



**M O U N T A I N
W A T E R S H E D
A S S O C I A T I O N**

2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

*PROTECTING, PRESERVING, AND RESTORING
THE YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER WATERSHED AND
ITS BROADER COMMUNITIES SINCE 1994*

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

At Mountain Watershed Association, I've learned that the work of protecting and restoring the places we love often moves slowly, as we build trust among our communities and support the regeneration of ecosystems that have been neglected for too long. Our work takes patience, long-term commitment, and an understanding that victories do not always come easily. Yet, for MWA, the past year has been a season of fruition.

To start the year, the company operating the sole permitted hazardous waste facility in Pennsylvania - located in Yukon - withdrew its application to expand its facility along Sewickley Creek, a tributary to the Yough. This decision came after years of resistance led by residents impacted by existing operations.

After years of dedicated work, MWA also completed the construction of the 140-foot Steyer Bridge, as well as the section of the Indian Creek Valley Trail leading up to it. Through this project, we've created an accessible and safe passage over the creek, bringing us one step closer to connecting the full 19-miles of the ICV Trail. Since opening this section of trail in Fall 2023, more than 2,000 visitors have recreated there.

Then, after seven long years of community mobilization, Invenergy withdrew plans to construct a new power plant along the Yough River and Great Allegheny Passage in Elizabeth Township. The power plant would have completely changed the character of the bottom Yough River corridor, negatively impacting treasured ecosystems as well as nearby Environmental Justice communities that have been rebuilding their economies through recreation and tourism. Time and again, we have shown that we can protect the places we cherish through the power of grassroots organizing.

I've highlighted only a few of MWA's successes that culminated in 2023. We also launched a new logo to celebrate our 30-year anniversary, completed the first phase of the Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan, and more. As you read through all that we've accomplished, I want to extend my gratitude to you - our members, supporters, staff, and Board - who continue to work tirelessly to serve the communities of the Youghiogheny watershed, as well as all those downstream.

2023 BY THE NUMBERS

\$127,582

Over one-hundred thousand dollars was donated to MWA through nearly 400 individual grassroots donations.

928

MWA collected and analyzed over 900 water samples.

425

Over 400 people attended the annual Yough Defense Party this year, making it our biggest party ever!

387

MWA acquired over 300 acres of land and mineral rights to be held in conservation.

59

MWA coordinated more than fifty community meetings to raise awareness of watershed impacts.

54

MWA's work was featured in local and national media over fifty times.



Ashley Funk
Executive Director

ABOUT MWA

MOUNTAIN WATERSHED ASSOCIATION IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION WITH THE MISSION TO PROTECT, PRESERVE, AND RESTORE THE YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER WATERSHED AND ITS BROADER COMMUNITIES.

Our organization is unique in that we pursue on-the-ground restoration of historic environmental damages while we advocate to protect the watershed from new sources of pollution, primarily caused by fossil fuel development. MWA aims to empower communities, both locally and downstream, to transition towards sustainable, resilient, equitable economies and healthy environments where all beings can thrive.

OUR HISTORY

Like many grassroots groups, Mountain Watershed Association began its life around a kitchen table. The organization was founded in 1994 to oppose an underground coal mine proposal in the Indian Creek watershed. MWA's input and organized opposition resulted in the denial of the permit. Since then, the organization has expanded to 12 full-time employees, a full-time Americorps member, a 21-person volunteer Board of Directors, and more than 2500 members and supporters.

We strive toward a world where we all act as if what affects one of us, affects all of us, because that's how watersheds work.



Dortheia Gearhart, one of the founding members of MWA.



(Most of) MWA's staff at the 2023 Member Appreciation Party.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF BILL BRISBANE



In early 2024, Mountain Watershed Association lost a dear friend and longtime member, Bill Brisbane. For decades, Bill served as a dedicated Board member, treasurer, and avid supporter of MWA. He freely volunteered his time to protect the watershed he loved, especially in service of the Poplar Run community where he resided. As stated by his daughters, "he found his fellow warriors amongst the wonderful watershed team and volunteers." His enthusiasm and light brightened so many of our lives, and his spirit will be carried on by so many.

