



## **LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION**

**P.O. BOX 183      LEETSDALE, PA 15056**

**[www.lscwatershed.org](http://www.lscwatershed.org)**

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## **NEWS FROM THE WATERSHED**

## **OCTOBER, 2017**

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### **WATERSHED ASSESSMENT OF LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK**

The Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association (LSCWA) has engaged the services of Civil and Environmental Consultants (CEC) to coordinate the first comprehensive watershed assessment of Little Sewickley Creek and its tributaries ever performed. The assessment will evaluate existing impairments, prioritize these impairments by severity, and identify remediation/restoration projects to improve the overall water quality of the creek. An additional benefit will be the ability to base future funding requests for restoration projects on the professional findings of the assessment.

The success of the project is dependent upon a corps of dedicated volunteers trained this past June in USDA Visual Assessment Protocol by the Allegheny County Conservation District (ACCD). The group is made up of LSCWA BOD members, staff from ACCD, Allegheny Land Trust, and Sewickley Heights Borough, as well as community members. Diane Abell is Project Manager; April Claus is Volunteer Coordinator.

As of September 30th, 22 volunteers have participated for a total of 292 hours during 20 field sessions and have covered 91 reaches of 500 feet each or about 8.6 stream miles. 813 photographs have been taken during the field excursions. Assessment teams have completed all but the extreme upper reaches of the two largest branches of the creek and have started work on the larger tributaries.

Funding to cover the \$30,000 estimated cost of the assessment has been received from ACCD and from the Colcom Foundation. The Watershed Association Board has earmarked funds to cover any assessment costs not covered through these grants. The project which began in January 2017 will be completed with the delivery of the final CEC report at the end of June 2018.

We hope that the long-term outcome of the project will be improved health and biodiversity of the stream, so that Little Sewickley Creek may continue to be a source of natural beauty to our community as well as a resource for educational, research, and recreational opportunities.

In addition to our appreciation for ACCD's financial help, we are also very grateful for the many other ways that ACCD has shown its support for this project. They served as consultants while we developed our request for proposals, they trained our volunteers in USDA Visual Assessment Protocol, and they have accompanied us during numerous stream assessments to help accustom the volunteers to visual assessment work. In short, they have been available as resources during this entire project and have shown throughout a strong commitment to their mission and vision.

For more information about this project, please go to our website at [www.lscwatershed.org](http://www.lscwatershed.org)

### **GRANTS FOR WATERSHED ASSESSMENT OF LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK**

#### **from the Allegheny County Conservation District**

*The mission of the Allegheny County Conservation District (ACCD) is to engage and lead "through partnerships, innovation, and implementation to conserve, promote, and improve Allegheny County's natural resources". Of special value in this vision is the importance of clean water. The goal of the LSCWA stream assessment to identify and address impairments to the creek's water quality aligns closely with this mission. In May of 2017, word was received that a grant request submitted to ACCD for \$10,000 had been approved for the full amount.*

#### **from the Colcom Foundation**

*In January, 2017, we learned that the Pittsburgh-based Colcom Foundation provides financial support for environmental projects related to natural resource preservation and land and water conservation, and that there might be interest in helping to fund the stream/watershed assessment project. We applied for a grant, and in August, we received a check from Colcom for \$19,100 to be used toward carrying out our assessment project. We extend our thanks to Colcom and we greatly appreciate their support. See <http://colcomfdn.org/> for more information.*

### **UPDATE ON THE QUAKER VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT**

#### **from Angela Conigliaro, Director of Communications at QVSD**

"Since the spring, the District has been actively engaged in a thorough review and analysis of the Three Rivers Trust property to determine whether that property is suitable for its contemplated use as the site for a new high school. The property lies within the municipalities of Edgeworth, Leetsdale, and Leet between Camp Meeting Road and Walker Park and is less than a mile from the current high school site. The investigations and inspections that have been and are underway include environmental testing, soil assessments, land use review, surveying, geotechnical testing, title review, and access analysis. These ongoing due diligence activities, when concluded, will assist the Board in determining whether to go forward with the acquisition of the property. It could take until December before the Board is in a position to make its final determination."

Dr. Joseph Marrone, Director of Administrative Services for the QVSD, is in charge of the property review and is on the agenda for our Annual Meeting on November 15.

