

*Protecting, preserving and restoring the Indian Creek
and greater Youghiogheny River watersheds.*



Highlights:

- Chestnut Ridge Trout Unlimited will hold the Yough River Symposium on Friday June 24. More info at chestnutridgetu.org. See you there!
- Please see enclosed invitation for our 2016 annual banquet!

Join Us for our Annual Clean Water Banquet & Silent Auction on April 30!

Our 11th annual Clean Water Banquet & Silent Auction will be held on Saturday, April 30, 2016 at Brady's Restaurant on Route 31 in Acme, PA. Auction doors will open at 5:00 PM and dinner will be served at 6:30 PM. **Reservations must be pre-paid by April 22, 2016 (we cannot accept payment at the door or walk-ins this year).**

You may make your reservation & payment at www.mtwatershed.com, by calling (724) 455-4200, ext. 0#, or by sending payment to PO Box 408, Melcroft, PA 15462. Please mark "annual banquet" in the subject line of your check. Dinner is buffet style and vegetarian options will be available. For more information please call (724) 455-4200 ext. 0#.

Our banquet is a great time for us to celebrate our accomplishments and our volunteers and to raise money to continue protecting and preserving clean water in the Indian Creek and greater Youghiogheny River watersheds. Please plan to join us!

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Swimmable Waters Project Expansion - Yay!

We're pleased to announce we've recently received funding to support our Swimmable Waters project into 2016 and 2017. This project began in Summer 2014 as we sampled monthly at popular swimming spots around the Youghiogheny River watershed. We published the data on the Waterkeeper Alliance Swim Guide (theswimguide.org) so members of the public could make informed decisions about where to safely recreate.

Throughout the course of Summer 2014, we conducted *E. coli* sampling at 15 locations throughout the Youghiogheny River watershed. Eight sites were on the main stem of the Yough. Tributaries sampled included Sewickley Creek, Indian Creek, Morgan Run, Blue Hole Creek, Meadow Run, Laurel Hill Creek, and the Casselman River. Many thanks to YOU, our members and supporters, for letting us know where you recreate and for suggesting sampling locations for this project. Also, we are grateful to all of the area businesses that distributed promotional materials for the project.

The funds we've just received will allow for weekly sampling during the summer recreation season (May 1-October 1) at 10 locations around the watershed. Also included are funds to construct an in-house laboratory to process *E. coli* samples which will reduce the cost per sample from \$32 to

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Our annual Wildflower Walk, held in the spectacular Indian Creek Gorge, will take place Saturday, May 7, 2015 at 9:00 AM, rain or shine. We cover about a mile and a half at a very gentle pace, and the terrain is relatively flat. Our walk normally lasts until around 12:00 PM. This event is free of charge though donations are always welcome.

Parking is at the entrance to the Indian Creek Gorge off of

Route 381 near Mill Run, PA. From Route 381, look for the Camp Christian sign, and turn down the road toward the camp. At the Y, turn right and you'll see a small parking area on the right.

Our Wildflower Walk is led by local naturalist and MWA supporter Lisa Smith. Bring sturdy walking shoes, water, a camera, and an umbrella, if necessary. Come enjoy the beautiful Indian Creek Gorge with us!



Welcome Back, Jordan!

Our former AmeriCorps Volunteer Jordan Hoover has rejoined our staff as a full-time Community Organizer. In that position, he'll be working primarily on our shale gas projects.

Jordan graduated from the Pennsylvania State University in 2009 with a B.A. in Political

Science and a minor in History. Born and raised in the Laurel Highlands region, Jordan is a four-season outdoor enthusiast who understands the crucial nature of protecting our natural resources. We are pleased to have him join our staff once again!

Calendars are Sold Out

Our 2016 Lottery Calendars are sold out! Many thanks to everyone who purchased a calendar and also to our fantastic

volunteers who helped us sell all 1,000! We had requests for more than we had so please order early for 2017.