THREE DECADES OF DEFENDING THE YOUGH

Mountain Watershed Association has been working toward the mission to protect, preserve, and restore the Youghiogheny River watershed for 30 years, and we're still gaining momentum!

2000

ACQUIRING THE INDIAN CREEK VALLEY TRAIL

MWA was given two sections of rail-trail by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. This was the beginning of the Indian Creek Valley Trail, a 19-mile trail along Indian Creek to its confluence with the Youghiogheny River.

1994

THE FIRST WIN OVER COAL MINING

MWA was founded to oppose an underground coal mine proposed in the Indian Creek watershed. Our input and opposition resulted in the denial of the permit.

2009

PROTECTING LAUREL HILL CREEK

MWA helped to secure the listing of Laurel Hill Creek, home to hemlock forests and wild trout, on American Rivers' 2009 Most Endangered Rivers list.

2012

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

In 2012, MWA began the Youghiogheny River Comprehensive Water Quality Monitoring Project to acquire baseline water data and identify impacts from shale gas drilling.

2003

JOINING THE WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE

In 2003, MWA successfully petitioned the international Waterkeeper Alliance to become home of the Youghiogheny Riverkeeper, a public advocate for the well-being of the river.

2014

ESTABLISHING THE DIRECT SUPPORT FUND

MWA started the Direct Support Fund to provide small grants to grassroots groups and advocates working toward social change on environmental justice, shale gas and petrochemical issues.

2006

APPEALING THE POTATO RIDGE DISCHARGE PERMIT

MWA and members appealed the renewal of this permit because it allowed too much pollution to flow into Laurel Run.

2016

DEFEATING THE CURRY STRIP MINE

After a decade-long legal battle, MWA succeeded in protecting a sensitive area of the Youghiogheny River gorge from a 600-acre proposed strip mine.

2008

INSTALLING THE KALP ACID MINE DRAINAGE TREATMENT SYSTEM

This 10-acre system treats the Kalp Discharge, which is responsible for over 40% of the total pollution in Indian Creek, a major tributary to the Yough.

2018

MARINER EAST SUPREME COURT DECISION

MWA and partners filed a legal appeal of the Mariner East 2 permits issued by DEP to hold Sunoco accountable for damage done to the Youghiogheny River watershed and throughout the area. After over a year of litigation, the case was settled with repercussions to Sunoco.



2019

RESTORING 70% OF INDIAN CREEK

MWA has reduced the length of impaired stream miles in the watershed from 47 miles to 14, using five treatment systems.

2023

MAX LANDFILL WITHDRAWS EXPANSION APP

This plant (in Yukon, PA) is the only facility in PA that treats and disposes of extremely hazardous materials.

2023

COMPLETING THE YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER CONSERVATION PLAN

The document overviews all existing studies for the region and will include a list of recommendations to improve conditions in the watershed.

2023

DEFEATING INVENERGY POWER PLANT

After seven years of community opposition and litigation against building a gas-fired power plant along the Youghiogheny River near West Newton, Invenergy abandoned its proposal.

2023

REBUILDING THE STEYER BRIDGE

This project on the Indian Creek Valley Trail closed yet another trail gap and opened access to a beautiful part of Indian Creek!

"In 2023 I returned to Ohiopyle with an update of my book, "Youghiogheny: Appalachian River," and in the 40 years since the first edition was published, the greatest change I saw was this:

Today the Mountain Watershed Association is on the ground and striving for a better Youghiogheny for everybody.

The dedication of only a few people years ago has grown into a vibrant, effective, and popular movement to protect the best of this river that remains and to restore all that we can of the natural river that my ancestors once had in this extremely special place.

Count me in for a future of even cleaner water, wilder shorelines, and healthier communities in every respect."

- Tim Palmer, author of Youghiogheny: Appalachian River

SNAPSHOTS OF THE YOUGH

We are always looking to feature our supporters' photos in the annual Lottery Calendar as well as presentations, newsletters, and educational materials.