### SUMMER DISCOVERY DAY CAMP

Chriss O'Lare has been in charge of Summer Discovery for many years, and describes the 2017 camp activities: We had another two successful weeks of Summer Discovery day camp. We spent most of the week exploring the land and water of Walker Park and then headed to Fern Hollow Lake on the final day of each week. We appreciate Rett and Don King once again sharing their property with us so that we can compare the organisms found in the creek to those of their lake. We had quite a few interesting sightings over the weeks including great blue herons, kingfishers, vultures, tadpoles, dragonflies (adults and nymphs), and a northern water snake.

**To register for *Summer Discovery* in 2018, look for info on the LSCWA website ([lscwatershed.org](http://lscwatershed.org)) in March.**

**Regardless of where they live, students who are presently in grades 3, 4, 5, or 6, are eligible to join us!**

### THE LATEST FROM THE QV CREEKERS

April Claus reports that she is thrilled that the LSCWA has continued to sponsor another year of the afterschool environmental science internship, the **QV Creekers**: the 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year! A big thanks to our additional sponsor "Creek Connections" at Allegheny College for supporting us by providing testing equipment and staff assistance (Laura Branby) over the years! Sadly, we say goodbye to our QVHS coordinator, Maryann Cibulas, who has been our faculty connection at the high school since 2009. Mrs. Cibulas retired this past June and Mrs. Amy Keller will now serve as the academic coordinator.

Mrs. Keller and I have already contacted 20 students to participate this year – 10 returning students and 10 new students. Students may stay for two years and then they step aside to give other interested students a turn to learn. Approximately 85 students have completed the internship to date; some have moved on to graduate school/medical school and update me often about their newest pursuits. Many of their brothers and sisters apply to be part of the internship because their siblings had such a wonderful experience.

During this past school year,

The QV Creekers were able to collaborate with two biology faculty members (Dr. Kurt Regester and Dr. Helen Hampikian) at Clarion University. Last fall, Creekers caught and swabbed the skin and gathered tissue samples from numerous salamander and frog species to test for the presence of two different amphibian pathogens. We then made two separate trips to the molecular biology labs at Clarion over the winter to analyze our results. Clarion faculty donated their time and provided us with free supplies to help us complete this project. We were searching for the presence of chytrid fungus (B.d) and/or Ranavirus, both of which have been known to adversely affect amphibian populations. It is thought that these two pathogens may play a role in the decline of amphibians globally. The good news is we were not able to detect either in any of our samples throughout the entire study; however, this doesn't mean either one is not present in our watershed. We have also not witnessed any outbreaks (major mortality episodes) of these diseases in our area during our frequent trips to the Bell Acres wetlands and Little Sewickley Creek so our lab results compare favorably with those from the field. Students made posters and shared their results with over 300+ students at the Creek Connections research symposium held at Camp Kon-o-kwee in April 2017. It was a great experience for all and we are talking about extending this project into this field season.

In addition to amphibian pathogen work, the QV Creekers decided they wanted to switch gears and study one of our lesser known semi-aquatic mammal species, the American mink. Since there have been

incidental mink sightings over the years along the Little Sewickley Creek, we decided to set up a field camera at several of these locations. Students baited the area with extremely pungent sardines. Success! A live mink was seen on camera in at least one location several times, and at a later date, two additional road kill specimens were found less than a mile from there along Fern Hollow Road. It was fun to see the results of our field camera sessions which produced pictures of raccoons, squirrels and deer in their native habitat.

This fall, the QV Creekers are looking forward to working once again with Eric Chapman (Director of Aquatic Science at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy) to investigate whether any more fish species have continued to move upstream as a result of the Woodland dam removal (in 2015). We will monitor the same two sites as last fall (using electro-fishing gear) approximately 0.5 miles and 1.0 miles upstream of the dam removal site. Last year, we added several new species to the list migrating upstream from the Ohio River to sites above the former dam, including Green sided darters, Long nose dace, Spotted bass and Bluntnose minnow. The next fish sampling will occur in early October, and results from the fall sampling will be placed on the LSCWA website.

