



**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 2018**

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**WATERSHED ASSESSMENT OF LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK**

There is always a sense of euphoria that accompanies the successful completion of a huge project on which many people have invested a great deal of time, energy, and hard work – and the completion of the Watershed Assessment of Little Sewickley Creek is no exception.

In January of 2017, due to concerns about sedimentation and decreasing biodiversity within the creek, the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association (LSCWA) engaged the services of Civil and Environmental Consultants (CEC) to coordinate and supervise the first complete assessment of Little Sewickley Creek and its tributaries ever performed by professional environmental consultants.

The main assessment goals for CEC were 1) to identify existing impairments within the creek system that were affecting water quality, 2) to prioritize these impairments by severity, and 3) to make recommendations that would improve the health of the creek and its watershed.

Although CEC was charged with analysis of historic data on the creek, GIS mapping, evaluation of all photos and assessment scores, and then the delivery of a final report with assessment findings and recommendations, the actual assessment work in the main creek and tributaries was performed by a group of volunteers trained in USDA Visual Assessment Protocol by the Allegheny County Conservation District (ACCD). The assessment could not have been accomplished without their hard work under all sorts of tough conditions.

We view the completion of the assessment as not an end in itself, but as the beginning of so much more. We now have a variety of recommendations for

improving the health of the creek from which to choose, and we can develop a plan of action for future restoration projects or activities that will enhance the creek water quality and encourage biodiversity.

That being said, we have already gained many benefits from the completion of the assessment:

- We now have a complete snapshot from this point in time of the main branch of Little Sewickley Creek and of all its main tributaries, with photos, assessment scores, mapping, etc. This information will be very useful as a basis for comparison when future land use issues arise.
- The complete CEC final report, will be available on the LSCWA website in the near future. This information will be extremely useful for researchers studying Little Sewickley Creek and its watershed as well as for any other interested persons or groups.
- We were extremely fortunate to receive grants from ACCD and from the Colcom Foundation to help cover the cost of this assessment project, but if we decide in the future to take on some of the more expensive recommended projects, we will need to seek new funding. We are certain that the completion of a professional assessment performed by professional environmental consultants will add credibility and weight to our future grant requests.
- The volunteers who worked on the assessment developed a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to the future of the creek and its watershed. We believe that this group of volunteers will remain interested and invested in working with the Watershed Association on future projects.

***Here are some facts about the volunteer portion of the assessment:***

- 38 volunteers participated in the assessment, including members of the LSCWA Board; staff members from Sewickley Heights Borough, Fern Hollow Nature Center, Allegheny Land Trust (ALT), and ACCD; Quaker Valley High School environmental science interns; and interested community members.
- The volunteers started the assessment on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, at the point where the creek enters the Ohio River, and finished on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in Franklin Park near Acorn Park, at the point where the main branch originates – almost a full year of field work.
- They walked the entire main branch of Little Sewickley Creek and all of its main tributaries – a total of 26 miles.
- They went out on 63 different assessment outings in groups of 3-4 persons.
- They spent a total of 813 hours on assessment work in the creek.
- They took 2737 photos.
- They dealt with rain, snow, ice, slippery and jagged rocks, log jams, freezing weather, humid, hot weather, ticks, flu season, mud, finicky GPS Units, and on and on, but they prevailed...

We are so appreciative of their efforts and of the efforts of April Claus, who served as the LSCWA Volunteer Coordinator on the project and who set the tone for the consistently high quality of the assessment work for each and every volunteer outing.

**A Summary of the CEC Final Report findings and recommendations may be accessed now on our website at [www.lscwatershed.org](http://www.lscwatershed.org)**

### SUMMER DISCOVERY DAY CAMP by Chriss O'Lare

The first year that I took over the LSCWA's day camp, my mom thought it would be nice to bake chocolate-chip cookies for the kids for snack-time on the final day. Twenty-five years later, she is still baking cookies!

When Ed Schroth decided that he would like to pass on the tradition of his environmental education camp, I was in the right place at the right time. I was a long-term sub at Quaker Valley High School and had recently completed a season at an outdoor education camp in Ohio. Although I really enjoyed teaching science in the classroom, I was thrilled to have the chance to continue teaching outside in the summer.