Small Fish Kill in the Yough

On February 7th we began to receive reports of small (2-3") fish dead or dying in the Yough River near Ohiopyle. On February 9th we went out to investigate and found a steady stream of dead or dying alewives in the river in Ohiopyle as well as a few larger game fish including smallmouth bass. After further investigation we found the fish were being pulled through Yough Dam in Confluence. During cold weather the alewives, which are sensitive to very cold water, gather just behind the dam in the deep and warmer water, and when the gates are opened to release water it causes a current which pulls them through the dam. We notified the Army Corps of Engineers which manages Yough Dam, and the Army Corps promptly performed their own investigation and reduced the discharge from the dam in an attempt to stop or reduce fish

mortality. They also took water samples and surveyed the lake to gather information and determine if the increased discharge was in fact the cause of the fish kill. At this time neither we or the Army Corps believe a water quality issue is to blame. This issue is fairly common in tailwaters across the region, and we're grateful to the Army Corps for taking quick

action to reduce the flow and lessen the number of fish impacted. Thank you to all of the boaters and fishermen who sent us reports of conditions on the river.

Remember, you can report pollution or other incidents to us anytime through our website or by calling 724-455-4200. We investigate citizen complaints. Thank you!



Above: 2" alewives found in Ohiopyle after a small fish kill in the river.

Membership Rates & Policy Revisions

After 20 years, we've made the decision to revise our membership rates and policies. Rates will increase slightly; new rates will take effect at the beginning of our fiscal year on April 1, 2016 and will be as follows:

- \$10 Individual
- \$15 Family
- \$20 Stream Defender
- \$50 Stream Friend
- \$100 Stream Hero
- \$500 Sustainer
- \$1,000 Benefactor

The other significant change is that membership will now become due on the anniversary date of when you joined MWA as a member. For example, if you joined in August you will receive a renewal notice in August rather than at the end of the calendar year.

All memberships and donations are fully tax-deductible, and memberships or donations over \$20 will be acknowledged.

Our online "join now" page

will also look a little different. We've converted the page from Paypal to Click and Pledge. Click and Pledge is a secure online donation system which is integrated with our new Watergrass database which we use to manage membership and donation information.

Thank you for your patience as we implement these changes!

A Bug's Eye View of Indian Creek

The tiny insects that live in the bottom of the stream, called macroinvertebrates, are very important residents of our watershed community. Their presence or absence along with their number and types tell us about the health of our streams. Some of these bugs can live anywhere, even below the Rondell mine drainage discharge where the pH levels of the stream are severely acidic (2.9). Others are only found within clean pristine waters of the watershed such as Back Creek, Mill Run, or Camp Run; these are commonly referred to as indicator species because their presence indicates a clean stream relatively free from pollution.

Based on a criterion designated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection each macroinvertebrate is assigned a pollution tolerant value. This is the amount of pollution an individual organism can tolerate for survival.

Organisms sensitive to pollution levels are on the lower end of the range (typically 0-3) while organisms that can live practically anywhere are on the upper end of the range (from 8-10). Organisms in the 4-7 range can tolerate some pollution.

Based on our 2015 monitoring a total of 10,950 individual bugs were collected within the Indian Creek watershed.



Above: Leptophlebiidae Mayfly found during sampling in Indian Creek

These bugs were collected from 44 samples taken at 25 locations. A total of 112 different macroinvertebrates were collected. Of these bugs 57 percent had a pollution tolerant value of three or less indicating that overall the health of the Indian Creek watershed is improving.

Our macroinvertebrate sampling has shown that the majority of locations sampled are in good condition. These sites include Indian Creek, Back Creek, Laurel Run, Mill Run, Champion Creek, and portions of Poplar Run. However there were portions of Poplar Run and Newmyer Run that are impaired which is not surprising as these areas are below the Marsolino, Rondell Correal, and Fulton mine drainage discharges.

Macroinvertebrate sampling is an important way to gauge the improving health of our watershed. If you're interested in volunteering to help collect macroinvertebrate samples please contact Carla.

Swimmable Waters Project *(continued from page 1)*

approximately \$12.

Sample results will be available through theswim-guide.org so you may check water quality prior to swimming, kayaking or fishing in a particular area. Do you have a favorite swim hole? Contact Krissy to suggest it for sampling.

If your business would like to show support for the Yough and for swimmable water, please contact us for materials (at right) to distribute. Thanks!



