive, non-native plants from over-running your yard.
- Reduce or eliminate your use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers. Don't fertilize plants near streams.
- Avoid mowing your lawn within 15 feet of the streambank.
- Make your yard friendlier for the creek and enhance wildlife habitat by gradually replacing lawns along streambanks with native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and ground covers.

Resources:

Audubon Pennsylvania's "Audubon at Home"
pa.audubon.org/Audubon_at_Home.html

The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education:
www.schuylkillcenter.org/departments/land/consulting

The Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov

The Pennsylvania Native Plant Society:
www.pawildflower.org

Join a Group Working to Protect the Greenway

Become a supporter of one or more of the groups already working to protect the Swamp Creek Greenway.

Montgomery County Lands Trust
P.O. Box 300, Lederach, PA 19450
215-513-0100
www.mclt.org

Natural Lands Trust
Hildacy Farm Preserve
1031 Palmers Mill Road
Media, PA 19063
610-353-5587
www.natlands.org

Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy
1 Skippack Pike
Schwenksville, PA 19453
610-287-9383
www.perkiomenwatershed.org

The Highlands Coalition
520 Long Street
Bethlehem, PA 18018
610-868-6915
www.highlandscoalition.org/pennsylvania.php

Valley Forge Audubon Society
1201 Pawlings Road
Audubon, PA 19403
610-666-5593
Fax: 610-630-2209

Berks County Conservancy
25 North 11th Street
Reading, PA 19601
610-372-4992
www.berks-conservancy.org

Active Partners:



“Water is alive... so is the ground, the trees, and animals. It belongs to nature. We acknowledge it, and love it, and leave it as it is, because it belongs to itself.”

Ann Price, 60-year resident of the Swamp Creek watershed



The Goschenhoppen Folk Festival
Photo courtesy of the Goschenhoppen Historians

History and Culture

When the native people of the Lenni-Lenape Turtle Clan encountered the first European visitors to the Swamp Creek Watershed in the 1680s, the tribe had no way of knowing that this meeting would be the precursor to a massive influx of settlers. Pioneers arrived from all parts of Western Europe, but the majority came from Germany whose “Deutsch” influence lives on in the Swamp Creek’s folk culture and architecture.

The area is dotted with stone farmhouses and distinctive Pennsylvania “bank barns,” along with other notable architectural features such as the Falkner Swamp Reformed Church, the New Hanover Lutheran Church buildings, and the Henry Antes house on the historic Antes Plantation. Local events such as the Goschenhoppen Folk Festival and the Belshnickel Festival continue the celebration of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage.

During the late 1700s, a stage coach line from Philadelphia to the Swamp Creek area brought tourists to the valley, which was already becoming known for its natural resources and scenic beauty. George Washington and his troops encamped in the area prior to the battle of Germantown in 1777.

After the American Revolution, local industry grew. The area saw the construction of grist, paper, and lumber mills, many of which remain standing. Iron and copper mining became important local activities. Potteries, blacksmiths and ice houses also dotted the landscape.

Residents of the area – from the Douglass Township line east to Zieglerville – commonly referred to themselves as “from the Swamp.” Today the watershed continues to attract people with its natural beauty, valuable resources, and rich history.

Adding to the Quality of Life

To gain a deeper understanding of the value of the Swamp Creek watershed as a natural and cultural resource, one need only speak with either Ann Price, a 60-year watershed resident, or with Francis Hartmaier, who spent nearly all of his 97 years in the area. As a young boy living and working on a 44-acre farm with his five brothers and four sisters, Hartmaier remembers walking on nearby land with his father to gather nuts for roasting from the plentiful chestnut trees. It was on this rich, familiar land that he later made his home.

Nearly a century ago, figure skating and ice hockey were favorite wintertime activities on the creek near the dam



Francis Hartmaier at Sunrise Mill

at Sunrise Mill. Dr. Jackson, a well-known surgeon who owned the mill, known as Reid’s Mill at the time, installed a pot-belly stove in the mill building to keep young skaters warm. For Hartmaier, riding his old Indian motorcycle along the banks, fishing for sunfish, and swimming in Swamp Creek’s sparkling waters are favorite memories.

