



WATERSHED NEWS

October 2020

LITTLE SEWICKLEY CREEK WATERSHED ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 183 LEETSDALE, PA 15056

www.lscwatershed.org

October 2020 Update

Barbara Carrier, LSCWA President

When traveling the roadway that meanders alongside Little Sewickley Creek this summer, you may have caught a glimpse of local children catching crawfish, people relaxing and fishing along the creek banks, and families enjoying the outdoors by picnicking in Walker Park. These are just a few ways that demonstrate how important this watershed is to the surrounding communities. Little Sewickley Creek also serves as an outdoor laboratory to various local schools and camp groups who explore the biodiversity that can be found in the stream and on its banks.

This is why the mission of Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association is to “to protect and to conserve the natural beauty and the environmental health of Little Sewickley Creek and its watershed”. Have you had a chance to enjoy a piece of this local treasure? How can you support this crucial asset to our community?

This year the watershed association has received two grants to continue to build upon past work that seeks to improve the overall health and biodiversity of Little Sewickley Creek and bring the creek closer to achieving DEP Exceptional Value Status. We have once again engaged Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. to continue studying the status of base flow of the surface water within the watershed. CEC began sampling of the surface water in July. They have begun sampling surface water at one hundred fifteen locations within the watershed and its tributaries. The stream water at each monitoring location was analyzed in the field for specific conductance, pH, and temperature. Their finding and summary data will be posted on the association’s website in GIS form when they have completed the study.

Due to Covid-19, the membership meeting held Monday, November 16th, will be virtual. At this meeting, the Board votes on officers and gives a yearly review. If you wish to be part of this meeting, please email info@lscwa.org.



Join the Watershed Board

Chriss O'Lare, Secretary

The Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association (LSCWA) is currently looking for members to join our board of directors. We especially need individuals who live in Bell Acres or Sewickley Hills to represent those areas. Board members are asked to serve a two-year term, starting in January of 2021.

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Attending 2-3 board meetings per year
- Attending the annual membership meeting
- Becoming a member of LSCWA
- Recruiting members
- Consulting on LSCWA initiatives (ex: camp, habitat restoration, water quality monitoring)

We are also always looking for new ideas for projects and programs. If you’re not able to commit to a board position, we also have positions open on our Advisory Panel to help us with specific concerns as they arise. Our panel currently includes an attorney, hydrogeologist, historians, and a financial advisor. If you have a certain area of expertise and would like to volunteer from time to time on an as-needed basis, please let us know.

If you are interested in discussing joining us, please contact us at info@lscwatershed.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

For additional updates on all thing LSCWA,
visit our website at www.lscwatershed.org



Recognition and Honor to Joe Hajnas, Sr. for Decades of LSCWA Volunteering

Joe Hajnas Jr.
Chris Popovic

When I asked my father, ‘Joe Sr.’ about the formative days of the LSCWA, he described (with apologies for memory lapses, omissions and errors) the early 70’s as a time where the budding ecology/environmental movement attracted attention to the importance clean water and a healthy environment and the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed provided a perfect place to focus that attention. There was an intersection of caring among a diverse group of stakeholders in the form of landowners, hunters, fishers and recreational users sharing their love of flora & fauna and above all, the clean water found in the watershed. They recognized it for the treasure that it was and committed to protecting it.

Joe Sr. credits B.G. Shields for giving us, “the impetus to be what we are.” He reminisced about how her husband would have to take the family dalmatians for a walk, since their house was the early meeting location and would fill up with people interested in Little Sewickley Creek.

In the beginning, “We didn’t know which way we were going... and were scrambling for structure... but agreed that something had to be done. Public interest was high and volunteers, donors, and people who would later become members were eager to help out. So, we decided to get organized. ‘Bud’ Harvey, Esq. put together the paperwork pro bono; George (apologies for not remembering his last name) of Rock Top Farm took the wheel at Treasurer and the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association was born.”

Nature walks along the creek identified septic seepage, then coliform testing began and finally to the generalized water quality sampling throughout the watershed that we perform today.

The following familiar names were sprinkled throughout Joe’s reminiscing:

- Harton Semple, John Oliver & Jim Edson
- Ed Schroth, in his pre “Up the Creek” days
- Marie Louise Johnson
- Suzy Pfieler & the ‘Bucket Brigade’ to help stock the trout fingerlings
- Larry LaSpada & Walter Z. Walters of the Sewickley Shooting & Fishing Club; Walter, “created a newspaper stir by drinking out of the stream,”

which was unthinkable in that era.