Second Gas Plant Proposed Along the Yough

A second natural gas-fired power plant is being proposed along the Yough in Elizabeth Township. The plant, proposed by Chicago-based Invenergy, would be called the Allegheny Energy Center (AEC) and would be located 8 miles downstream from Tenaska's newly permitted Westmoreland Generating Station. AEC's proposed location near Buena Vista is considered an EPA brownfield due to its long history of environmental degradation as a hazardous-waste landfill. The site was forced to close in 1983 as a result of illegal dumping where pollutants like benzene, xylene, and other known carcinogens leaked into an unnamed tributary of the Yough. Prior to the landfill, the property was also used as both a deep and strip mine. Operations

were suspended until 1988 when PA DEP declared a state of emergency on site and United States Steel Corporation and other responsible parties entered into an agreement with the Department to investigate and remediate the primary sources of contamination.

In 2002, the site was partially remediated but the full extent of contamination has never been documented by DEP. Deed restrictions, which have not been relevant until now, are in place to limit future development on the site. There is a very real concern that land disturbances could unearth additional sources of contamination and could potentially pollute the Yough. On February 18th 2016, Invenergy went before Elizabeth Township's zoning hearing board to request

variances which would allow them to apply for a conditional use to build the plant in a residential district, on the basis that the property's history would prevent it from ever being developed residentially. At the hearing, Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services represented both MWA and the local community group, Protect ET (Elizabeth Township) in opposing the issuance of variances for use, noise, and height.

A continuation of the hearing will take place on March 17th at 7:00 PM at the Elizabeth Forward Middle School to allow all parties to present expert testimony and for the zoning hearing board to consider public comment. This is an opportunity to advocate for the protection of the lower Yough. Please join us.

Goals for 2016 Trail Expansion Set

Committed to both trail expansion and trail maintenance, the Mountain Watershed Association Trail Committee and Trail Council have set goals for the coming construction season. We hope to extend the trail into the Indian Creek gorge all the way to the Yough and to build the Council into a working group that will monitor needs of trail users. The Trail Council is looking for more volunteers to hike and bike the trail to identify locations of fallen trees, rough spots, drainage problems, and issues with signage as well as to greet and assist trail

visitors as necessary.

One problem that arose during the snow storm that swept through our community in early February was the issue of plowing the trail. We have had more than one request to ask the township supervisors to limit the plowing so that people can cross country ski and snow shoe. If you would like us to "count noses" to see whether this is generally felt, please call the office and talk to Bev.

We have received several grants to build the gorge section of trail and are submitting additional

proposals for funds. At the very least we will begin the work this summer and do as much as possible with the funds we have. Tax exempt donations specifically for trail development are welcome.

Mark your calendar: Fayette Healthy Walks will visit our trail again this year! Their July 20th Wednesday Walk will begin at Resh Park in Indian Head. Stay tuned to our website for details or call the office as the date approaches.

Over 75 Attend DEP Hearing on Proposed Rustic Ridge Deep Mine

On December 15, 2015 the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) held a public hearing on a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System draft permit to discharge mine waters into Champion Creek and then into Indian Creek from the proposed Rustic Ridge deep mine. The National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program serves to control water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants into the waters of the United States.

Despite the close proximity to the Christmas holiday and the mid-afternoon time slot of the meeting, over 75 people attended. Twenty-nine of them gave testimony, all but one opposing the proposed deep mine. Many asked how, since the Department (DEP)

denied and defended the denial of the earlier Rand Am application they expected LCT could mine the same acidic coal seam without causing acid mine drainage and impacting the receiving springs and the public water supplies in our areas. Why is it that a known acid producing seam is being considered for mining in this area? Given that the state and federal governments and private foundations have spent more than \$7 million to treat discharges in the streams here, why would the Department even consider permitting this mine??

This is a question we have been asking for months. According to experts we engaged to review the permit, the proposed mine will cause discharges to the watershed—something not allowed to be permitted. Despite the

earlier Rand Am decision stating that barriers should be more than 1200 feet, the LCT application proposes barriers of 500 feet. This has caused concern about blowouts around our community. Add to that the fact that the underground Melcroft discharge (feeding into our Melcroft treatment system) has diminished over the past few months but the related mine pool elevation has not changed makes us wonder where all the contaminated water is going and where it is likely to appear next.

The conclusion is that the area is far too unstable to begin underground mining—particularly in such close proximity to the old Melcroft mine workings and in an area that DEP has already, per the Rand Am decision, deemed not safely mineable.

Greening MWA's Territory

We are in the process of purchasing our office building in Melcroft. We're excited to announce that part of this endeavor will include turning the building into a "green" building. What does that mean?

