

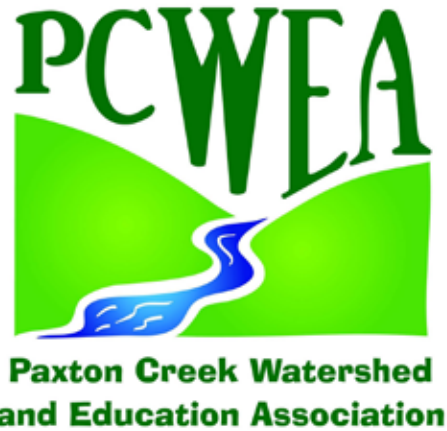
living downstream

By Anne Wain of Forest Hills



The Paxton Creek Watershed

and Education Association brings river stewardship to our backyards



“hands on” in keeping the creek healthy and free from harm. The Paxton Creek Watershed and Education Association (PCWEA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection and improvement of the Paxton Creek Watershed. Forest Hills resident Anne Wain, a board member with PCWEA, tells us about the organization’s important work in our community in preserving our Paxton Creek, and shares the ways we can all be good stewards of our watershed.

I moved here from the DC Metro area with my husband 10 years ago after retiring from National Geographic. We fell in love with the Tuscan Villas neighborhood in Forest Hills and liked the small-city charm of Harrisburg with the river and mountains and nearby farmland.

I joined Paxton Creek Watershed & Education Association after hearing a presentation at Wildwood’s Olewine Nature Center by Matt Bonanno on the basics of storm water management. Matt, a Civil Practices Area Leader at HRG and longtime member and officer of PCWEA’s board, explained in layman’s terms how urban development can affect nature’s ability to filter and absorb storm water, and how that translates to stream and river pollution, erosion, and flooding.

I’ve always been interested in conservation and environmental stewardship, and joining PCWEA seemed like a good way to make a difference locally, plus they seemed like a really nice group of people!

From the slopes of Blue Mountain, the Paxton Creek begins a 13.9-mile journey, winding its way first to Wildwood Lake, then following a course through downtown Harrisburg toward the Susquehanna River. Early along on its journey, the Paxton Creek and its tributaries pass through Forest Hills, allowing residents an unique opportunity to be



Our Paxton Creek Watershed

A “watershed” is a land area that channels rainfall and snowmelt to creeks, streams, and rivers. The Paxton Creek Watershed is a 27-square-mile area with 50 miles of streams encompassing five municipalities including the city of Harrisburg. Its headwaters begin at the base of Blue Mountain as small tributaries which join with others and eventually flow into the Susquehanna River in Harrisburg.

The new stormwater fee has brought the issues of maximum sediment load and the effects of river pollution on the Chesapeake Bay to the forefront. We do all “live upstream” from our neighbors in Maryland and Virginia, and our actions or inactions impact their livelihoods and quality of life. Chesapeake Bay Watershed water quality regulations exist to protect the fish, crab, oyster, and recreational industries as well as ecological concerns.

PCWEA hopes that if citizens can understand the interconnectedness of watershed stewardship, they might be willing to be part of the solution by taking simple steps in their own backyards or streets.

Some of Paxton Creek’s tributary headwaters pass through properties in Forest Hills. It’s important to not disturb the vegetation along creek banks, and to leave what is called a “riparian buffer” of native trees and plants to help stabilize the banks from erosion and to absorb and filter storm water during high precipitation events. For example, if you notice a lawn subsiding into the creek, it’s because the roots of turf grass aren’t deep enough to hold the banks in place.

Riparian buffers are just one way to safeguard the health of neighborhood creeks and streams. Planting more deep-rooted trees on your property whether or not it has a creek is a good way to absorb more rainfall and slow runoff flows. Trees also provide cooling shade, shelter and food for wildlife,

and help clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and nutrients.

Environmental Education and Outreach

We included “Education” in our name to emphasize the outreach we provide—user-friendly resources on stormwater management, water quality, flood prevention, and responsible watershed stewardship. Our target audience includes residents, businesses, civic groups, and municipalities. We are particularly interested in families with young children who care about the environment and want to make a difference.

Examples of PCWEA Outreach include

We use a miniature Enviroscope model at festivals and events like National Night Out to demonstrate how storm water travels through communities. With the Enviroscope model, we can show—hands-on—how water contamination occurs and help to present ways of preventing the contamination.

We host talks, workshops, and monthly meetings which the public is invited to attend.

We publish seasonal newsletters and post routinely to social media (follow us on Facebook and Instagram!) #pcwea.

If your family is interested in protecting the Paxton Creek Watershed by helping nature “do its natural thing,” you’ll want to look into our Neighborhood Stream Teams initiative, which provides step-by-step instructions on how to protect and improve backyard creeks (see our website paxtoncreek.org for more info)

Keystone 10M Trees Partnership

Pennsylvania has the most miles of rivers and streams of any state besides Alaska. And we know that trees help to improve the quality of water in those rivers and streams.

Our tree nursery provides seedlings and saplings for planting projects, and PCWEA has furnished free plants and trees to Rotary clubs, Boy Scout troops, farms, colleges, businesses, municipalities, and individual landowners.

PCWEA networks with the Keystone 10 Million Trees Partnership, one of Pennsylvania’s most ambitious, collaborative, and challenging efforts to restore and protect its rivers and streams – the planting of 10 million trees by the end of 2025, helping to remove an estimated 43,000 pounds of





phosphorus and 22 million pounds of sediment from Pennsylvania rivers and streams.

Volunteer with PCWEA

Our main goal going forward is to increase our membership. We are seeking individuals, students, families, and businesses to join us and assist with landscaping and rain garden projects, stream clean-ups, training and workshops, presentation displays, communications, and to help us evolve into a more vibrant and impactful organization.

Our entire board is made up of volunteers many of whom also work full time, and we are very grateful to anyone who can help with our mission.

We would love help with a fall nursery cleanup at Shutt Mill Park in November (date to be announced on Facebook).

Membership is only \$5 per year for individuals, free for students and other non-profits, \$15 for families, and \$35 for businesses. A lifetime membership is \$100.

How to Help Your Paxton Creek

Some simple things you can do to help preserve and protect our watershed:

Clean litter from streets and storm drains and along stream banks. Make sure your recycling plastics don't blow into the street on windy pickup days

Plant a tree – anywhere in your yard, preferably native species like white oaks, red or silver maples, river birch, or shagbark hickory.

Go easy with lawn fertilizer and avoid spreading it on paved surfaces that run off into storm drains.

If you use a lawn care service, ask them to test your soil to determine appropriate fertilizer and pesticides, rather than just doing a blanket application of chemicals.

Leave a strip of unmowed grass and vegetation along creeks on your property and consider planting native trees and plants to help stabilize the banks and prevent erosion

Mulch grass clippings with your mower or dispose of them properly so they stay out of storm drains.

Wash cars at a commercial car wash or on non-paved surfaces