In 1994, there were four week-long sessions, two for rising fifth-graders and two for sixth-graders. Over the years, the program expanded to include rising fourth through seventh graders. Although we hold only two week-long sessions now, each week is a mix of ages.

We have also changed locations several times. Originally, we used the classrooms in the lower level of QVHS and walked over to Morrow-Pontefract Park. When the high school was renovated, we used the restrooms at Sewickley Academy's athletic complex so that we could still walk to the park that included Little Sewickley Creek. We also spent a couple of weeks at Fern Hollow Nature Center right after it opened but we missed having the creek nearby so the following year, we decided to try out Walker Park which has been our home base ever since. Although we are no longer able to walk to the Ohio River on our "creek walk," we can easily spend more time in the creek on a daily basis.

The other big change has been our Friday field trip. Fridays used to mean a bus trip to the nature center of North Park. Since 2016, however, Don and Rett King have invited us to use their property known locally as Fern Hollow Lake, Kings' Lake, or The Soggy Bottom Lodge to explore another part of the Little Sewickley Creek's watershed. Although some campers have been there already to fish, we use nets to bring up macroinvertebrates to see what those fish are eating. We can compare what we find in the lake to the macros and fish that we collected in the creek early in the week.

Regardless of where camp has been held, we have always had the goal of teaching children about the natural world in a fun way. Games that teach ecological principles are a staple of the camp. Kids run around acting as a deer, or a hawk, or a water droplet and forget that they are learning at the same time. Journals are created on the first day and campers record their findings and create their creek creature which they then make out of a sponge and test out in the creek.

Besides chocolate-chip cookies on Friday, the other constant at Summer Discovery has been our Wednesday night program at Sewickley Heights Borough Park. When I took over the camp, John Orndorff, a member of LSCWA, volunteered to help at the camp and share his nature knowledge. It also just so happened that Comet Shoemaker-Levy was crashing into Jupiter and John had a telescope that we could view it with. We invited the campers and their families to join us in the evening to see this site. Ever since, we have continued this tradition to teach people about the night sky, as well as take a walk in the woods and play a few games. Like my mom, I am sure that John did not realize what he was getting himself into, but he has become an integral part of the program.

**To register for *Summer Discovery* in 2019, 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

2018 marked the **10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of the QV Creekers!** April Claus reports the afterschool environmental science internship is one of her most rewarding experiences and we are so grateful for her dedication and devotion to the program. This year we welcomed Amy Keller as Quaker Valley's new academic coordinator for the program. A big thanks to the additional sponsor "Creek Connections" at Allegheny College for supporting the Creekers by providing testing equipment and staff assistance (Laura Branby) over the years!

Each year 20 students participate in a variety of field experiences throughout the watershed. Students may stay for two years and then they step aside to give other interested students a turn to learn. Over 100 students have completed the internship to date; some have moved on to graduate school/medical school. Here is what some of them have to say about their experiences:

*"The QV Creekers internship helped me gain experience in the environmental field and build friendships that are still going strong years later. When I was applying for colleges and internships in college, having the internship on my resume helped significantly as I already had experience in the field". – (Eric Bergdoll, QVHS Graduate, 2014)*

*"As a home-schooled student, Q.V. Creekers offered me the opportunity to engage in a learning environment centered on teamwork and friendship. I've always looked fondly back on my time with the group; it was special to find a shared appreciation and respect for nature in such a diversified group of students. I still wear my Creeker shirt with pride!" – (Genevieve Abell Graduate, 2011)*

*"I enjoyed learning about the watershed and the ecosystem through Creekers, and it was fun as well as interesting! Even though I'm not actively involved in environmental science anymore, I think it's really important to learn about the environment around you and how you can affect it, positively or negatively." (Sabine Gross, QVHS Graduate, 2016)*

*"Having the opportunity to do Creekers in high school is the equivalent of being able to do Co-ops in college. For those*

*curious about environmental science, there is no better activity to be involved in." - (Devon Jones, QVHS Graduate, 2018)*