We are specifically seeking high quality photos of water, plants, animals, and landscape located within Indian Creek and other tributaries of the Youghiogheny River.

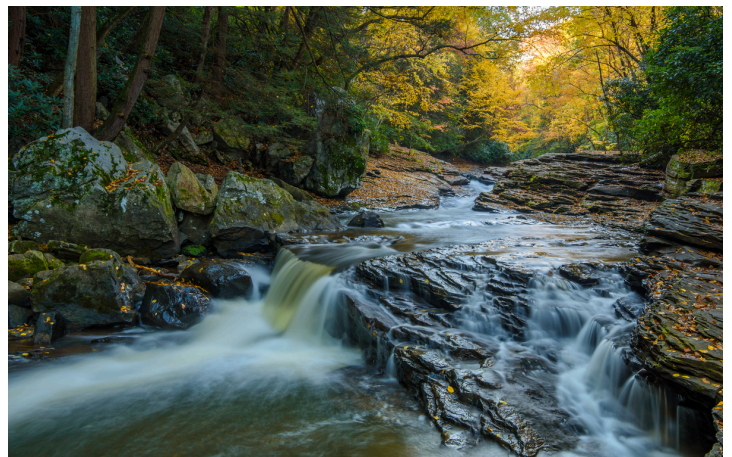
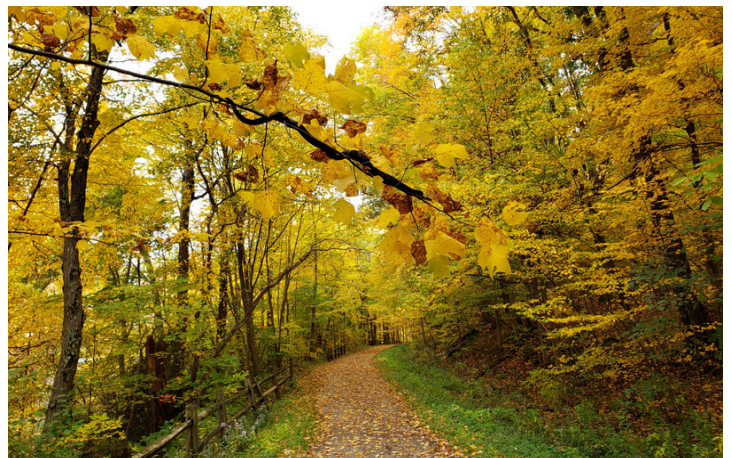


Photo credits (clockwise from top): Chris Herring, Jace Marsh, Clare Kaczmarek, Colleen O'Neil, Kerry Bell

Do you have any photos taken in the Youghiogheny River watershed that you'd like to share with us? Email Colleen@mtwatershed.com

MEET THE TEAM



Ashley Funk
Executive Director



Alicia Martin
Operations Manager



Hannah Spencer
Program Development Manager



Carla Ruddock
Director of Conservation



Taylor Robbins
Conservation &
Recreation Manager



Melissa Marshall
Managing Attorney



Madison Hinkle
Community Advocate



Eric Harder
Youghiogheny Riverkeeper



Stacey Magda
Organizing Manager



James Cato
Regional Organizer



Colleen O'Neil
Communications Specialist



Lindsey Waugaman
Education &
Outreach Coordinator



Sarah Anthony
Conservation Fellow



Keith Tierney
Trail & Field Specialist

CONSERVATION

Guided by comprehensive restoration plans, we focus our conservation efforts on initiatives such as abandoned mine drainage remediation, water quality monitoring, trail development, and education.

NEARLY 200 ACRES PROTECTED ALONG HIGH QUALITY STREAM

What's in a designation?

Class A Wild Trout Stream: The stream supports a long-term population of wild (naturally reproducing) trout. Designated by the PA Fish and Boat Commission.

High Quality, Cold Water Fishery: A very healthy waterway. It meets high standards of biological and/or chemical conditions, having high biodiversity and exceptionally clean water. Designated by the PA Department of Environmental Protection.