Today, the watershed retains much of its natural beauty and it isn’t too hard to imagine those days of old. Hartmaier, who at age 96 flew his plane high over the watershed, says the gentle ridges covered in white snow in wintertime are one of his favorite sights. In springtime he and other residents – both long-time residents and those new to the area – enjoy the flowering of native buttercups, spring beauties, Virginia bluebells, trout lilies and wild phlox. Deep respect for the natural habitat emerges as a common theme for those who make the Swamp Creek watershed their home; they are people who believe the natural beauty of the area is unique and precious. For these residents conservation is a way of life.



Swamp Creek at Gerloff Road, Lower Frederick Township

The Swamp Creek Riparian Corridor Conservation Plan

As continuing development in the Delaware Valley imposes further demands on water resources, the importance of maintaining healthy watersheds has become an increasing focus of residents, municipalities and conservation organizations. Working together, they seek to protect and conserve our precious water resources and the fragile areas surrounding them. Fragile areas along the edges of streams and rivers are called “riparian corridors”. When these corridors contain native woodlands – extending outward from the banks of rivers and streams 50 feet or more – they are known as “riparian buffers.” Protecting these buffers helps to protect the entire watershed.

In 2003, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) provided grant funding to Montgomery County Lands Trust to study the lands within a ¼ mile riparian corridor area along each side of the Swamp Creek for conservation analysis and stream water protection. The study investigated the feasibility of providing a continuous greenway along the Swamp Creek between Schwenksville Borough in Montgomery County and the Berks County line in Douglass Township, Montgomery County. The William Penn Foundation has given Montgomery County Land Trust a grant to continue our work and expand our area of focus on the entire Swamp Creek Watershed. The resulting Swamp Creek Riparian Corridor Conservation Plan identifies land with natural features and potential conservation

opportunities which, if protected, would help create a preserved, healthy riparian corridor. The plan also recommends specific actions that would result in a continuous, healthy riparian buffer along the Swamp Creek. This report is available on the Montgomery County Lands Trust website: www.mclt.org. The William Penn Foundation has given Montgomery County Lands Trust a grant to continue work in the Swamp Creek and expand it to the Swamp Creek watershed.



Asclepias incarnata
Photograph courtesy of Ann Rhoads

Location

The Swamp Creek watershed drains a 55.4 square-mile area in western Montgomery County and Southeastern Berks County. (See watershed map in this brochure).

The creek itself originates in the hills of District Township, Berks County, part of the Pennsylvania Highland Natural Corridor. From there, it crosses the Montgomery County border just north of Gilbertsville in Douglass Township and flows through Douglass, New Hanover, Upper Frederick, and Limerick Townships. Before emptying into the Perkiomen Creek in Lower Frederick Township as it flows from Berks County to the Perkiomen Creek, the Swamp Creek is fed by Middle Creek, Schlegel Run, Minister Creek, Scioto Creek, and Goschenhoppen Creek. Along the way, the landscape is characterized by forested areas, rolling fields, as well as historic bridges, mills and farmsteads.

Benefits of a Natural Greenway

Benefits of a Swamp Creek Natural Greenway are numerous and varied and include the following:

Environmental

A Natural Greenway...

- filters out pollutants carried into our waterways by stormwater run-off from neighborhood streets and sidewalks
- stabilizes our soil and prevents erosion and silting of streams
- cools our neighborhoods
- reduces floodwater volumes and speed
- maintains water flows in streambeds, allowing fish to thrive

Habitat Preservation

A Natural Greenway...

- provides contiguous natural areas for habitat
- offers migration corridors
- supports biodiversity

Social Benefits

A Natural Greenway...