Stewardship has been a perennial theme for Joe Sr. and the LSCWA has been a medium whereby the bounty of individual talent and care and the natural beauty & resources of Little Sewickley Creek have met that opportunity together and will endure.



**ALLEGHENY
LAND TRUST**

Big Sewickley Creek Rivers Conservation & Stewardship Plan

Alyson Fearon, Project Manager for BSCW RC&SP, Senior Director for Community Conservation & Resiliency, Allegheny Land Trust Allegheny Land Trust

All the field research is complete for the Big Sewickley Creek Rivers Conservation & Stewardship Plan. The final public meeting, which was held in January of 2020, focused on bringing people together around protecting and enhancing the watershed.

Residents were encouraged by the increase in the abundance and diversity of water species, as documented in the electrofishing survey. We were particularly excited to report a new Allegheny County record of the Southern Red Belly Dace, which is listed as a Threatened Species in PA and is particular to its habitat needs. Water quality appears to have improved since a 2010 study.

We are excited to report that a group of concerned residents have organized to create a watershed organization or Big Sewickley Creek. This was a critical goal of the plan, to ensure that the plan is taken to action and to assist in monitoring the long-term health of the watershed. The newly formed group already has interest from volunteers looking to help monitor long-term water quality by taking data, and the electrofishing team from Chatham and Duquesne Universities plan to return to the watershed as well. The BSCW Association is coordinating these volunteers based on guidance from ALT while the final plan is being finalized. The Big Sewickley Creek Watershed Association has developed a logo and social media presence and is planning their first major event for October, a photography contest with prizes. Please see facebook.com/BSCWatershed for more details. The full report will be posted online once complete and the watershed will be eligible for the PA Rivers Registry which opens the door to funding opportunities.

Summer Discovery Camp 2020

Chriss O'Lare, Secretary



As with everything else, Summer Discovery had to make some changes for 2020. We had nineteen campers sign up for a week of learning about the Little Sewickley Creek Watershed with a lot more hand sanitizing than usual.

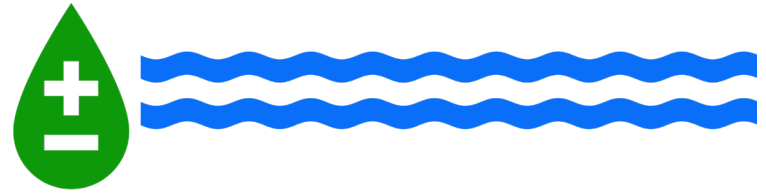
Some of our favorite games had to be modified while others were replaced with new games that allowed for better social distancing, but our nineteen campers managed to have fun and learn about the watershed. We developed two new games that the campers enjoyed so much that we will probably bring them back next year. One teaches them about the different sensitivities of macroinvertebrates and other was a memory game that required teamwork to cross an imaginary creek.

We did spend quite a bit of time in the actual creek and were amazed at how low it was compared to a typical June. There were large areas of exposed rocky bottom where typically water flows. After not being able to go in the creek due to high water levels in previous years, this was quite a change. A trip to Fern Hollow Lake ended the week and we are grateful to Don and Rett King for inviting us again to explore their woods and lake. We were treated to the calls of frogs and sightings of tiny toads, hummingbirds, and pileated woodpeckers which impressed the kids with their size.

We appreciate all the families who entrusted us with their children for a week of outdoor fun during a most unusual summer.

Water Quality Study Underway

David Quatchak



Water quality studies of Little Sewickley Creek (the “mainstem”) and Fern Hollow Creek were begun this summer. The LSCWA Board contracted with Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. (CEC) to begin Phase 1 of an investigative study to determine possible causes of historically high readings for conductivity within the watershed. High levels were originally detected during water sampling completed during the 1980s and early 2000s, including previous ALLARM program sampling. An initial field analysis of conductivity completed as part of the 2018 Watershed Assessment confirmed continued high conductivity in portions of the watershed.

CEC conducted a full day of field readings at dozens of locations along these two major tributaries within the watershed. This allowed CEC to determine which smaller tributaries are sources of the elevated conductivity, which indicates higher levels of dissolved chemicals in the water. A water-sampling plan for these areas is now underway.

Unlike the simple field conductivity readings, small samples of water from specific recorded locations will now be collected for precise laboratory analysis. These analyses will identify the major chemicals and precise concentrations present in the water. (Not all dissolved chemicals are necessarily harmful and some are naturally occurring.) The results of the analyses will contribute to possibly pinpointing sources and suggesting strategies to reduce or mitigate the sources of controllable contaminants.