MWA received grants from DCNR and RK Mellon to acquire 186.17 acres in the Indian Creek Valley gorge. The property, which MWA purchased in 2023, is located in Fayette County's Springfield Township, and it borders both Indian Creek and Rasler Run.

Rasler Run, a tributary to Indian Creek, is designated as a High-Quality, Cold Water Fishery and a Class A Wild Trout Stream. Due to its exceptional biodiversity, 12.8% of the property is also designated as a Natural Heritage Area by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

We plan to create recreational opportunities within the property, which is directly across from the Indian Creek Valley Trail. But first, we need to conduct biological surveys, develop a management plan, and secure access to this deep wilderness. Keep an eye out for upcoming projects and fundraisers!

PROTECTING MINERAL RIGHTS FROM EXTRACTION

185

Acres of mineral rights
now protected!

A private land owner has donated 185 acres of mineral rights in Henry Clay Township, Fayette County! This underground area contains about 64 acres of coal rights and 185 acres of gas and oil rights in the Youghiogheny River watershed. This generous donation has protected these areas, which were being considered for future mining!

Would you like to donate land or mineral rights? Contact Taylor@mtwatershed.com!

RESTORATION

The first abandoned mine discharge (AMD) treatment system was developed in the Indian Creek watershed in 2001. Since then, we have developed four additional treatment systems to divert contaminated mine water, filter pollutants, and direct the cleaned water back into the stream.

REHABILITATING TWO MAJOR AMD TREATMENT SYSTEMS

The PA DEP awarded MWA a total of \$320,482 to redesign and improve two treatment systems through the Growing Greener Program.

The Kalp Passive Treatment System, located along Indian Creek near Melcroft, was built in 2007 to filter polluted water flowing into Indian Creek from the abandoned Kalp Mine. Using a series of ponds designed to remove metals and acid, the system treats 184 million gallons of polluted water each year. It has played a critical role in restoring Indian Creek.

But treatment systems need frequent maintenance and updates to work correctly. The 16-year-old Kalp System is only 71% efficient in removing iron and 72% effective in removing aluminum. It's also too small, which causes overflow issues and clogged pipes.

MWA used a grant from the Growing Greener Program to purchase 14.5 acres next to the Kalp System so we can expand its area. We're also using these funds to design a more effective treatment system with a local environmental consulting firm that specializes in AMD treatment.

The PA DEP also awarded MWA a \$98,000 grant to redesign the Melcroft Treatment System. This 12-year-old system lowers the mine pool from the abandoned Melcroft Mine and treats the discharge before it reaches Champion and Indian Creeks. Like the Kalp System, the Melcroft System is also declining in effectiveness. Our redesign will incorporate newer technologies successful in passively treating mine drainage to keep the Indian Creek watershed safe.



Treatment systems need lots of maintenance. Here, our conservation fellow Sarah manually closes a pipe.

YOUGHIOGHENY RIVER CONSERVATION PLAN (PART 1) DONE

134

The Youghiogheny River flows 134 miles from its headwaters in West Virginia. It continues through Maryland and flows into Pennsylvania, where it eventually empties into the Monongahela River in McKeesport.

In December 2023, Mountain Watershed Association completed *The Youghiogheny River Conservation Plan, Part 1: Headwaters to Dunbar Creek*. This plan is a comprehensive document detailing all the characteristics of a watershed. It covers land, water, biological and cultural resources within the Youghiogheny River watershed, an area of 1,067 square miles from the river's headwaters to the point where Dunbar Creek meets the main stem. The plan compiles all the information known about the watershed in one "go-to" document, and includes conservation suggestions gathered through public outreach. When the final draft is completed and recognized on the Pennsylvania River's Registry, funding opportunities will become available for projects identified within the plan.

BIODIVERSITY

The health of a watershed is evident through the living things that rely on clean water to live and thrive. We conduct annual surveys to better understand the natural community in the watershed.

LOOKING FOR HELLBENDERS

1

Our team only identified one hellbender in this survey. However, this number doesn't represent the actual hellbender population. It more represents the limitations of using the traditional "flip and turn" survey method in fast, deep water.