- creates a sense of local and regional identity
- provides a place to meet and socialize with friends and neighbors
- presents environmental educational opportunities for all ages
- enhances property values
- stimulates economic development
- provides potential transportation alternatives

Recreation and Wellness

A Natural Greenway...

- ensures areas for passive recreation
- grants access to exercise opportunities
- offers places for mental respite and quiet reflection
- provides local areas for family outings

Carbon Sequestration

A Natural Greenway...

- removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to reduce global warming
- sequesters carbon in the forest cover and other vegetation and incorporates it into plant tissue.

Resources:

Montgomery County's Climate Change Action Plan.

The Swamp Creek



Oley Hills, Berks County
Photograph courtesy of the Berks County Conservancy

Located in northwestern Montgomery County and southeastern Berks County in southeast Pennsylvania, the Swamp Creek watershed covers 55.4 square miles. Originating in the hills of District Township, Berks County, the Swamp Creek flows southeast for roughly 17.5 miles to its confluence with the Perkiomen Creek just north of the Borough of Schwenksville in Montgomery County.



Swamp Creek at Sunrise Mill
Photograph courtesy of Ann Rhoads

The Landscape of the Swamp Creek

The Oley Hills, in Berks County, consists of 27,144 acres of forested land in District, Pike, and Rockland Townships and is one of the largest undisturbed forested areas in Berks County. The Oley Hills is also home to the headwaters of Exceptional Value (EV) streams including Pine, Oysterville, Saucony, Bieber, Perkiomen (West Branch), and Trout Run. "Exceptional Value" are those streams that have received the highest water quality designation awarded in Pennsylvania.

This area is the birthplace of the high quality Swamp Creek. From its origins in the forested Oley Hills, the Swamp Creek flows past the urbanized area around Boyertown on the Montgomery County/Berks County border, then widens and slows as it flows into a large area of prime farmland and scattered residential landscape in western Montgomery County. The lower portion of Swamp Creek then courses along the edge of Stone Hills – a diabase ridge containing 4,300 acres of contiguous woodlands – before it joins with the Perkiomen Creek.

The Swamp Creek is contained within a federally designated special natural area known as the Highlands (www.highlandscoalition.org). The Highlands consists of more than three million connected acres of nationally significant forest and farmland running through Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Additional resources:

www.mclt.org

www.berks-conservancy.org/LandProtection/ProjectSpotlight/TheOleyHills/tabid/99/Default.aspx

Lower Perkiomen Creek Watershed Conservancy Plan, June 2005 – Natural Lands Trust, Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy



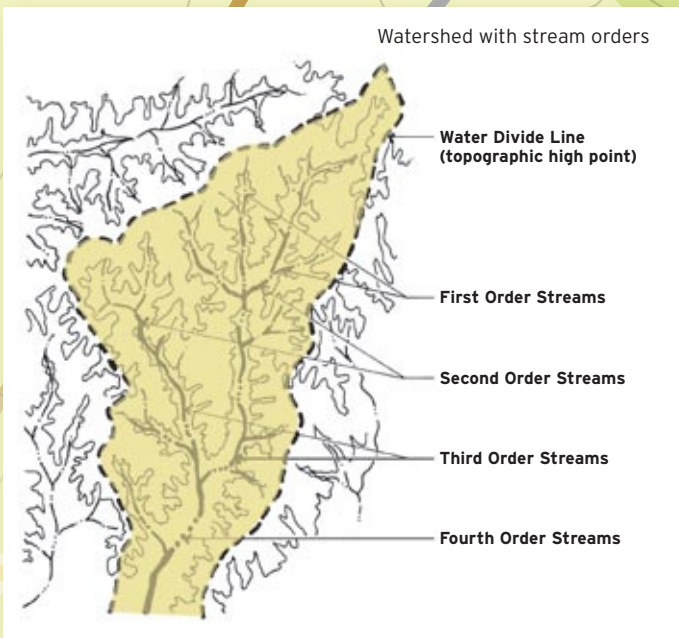
Bridge over the Swamp Creek at Sunrise Mill
Photograph courtesy of Ann Rhoads



View from Swamp Creek Road
Photograph courtesy of Ann Rhoads



Farm along Route 73 in Lower Frederick Township



Courtesy of the *Guidebook for Riparian Corridor Conservation* by Montgomery County Planning Commission

What is a forested riparian buffer?