This year, QV Creekers will also continue to monitor populations of the Jefferson and Spotted salamanders at our wetland site in Bell Acres on the northern border of Sewickley Heights Borough Park. These pit trap surveys will start in late February/early March and will continue to collect long term mark/recapture data in collaboration with Dr. Catie Hanna of Robert Morris University's Biology Dept.

### THE ANN COBURN MEMORIAL CREEK CAMP SCHOLARSHIP

This past year, the LSCWA lost one of our dearest board members, Ann Coburn. Ann was a passionate nature enthusiast and always took a strong interest in educating the local youth about our natural resources. Therefore, the Board of Directors took great pleasure in renaming this scholarship in her memory.

Since 2010, the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association has provided full/partial scholarships for a total of 12 QV creekers to attend a session of Creek Camp at Allegheny College during the summer. This year's full scholarship recipient was Quaker Valley high school junior, Aiden Dimeolo of Sewickley. We are looking forward to hearing about Aiden's experience at our Annual Meeting on November 15. You can learn more about Creek Camp and Aiden's adventures by exploring the Creek Connections website at <http://sites.allegheny.edu/creekconnections/creek-camp/>.

**WATERSHED DISCOVERY DAY**

On a very soggy Sunday, May 21, 2017 we hosted our second annual watershed discovery day. A steady rain kept most people at home but we did have a few friends stop by Walker Park and the Amphibian Habitat Restoration site in Bell Acres. A few people even hiked through the mud for a guided walk to our local beaver dams. Thanks go to everyone who participated and the Sewickley Confectionary which provided ice cream. We hope to see sunshine and lots of people at our third annual event in May, 2018!

**THOMAS MARSHAL FOUNDATION GRANT**

The LSCWA was honored to receive a \$12,000 grant from the Thomas Marshall Foundation to fund an education program at The Bradley Center in Robinson Township. Thomas Marshall, the former chairman of Aristech Chemical Corp., started the foundation in 1994 to improve the quality of life for women and children.

The Bradley Center is a licensed, private academic school for elementary and secondary students who have severe trauma histories and mental health diagnoses. Since 2014, Fern Hollow Nature Center (FHNC) has provided environmental education programs to Bradley students and faculty at several locations within the LSC watershed. FHNC developed the hands-on curriculum and provides the materials and an educator; LSCWA provides trained volunteers to assist in the program. Over the course of each year's programming, during sessions in the fall, winter and spring, the students look forward to seeing familiar faces and learning in a relaxed, outdoor environment.

The Thomas Marshall Foundation Grant has allowed us to slightly expand the program and ensures that it will continue for 3 years.

Secretary Marisa Tobias was fortunate to meet Sue Roberts, Thomas Marshall's daughter and Sewickley resident, when the LSCWA was invited to speak at a meeting of The Little Garden Club.

**LSCWA DONATES LAND TO ALLEGHENY LAND TRUST AND TO THE BOROUGH OF SEWICKLEY HEIGHTS**

On January 6, 2016, the Board of Directors approved the donations of 77 acres in Devils Hollow (along Sevin Road) to Allegheny Land Trust and 92 acres in Wagoner's Hollow (along Little Sewickley Creek Road) to the Borough of Sewickley Heights. Since the early 1990's, the Watershed Association has owned these parcels of land which had been deeded to the LSCWA by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, with the restrictions that the land remain "forever wild" and that encroachments and motorized vehicles be prohibited.

ALT had indicated that Devils Hollow would be an important link in the greenway being created from Sewickley Hills Park along Little Sewickley Creek to the Ohio River, and across the ridge to Big Sewickley Creek. The Borough of Sewickley Heights expressed a wish to incorporate the Wagoner's Hollow land into its park system. Both groups agreed to adhere to the deed restrictions, so that the land would remain forever wild and open for hiking and nature study.

On December 29, 2016, the paperwork was complete, and the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association officially transferred the parcels of land. See [www.lscwatershed.org](http://www.lscwatershed.org) for additional details and historical information.

**DEVIL'S HOLLOW TRAIL NAMED IN HONOR OF ANN COBURN**

A hiking/biking trail runs through the Devil's Hollow property, and on Saturday, July 1, 2017, the Allegheny Land Trust dedicated that trail in Ann Coburn's honor. A plaque with Ann's name marks the beginning of the trail. The LSCWA was in full support of the dedication – and pleased that Ann's endeavors in working with local conservation groups were recognized. We should note that Ann Coburn was a member of the Boards of Directors of both ALT and LSCWA, and supported the Devil's Hollow land donation to ALT by LSCWA.