Over three days in June 2023, Mountain Watershed Association, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, and other partners conducted a survey of the Yough Watershed for the elusive Eastern Hellbender.



Hellbenders, like all amphibians, are very sensitive to environmental change and habitat alteration. These big salamanders are an indicator species, which means that their presence in a waterway indicates good water quality — hellbenders require cool, clean water and a stable food chain that provides them with lots of crayfish and other aquatic prey.



These critters are notoriously hard to spot. They live under big, flat rocks in the river and typically only come out at night to hunt. Scientists often conduct snorkel surveys or carefully move rocks that hellbenders might live under to look for them. But using diving gear in deep, moving whitewater is a challenge, so the team decided on a "flip-and-turn" survey.

The team didn't find hellbenders in the Casselman River, Laurel Hill Creek, Indian Creek, or Rasler Run. However, our Americorps member Sarah spotted a hellbender lounging underwater on a boulder in the Lower Youghiogheny River! The researchers collected data from the animal, gave it a microchip, and released it back into its habitat.

44

Our team sampled streams in Indian Creek watershed at 44 locations to survey macroinvertebrate populations. Macroinvertebrates are animals without a backbone that spend at least part of their lives in water, and are big enough to see without a microscope. Monitoring these tiny creatures helps us see changes in water quality throughout our watershed.

RECREATION

From river trails to rail-trails, we work to enhance and promote recreational activities in the watershed.

LONG-AWAITED STEYER BRIDGE PROJECT COMPLETED



2,000

As of January 2024, nearly 2,000 people have accessed this new section of the Indian Creek Valley Trail!

In October 2023, we finally opened the Steyer Bridge on the Indian Creek Valley Trail! With a budget of nearly \$400,000 raised through grants, public and private funds, and community donations, MWA oversaw rehabilitation of the 140-foot bridge, development of the adjacent trail, and construction of an upgraded culvert crossing a tributary to Indian Creek. A parking area, largely donated by Doug Show in memory of his son DJ, was also built, creating access for an additional 30-40 vehicles.

GORGE WASHOUT REPAIR PROJECT 65% FUNDED

In 2023, MWA started fundraising for the \$160,000 needed to rehabilitate the washout in the Indian Creek gorge. We've hired Streamline Civil Solutions to design a solution. In December 2023, MWA was also awarded \$75,000 by the Go Laurel Highlands Tourism-Fayette County fund. An additional \$28,607.22 was raised at our annual Golf Scramble and individual donations, bringing us to 65% funded! The project is estimated to be completed by the end of 2025.

SWIMMABLE WATERS TESTING



Text "YoughSwimmableWaters" to 84483 to receive alerts when new water data is available

347

In the summer we test 16 popular swimming, wading and paddling spots in our watershed for E. coli through the Swimmable Waters Program. This year we analyzed over 300 water samples! Check our website for weekly results, or visit theswimguide.org.

EDUCATION

Our goal is to build a sense of wonder about nature by inviting everyone to explore and appreciate wildlife, water, and the world around us. For more info about these programs, email Lindsey@mtwatershed.com

MWA DEVELOPS MORE LOCAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Thanks to generous funding from DEP's Environmental Education Grant and the Grable Foundation, we've greatly expanded our capacity for education programming at local schools, camps, and clubs! Our Education Coordinator, Lindsey, has established connections with the East End United Community Center in Uniontown, Confluence Creative Arts Center, Connellsville Library, Maxwell Elementary School, and various homeschool groups. Over the past year, we held 8-11 education programs per month. Additionally, we've partnered with Allegheny Land Trust to

hold continuing education classes for outdoor educators, and we're hosting another year of the Water Guardians Club, a free, after-school club that meets on the second Thursday of each month from September through May at the Carnegie Free Library of Connellsville from 5:00 – 6:00 pm.



2,716

We've reached 2,716 people in 2023 over the course of 50 education, outreach, and volunteering events.

50

FIRST FAMILY FIELD DAY AT LAUREL HILL STATE PARK

In June, MWA and Laurel Hill State Park held the first annual Family Field Day! Over 100 people joined this fun, free summer event.