*"Creekers provided me with an incredible foundation in conducting research experiments in real-world settings, understanding how to apply scientific concepts to learn more about our environment, and working closely with peers to accomplish challenging goals. Not only was it a fun, community-driven organization, but I was able to take the skills I developed in Creekers and use them to my research work in college. The dam removal project taught me valuable lessons about learning to communicate effectively between our community at large and the scientists conducting the experiments. I spent several years working with Creekers, the being able to see the impact of our work from year-to-year was gratifying and motivating. I'm so grateful for the time I got to spend with Creekers!" – (Laura Kou Graduate, 2014)*

*"Joining creekers was one of the best experiences of my life. Not only was it something fun to do during high school but when I went to college it helped me get involved in research after only the first week because I already had experience." – (Felicity Moffett Graduate, 2018)*

### SUMMER INTERNSHIP COLLABORATION: SEWICKLEY HEIGHTS BOROUGH PARK AND LSCWA

This year the LSCWA and Sewickley Heights Borough Park joined forces to offer a summer internship experience for a local college student. Recent graduate Matthew McCurdy (Duquesne University, May 2018) was chosen for the position this year. Here is an article written by Matthew about his 270 hours logged this summer. Matthew is now heading to Utah for his next ecological adventure with Americorps!

*"A Rewarding Experience"*

*It has been one awesome summer in the watershed, but sadly I have reached the end of my internship. In short, I have learned buckets about Pennsylvania's ecosystem and ecology in general, while getting new skills that should help my career in conservation greatly.*

*One of my favorite projects was monitoring 13 bluebird boxes throughout the watershed. The data we collected along with our dutiful volunteer Eileen Hencher was ultimately uploaded to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project Nestwatch. This means that the bluebirds may one day thank us for the weekly solicitation, because the data we collected could be used to support scientific studies of their behavior and development, and contribute to conservation efforts. My favorite aspect of the nestwatch was getting to know the local birds and their personalities. But the data itself is pretty rewarding, too: this summer, our friends laid 87 eggs, and 46 of those babies successfully hatched and survived to leave the nest. As for all wild animals, life as a bluebird is tough. However the wildflower meadows and mowed areas of Sewickley Heights Borough Park make fantastic habitat for them, where they would historically have to rely on forest fires to create similar swaths of insect-rich land. It is awesome what you can learn with a good teacher and some binoculars!*

*I enjoyed participating in the long-term water quality testing as well. The monthly stream tests can give the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association an alarm if anything goes wrong, and also provide long term data to track gradual changes in measures, such as conductivity or total dissolved solids. It is great to contribute to the preservation of such an ecologically important watershed, because it does a service not only to Little Sewickley Creek, but to all of Allegheny County. Really, every healthy watershed helps to promote the biodiversity of Pennsylvania at large.*

*Trail work was the most challenging activity of the summer, and probably where I learned the most. I loved learning different methods of trail construction, improvement, and repair, and April was the best mentor I could have asked for. This was very rewarding, too. Just a few days of hard work can turn a wreck of mud and erosion into a lovely, sustainable multi-use path. It was a special treat to carry out these projects with our hard-working park volunteers. I want to thank all of you for that opportunity!*

*I have tried my best to summarize my experiences this summer, but there are simply too many great things to include them all in detail. Small mammal and crayfish burrow surveys, school group visits, and astronomy programs all afforded me experience and education that I will never forget, and will put to good use. Thank you to the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association and to Sewickley Heights Borough for all of the wonderful opportunities.*

*Until next time, Matthew McCurdy*

### MARCELLUS SHALE DRILLING

Unconventional gas well drilling and development is currently underway in Economy Borough, Beaver County. We anticipate that leasing for sub-surface horizontal drilling/fracking will next extend into Bell Acres (and possibly Leet and/or Franklin Park), Allegheny County. The LSCWA may be approached for leasing the Waggoner's Hollow property located on Little Sewickley Creek Road in Sewickley Heights which borders Bell Acres. Although we donated the property to Sewickley Heights we retained the mineral rights.

In the event of a potential lease offer we recognize the following:

- Our mission:

As stated in Article II of our bylaws:

*The purpose of the Association is to protect and to conserve the natural beauty and the environmental health of Little Sewickley Creek and its watershed (the Watershed) in Allegheny County, PA.*

- The high quality of Little Sewickley Creek and its watershed;
- The number of residents within the watershed that rely on well water; and,
- The potential negative impacts of sub-surface horizontal drilling/fracking.