Results of the water-quality study will be added to the Association’s interactive online GIS map at the completion of the study. Go to www.lscwatershed.org and select “Watershed Data: on the men for the Interactive Watershed Map.

The Association once again thanks the approximately 129 streamside property owners within the watershed. Without their ongoing support and cooperation, the Association would be unable to complete these detailed studies. The Association also looks forward to continuing to work with all property owners within the entire watershed as we work together to protect and to conserve the natural beauty and the environmental health of Little Sewickley Creek and its watershed.

LSCWA Reluctantly Accepts Longtime Board Member Resignations

John Orndorff

The LSCWA reluctantly accepted the resignation of President Marisa Tobias, along with board members April Claus and Diane Abell this past year.

President Tobias joined the LSCWA board in 2012 and immediately began serving as acting secretary, writing the minutes for meetings when the elected secretary, Diane Abell, was absent. She developed “Watershed Wonders,” a community outreach initiative, organized efforts to investigate proposed logging in Acorn Park (ultimately cancelled) to avoid damaging the headwaters of Little Sewickley Creek, and promoted the joint Fern Hollow Nature Center/Bradley Center environmental education program for children and teens who are experiencing trauma, mental illness, and behavioral challenges.

Diane Abell joined the board in 2007. In addition to serving as LSCWA secretary from 2007-2017, Diane devoted countless hours working with QVSD to mitigate erosion and sedimentation problems at the Legacy Fields at Bouchard Family Park, solicited grant money and assisted Fern Hollow naturalist April Claus in conserving a wetland habitat for the Jefferson Salamander, coordinated the ALLARM project with Dickinson College and Fern Hollow Nature Center to perform water quality testing, and helped update the association bylaws.

Marisa and Diane were instrumental in working with April in developing and conducting the recently completed watershed assessment project. Diane researched and wrote the Association’s Request for Proposal document sent to environmental consulting firms. She coordinated the analysis of the proposals and served as LSCWA’s Project Manager throughout the assessment. In addition, Diane prepared a successful grant application to Allegheny County Conservation District to help fund the assessment and submitted the required midterm and final reports. Once the project began Marisa, Diane, and April became three of the most dedicated volunteers, collecting field data and evaluating, editing, and providing feedback to the results and recommendations in the final report. The watershed assessment they initiated, organized, and implemented has clarified priorities for enhancing the environmental quality of our creek system, which will guide the efforts of Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association in the future for years to come. We thank them for their leadership and hope to be inspired by their example.

April Claus blessed Little Sewickley Creek Watershed Association with her knowledge and experience in environmental science, her organizational skills, her aptitude for interacting and inspiring people, and her dedication to its mission for 14 years. As an environmental educator at Fern Hollow Nature Center and then naturalist at Sewickley Heights Borough Park, April worked in Little Sewickley Creek watershed every day. Her tireless efforts on behalf of LSCWA earned her the respect and admiration of fellow board members.

April was exceptional as a career naturalist because she was a creative leader. Comfortable at interacting with scientists, government agents, municipal personnel, educators, and students she spearheaded initiatives which harnessed the energies and expertise of diverse individuals. The QV Creeker program for Quaker Valley high school students, the Ann Coburn Memorial Fund Creek Camp scholarship, and the LSCWA/Sewickley Heights Borough college internship program helped April recruit a devoted cadre of young residents to conduct projects enhancing our watershed including the award-winning Bell Acres Wetland Restoration, Wood Turtle surveys, Mink Farm cleanup, and field surveys for the recently completed watershed assessment.

April’s contributions will live on through the many young people she has mentored as environmental stewards. She wrote dozens of letters of recommendation enabling students to pursue their academic and career dreams to become doctors, fisheries biologists, engineers, and teachers. Describing his experience as a former QV Creeker Eric Johnston wrote: “April is such a one of a kind person that positively impacts everyone around her. She helped form an amazing program that is really training a future of people who want to help save our planet and I don’t think the impact she has had will ever be fully understood or realized.”

Assessment Survey Online

Chris Popovic

One last, but very important item to the Board, to mention is the posting of the watershed assessment data to the LSCWA website after a years-long process.

Thank you to David Quatchak and Jennifer Rokosz and the rest of the team at Civil Environmental Consultants, Inc. for all of their help in processing the thousands of data points, information and pictures. This data will be invaluable to measuring changes and managing the watershed.

You can find the data on our website menu, titled “Watershed Data” at www.lscwatershed.org