SAVE THE DATE!

*FREE Family Field Day: June 15, 2024
Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset PA*



Scan this QR code to learn more and see the full list of items available to borrow!

OUTDOOR LENDING LIBRARY EXPANDS

The Outdoor Lending Library is a collection of outdoor gear, games, activities, and guides to encourage outdoor learning. All 256 items are free to borrow and located in our office in Melcroft.



CAMPAIGNS

We empower communities in the broader Youghiogheny River watershed to engage in campaigns to address environmental degradation, climate change, and its root causes.



6,331

MWA contacted more than 6,000 residents by mail and canvassing efforts to notify them of potential impacts of proposed or existing developments near them.

BUILDING AN ACTIVE COMMUNITY

We measure the impact of our work by the level of engagement of local residents, and the outcomes that we are able to accomplish with their support. In the past year, we recorded thousands of volunteer hours by our members and supporters.

Together, we helped to stop the construction of one shale gas well, one hazardous landfill expansion, and an injection well. We have also delayed the construction of more than 5,000 acres of underground mining and the construction of a new gas-fired power plant.

COAL MINING

Over the past 30 years, MWA has raised almost \$9 million to construct abandoned mine drainage treatment systems, leading to improved quality of life in our region. Given the tendency for mining to harm our communities and environment, we advocate to prevent coal mining developments in our watershed.

DEFENDING THE LAUREL HIGHLANDS FROM MINE EXPANSION



LCT Energy LP, a subsidiary of Robindale Energy based in Latrobe, has set its sights on the Donegal, Acme, and Stahlstown areas to expand their underground coal mining operations. LCT's active mine, Rustic Ridge I, has a record of serious issues including impacts to private water, subsidence of homes, noise concerns, coal dust pollution, and a dangerous increase in industrial traffic.

Despite known impacts and an extensive list of violations issued by DEP, LCT has proposed to expand mining activities in the heart of the Laurel Highlands. Over 9,000 acres of active and proposed mining in a 4.5-mile radius encompass the headwaters of Jacobs Creek, Loyalhanna Creek, and Indian Creek.

75 75% of individuals who checked their property information with MWA staff found errors on LCT's pre-mining/blasting surveys.

50 We reported these 50 errors to DEP. This information must be accurate for residents to seek replacement or compensation if their property is damaged due to mining.

Mining experts that we've consulted believe that the proposed operations could result in significant dewatering and toxic discharges into Four Mile Run, which makes up the headwaters to Loyalhanna Creek. These waterways, which are home to several species of federally protected mussels and a thriving hellbender population, would almost certainly be impacted by underground mining.

In July 2023, we met with the Secretary of Active and Abandoned Mining Operations and the DEP's coal permitting team. During this meeting, it became clear that DEP was planning to soon issue the permit for LCT's Rustic Ridge I permit expansion, claiming there would be "no impacts from the mine." But after our meeting, DEP committed to conducting further review of the permit – which still hasn't been issued as of January 2024.

We've retained a private law firm that regularly (and successfully) litigates against the mining and fracking industries. With this firm's support, we've submitted extensive comments and expert analysis to DEP, urging the agency to deny the applications.

We have researched alternative legal strategies and recently filed Unsuitable for Mining petitions for the proposed areas of expansion in January 2024. If DEP issues a permit to LCT Energy to expand the Rustic Ridge mine, we're prepared to bring a strong legal appeal opposing the proposed extraction.

HAZARDOUS WASTE

MWA works alongside communities directly affected by the pollution discharge, poor air quality, and health impacts of hazardous waste landfills.

ORGANIZING AGAINST A LEGACY POLLUTER



Yukon, PA, is a small Environmental Justice community (a place that bears a disproportionate share of pollution and health problems from industry) of around 550 people along I-70 and Sewickley Creek, a tributary to the Youghiogheny River. Less than a mile from town, MAX Environmental Technologies runs a hazardous waste landfill. This is the only facility in Pennsylvania permitted to treat and dispose of waste from the crude oil and natural gas industries, plus a wide range of hazardous materials from construction, manufacturing, and contaminated waste sites. MAX has a long history of violations.