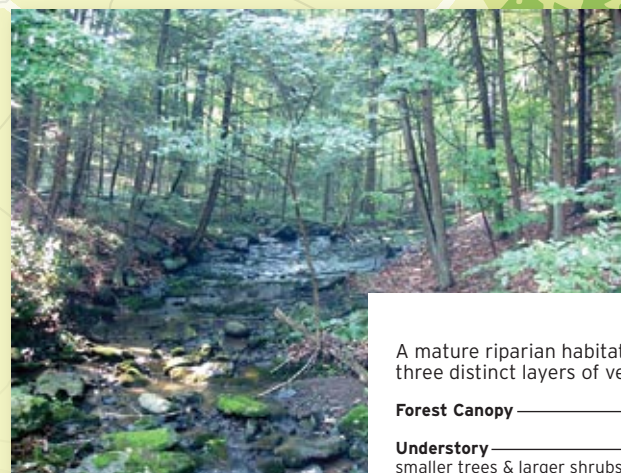
A continuous band of native trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers bordering a stream makes up a forested riparian buffer. Research shows that a high-quality forested buffer from 75 to 100-foot wide significantly benefits stream water quality.

Riparian buffers benefit us by:

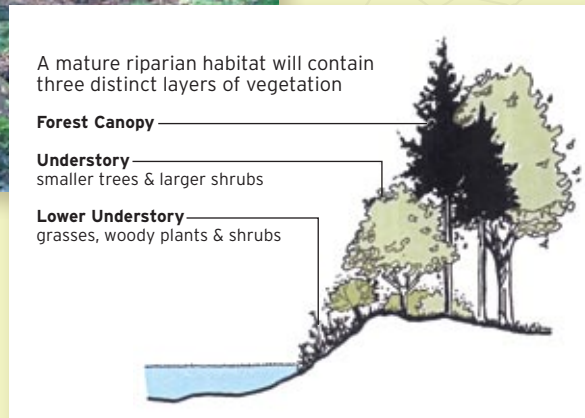
- Slowing flood waters
- Improving water quality
- Providing habitat protection
- Moderating climate
- Moderating water temperature
- Recharging groundwater
- Abating climate change

Additional Resources:

Guidebook for Riparian Corridor Conservation by Montgomery County Planning Commission: www.planning.montcopa.org



Healthy riparian buffer along Swamp Creek



Courtesy of the *Guidebook for Riparian Corridor Conservation* by Montgomery County Planning Commission

What are headwater streams?

Headwater streams are the initial, small, typically unnamed streams that feed a watershed, often called first order streams. Headwater streams may flow continuously or intermittently depending on the time of year or amount of rain. They may or may not have defined routes.

Headwater streams and wetlands (see "wetlands" in definitions) provide significant benefits to the watershed, including:

- Enhancing water quality
- Absorbing and storing flood waters
- Renewing groundwater supplies
- Removing excess pollutants
- Providing unique and diverse habitats that support thousands of species of animals and plants
- Providing seasonal spawning and nursery habitat for unique plants and animals

Additional Resources:

Stroud Water Research Center: www.stroudcenter.org
Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy: www.perkiomenwatershed.org

What is a watershed?

A watershed is the land drained by a river and its smaller streams and creeks. All land lies within a watershed. Therefore all human activity on land affects the health of the watersheds in which we live. Watersheds provide both the surface and well water on which area residents rely. Healthy watersheds are important to all life.

Additional resources:

The Center for Watershed Protection: www.cwp.org
The Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov/wow



Map Key

- Creeks
- Parks
- Forests
- Watershed
- Major Roads
- Secondary Roads
- Boroughs
- Municipality Borders