Recent studies show that green buildings glean savings and improvements in the form of:

- 26% less energy usage,
- 27% higher levels of occupant satisfaction,
- 18% lower maintenance costs, and

- 35% lower emissions of carbon dioxide, lowering the carbon footprint.

We already have estimates for upgrading the lighting system (to LEDs), improving the heating system, installing energy efficient water heaters, water conserving plumbing, and switching to solar electricity generation. With one of the primary drivers being to illustrate that there are alternative renewable sources of energy production, we are looking forward to the day when our roof is covered with solar panels. We

cannot wait to turn our office into a green epicenter.

Being a non-profit, we are always looking for ways to save money. Lower energy bills, lower water bills, and lower maintenance costs will help us be more cost effective and economical and will allow us to dedicate more of our resources to accomplishing our mission. Thank you for your support as we take this important next step in establishing the sustainability of the organization.

Our Laurel Landscape: Busy Bees

Did you know it is estimated that $\frac{1}{4}$ of the pollination for all fruits in the United States is the work of honeybees?! These little creatures are more important than we realize. When honeybees land to drink the sweet nectar of a flower, the pollen sticks to their bodies and is deposited on the next flower the bee visits. A simple process but oh so important. Recently, though, the honey bee population has been in decline because of air and water pollution, habitat degradation and pesticide use.

There are three different castes of bees in a honey hive; the queen, drones and worker bees. There is only one queen in the hive at a time. She is responsible for laying thousands of eggs. The drones also only have one responsibility; mating with the queen. Shortly after they mate, they die. If they are unsuccessful at mating they are expelled from the hive and will likely die of a lack of food and shelter. Finally, the worker bees are the kind that we typically come in contact with because they collect the pollen and nectar. Their lifespans are relatively short, ranging from 5- 7 weeks, but that span is becoming shorter and shorter. While humans typically only come into contact with the

worker bees, we are destroying whole hives with our indirect actions.

Honey bees are being deprived of the resources they need causing the phenomenon that commonly known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD). When a hive has been affected by CCD few or no living adults will be present, and typically very few dead bees are found. With no adults in a colony there is no way to reproduce or feed the larva. Scientists are looking at four main categories of stressors that may be responsible for the decline; pathogens, parasites, management stressors, and environmental stressors.



Above: Honey Bee
Photo: Karunakar Rayker/Flickr

The environmental stressors are ones that we could positively impact if we so choose. As it stands right now, the human population is having a severe negative impact. With more and more urbanization, many trees and flowers are being removed. This removal eliminates access to flowers and buds and can lower plant diversity. Also, lack of water and contaminated water are issues for honey bees. Water is essential for honey bees just as it is for us. Water sources are being relocated or eliminated; this makes it difficult for bees to find clean water.

In order to stop or slow CCD and the decline of the honey bee, we need to start providing more of the resources that the bees need. We can make some small changes in our own lives to get the ball rolling. We can provide bees with a diverse group of native plants and flowers in our own backyards or flower gardens and also include bird baths or ponds in our landscaping. While this may cause bees to linger around your house, know that they are usually more scared of you than you are of them. You will be providing them with the resources they need to keep their hives healthy, protect our food sources, and keep honey bee populations from plummeting. More flowers—less grass!

Water Matters: A Storytelling Blog Series

Our AmeriCorps Volunteer Jena Shaffer has recently begun work on a series of blog posts telling the stories of people

in our watershed who rely on clean water. If you have a story you'd like to share please contact Jena. Visit mtwatershed.com/blog to

check out the first two posts in this series!



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Upcoming Events

April 30

Clean Water Banquet &
Silent Auction

May 7

Wildflower Walk

November 2

General Membership Meeting
& Potluck Dinner

November 2016

Yough Defense Party
Date TBA

Visit www.mtwatershed.com
for more upcoming events.

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Type of Membership or Donation Amount	
____ Individual (\$10)	____ Stream Friend (\$50)
____ Family (\$15) Number of people _____	____ Stream Hero (\$100)
____ Group (\$15) Number of people _____	____ Sustainer(\$500)
____ Stream Defender (\$20)	____ Donation (Tax Deductible)

I would like to receive MWA's quarterly newsletter via email!

Please make checks payable to: Mountain Watershed Association
1414B Indian Creek Valley Rd., P.O. Box 408, Melcroft, PA 15462

The official registration and financial information of the Mountain Watershed Association, Inc.
may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free,
within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999.