We have concluded that leasing the Waggoner's Hollow property for gas well drilling and development are contrary to our mission and therefore should not be approved.

### ACORN PARK LOGGING

Acorn Park is a 25-acre park located in Franklin Park, at the headwaters to Little Sewickley Creek. In early January 2018, LSCWA was contacted by a concerned Franklin Park resident informing us that Franklin Park was initiating a Timber Harvesting Plan to remove over 200 trees in the park. We immediately evaluated the limited information provided by Franklin Park and

conducted several site investigations. Based on our assessment we judged that there were several significant deficiencies with their logging plan and that those deficiencies had the potential to negatively impact the headwaters of Little Sewickley Creek. Accordingly, we filed a formal appeal of the logging plan on January 29, 2018.

At Franklin Park's public Borough Council meeting on February 21, 2018, the LSCWA and 11 concerned Franklin Park residents made public comments enumerating and explaining the specific deficiencies of Franklin Park's logging plan. We estimate 10-15 other Franklin Park residents attended the meeting to oppose the logging plan.

We were pleased that Franklin Park Borough Council took those concerns seriously and unanimously passed Motion #17 which authorized the borough manager to negotiate contract termination terms with the logging contractor.

Franklin Park stated at the public meeting that they will reevaluate their plan and include interested residents and organizations in their discussion. LSCWA board members met with Franklin Park council members in March and again in May. The May meeting took place in Acorn Park and also included representatives of the Allegheny Land Trust and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Many good recommendations were made as to how best manage and support Acorn Park. To date, Franklin Park has cut the invasive Japanese knotweed by the parking lot and applied herbicide to the cut stems.

The LSCWA continues to monitor Franklin Park's plans for Acorn Park by attending their public Council and Environmental Advisory Committee meetings.

**THOMAS MARSHAL FOUNDATION GRANT**

The LSCWA was honored to receive a three-year \$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.

Now in the 2nd year of our grant, the LSCWA, in cooperation with Fern Hollow Nature Center (FHNC) has provided programs to over 480 Bradley students and faculty at several locations within the LSC watershed. Over the course of each year's programming, during sessions in the fall, winter and spring, we have learned about plankton, mammals, rocks, minerals and fossils, owls, maple sugaring and have enjoyed fishing together in King's Lake. We have formed warm relationships with the students and hopefully an appreciation for our beautiful watershed.

**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 14, 2018, at 7:00 PM  
at the Fern Hollow Nature Center, 1901 Glen Mitchell Road, Sewickley, PA**

**AGENDA**

**Approval of Minutes from 2017 Annual Meeting**

**Approval of Treasurer's Report for Fiscal Year-to-date 2018**

**Approval of Budget for 2019**

**Election of officers and members of the Board of Directors for the 2019-2020 term**

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 2018**

**Report on Allegheny College Creek Camp**

**Report: Overview of Watershed Assessment and Where We Go from Here**

**Update on new Quaker Valley High School site**

*Posters illustrating QV Creeker projects will be on display.*

**SUMMARY OF OPERATING EXPENSES INCURRED IN 2018 BY THE LSCWA (through Oct. 2018)**

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

<b>Summer Discovery Day Camp at Walker Park</b>	<b>\$3,850</b>
Stipends for Director and Counselors; Insurance; Supplies	
<b>Fern Hollow Nature Center</b>	<b>\$4,550</b>
QV Creekers Projects; Allegheny College Creek Camp and Scholarship	
<b>Watershed Assessment</b>	<b>\$5,150</b>
Paid by LSCWA in addition to grants from Colcom and ACCD	
<b>Summer Intern</b>	<b>\$1,500</b>
<b>General Liability Insurance</b>	<b>\$350</b>
<b>Newsletter</b>	<b>\$353</b>
Printing, postage, stationery	
<b>Administrative costs</b>	<b>\$224</b>
Website, mailing, office supplies. PO Box	

*A complete overview of the 2018 budget will be presented at the meeting.*

**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.