**The QVRA Project and the BAMA project** address significant problems from past years. The Board has been actively following the mitigation efforts and is pleased to report significant improvements to the water quality of the tributaries to Little Sewickley Creek.

**UPDATE ON QVRA PROJECT AT THE  
LEGACY FIELDS AT BOUCHARD FAMILY PARK**

The Alcoa Foundation has awarded a grant to Tree Pittsburgh in support of their desire to work with the Quaker Valley Recreation Association (QVRA) to plant trees and provide educational programs for the community at the Legacy Fields site in Bell Acres. The trees will be quite small and densely planted to increase survival rates. Teams will be organized to do the planting in the spring of 2018. Alcoa will supply one of the teams as will the Quaker Valley School District. Over time these trees will further reduce stormwater run-off and improve water quality, both important benefits to one of the headwaters of LSC located nearby.

**BELL ACRES MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY  
SEWER PROJECT**

The Bell Acres Municipal Authority (BAMA) has completed a project to convert four malfunctioning package sewage treatment plants (STPs) to pump stations. The sewage is now being pumped to a new sewer line along Camp Meeting Road through Leet Township and on to the much larger Leetsdale Waste Water Treatment Plant. For many years, the two STPs located in the LSC watershed had been negatively impacting tributaries running through the environmentally sensitive land of Waggoner's Hollow and Devil's Hollow before reaching LSC. With the conversion of these STPs to pump stations this past spring, the contamination has ended, and the water quality of these tributaries is expected to greatly improve. The other STP still in operation within the LSC watershed is located at the Amphibian Habitat Restoration site. BAMA has renovated this STP, but plans to convert this also to a pump station when funding becomes available.

ANNOUNCEMENT of ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association  
is open to everyone in the watershed community.  
The meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 15, 2017 , at 7:00 PM  
at the Fern Hollow Nature Center, 1901 Glen Mitchell Road, Sewickley, PA

AGENDA

- Approval of Minutes from 2016 Annual Meeting
- Approval of Treasurer’s Report for Fiscal Year-to-date 2017
- Approval of Budget for 2018
- Approval of new members to the Board of Directors
- Anyone who is a paid member of LSCWA may vote on the above agenda items.  
(see [www.lscwatershed.org](http://www.lscwatershed.org) for Minutes and Treasurer’s Report)
- President’s Report of LSCWA accomplishments in 2017
- Report on Allegheny College Creek Camp
- Report on status of watershed assessment project
- Acknowledgement of grants received (ACCD, Colcom, Thomas Marshall)
- Considerations for acquisition of Three Rivers Trust property as site for new Quaker Valley High School  
(Guest: Joseph Marrone, Director of Administrative Services,  
Quaker Valley School District)
- Posters illustrating QV Creeker projects will be on display.

SUMMARY OF OPERATING EXPENSES INCURRED IN 2017  
BY THE LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

Your membership donations make it possible to fund the projects and programs listed below.

Summer Discovery Day Camp at Walker Park	\$ 3812.
Stipends for Director and Counselors; Insurance	
Fern Hollow Nature Center	\$ 4550.
QV Creekers Projects	
Allegheny College Creek Camp	
General Liability Insurance	\$ 353.
Newsletter	\$ 1301.
Printing, postage, stationery	
Administrative costs	\$ 70.
Website, mailing, office supplies	
2017 YEAR-TO-DATE BUDGET EXPENSES	\$10,086
Project expenses for the watershed assessment are covered by grants from the Allegheny County Conservation District and the Colcom Foundation.	

INVITATION

The Board of Directors of the Watershed Association invites you to work with us on current and future projects.  
Please get in touch through our website ([lscwatershed.org](http://lscwatershed.org): *Join and Volunteer*) if you are interested in volunteering to help on projects, if you have ideas for future projects, and/or if you wish to be a member of the Watershed Association.



We have a new look!  
Thanks go to the talents  
of the Allegheny Watershed Alliance  
for our new logo.