Residents have reported health impacts from living close to the hazardous waste center, including reproductive issues, cancers, sickened pets and livestock. MWA has worked with Yukon residents since 2017, helping to spread awareness about the negative impacts of the landfill, monitoring pollution in the area, and encouraging PA DEP to enact stricter regulations.

As the current landfill is nearly full, MAX submitted an application to expand their facility by constructing Landfill #7, which would also allow them to dispose of waste without treatment on the banks of Sewickley Creek. We submitted a 54-page comment on the proposal, which included extensive expert review and 45 co-signatories. As a result, PA DEP issued MAX an 18-page deficiency letter. Shortly after, MAX withdrew their expansion application, with plans to resubmit.

We arranged a site visit at MAX with the Secretaries of DEP and Departments of Health, the permitting team, and state officials to meet with residents. As a result of our efforts, DEP has issued MAX several violations and deficiency letters. In addition, EPA conducted a civil investigation of MAX, noting egregious issues in their operations, including examples of MAX burying hazardous waste without properly treating it, illegally constructing additional storage tanks, and failing to properly contain leaking waste.

MWA continues to support the Yukon community. As momentum builds, we're hopeful that we can permanently stop this expansion and seek justice for Yukon.

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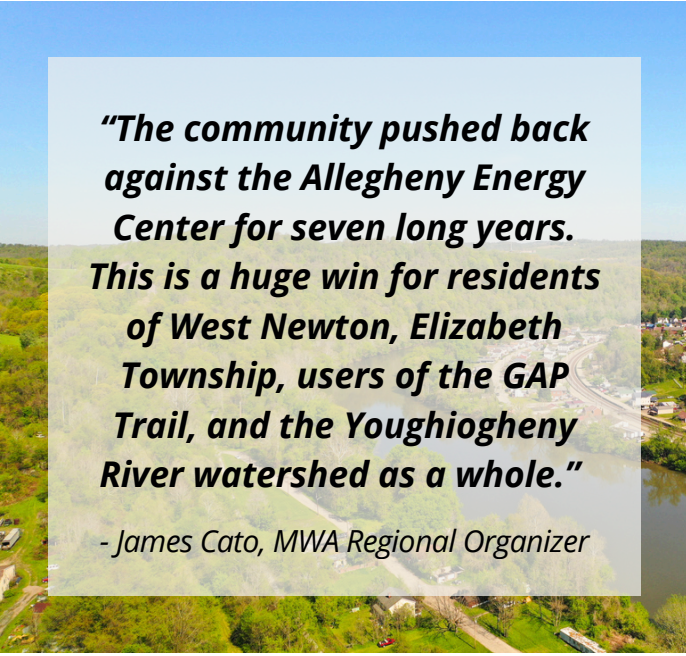
Pages in the civil investigation report the EPA generated after observing operations at MAX in March 2023.



ALLEGHENY ENERGY CENTER

A Chicago-based company, Invenergy, has been attempting to construct a shale gas-fired power plant in Allegheny County since 2016. In 2023, the proposal was finally defeated!

YOUGH RIVER COMMUNITIES DEFEAT AEC POWER PLANT!



"The community pushed back against the Allegheny Energy Center for seven long years. This is a huge win for residents of West Newton, Elizabeth Township, users of the GAP Trail, and the Youghiogheny River watershed as a whole."

- James Cato, MWA Regional Organizer

After seven years of community opposition to the Allegheny Energy Center (AEC), a gas-fired power plant proposed along the Youghiogheny River and Great Allegheny Passage in Elizabeth Township, PA, Invenergy abandoned its proposal!

The announcement came almost three months after Invenergy paused a multi-week trial in the legal appeal challenging AEC's air permit brought by MWA and our partners.

The gas-fired power plant would have been one of the largest and most polluting in Pennsylvania.

75

Community members attended the trial hearing, which was held online in July 2023.

NEW FOSSIL FUEL DEVELOPMENTS

In 2023, we saw a barrage of new proposals for coal mines, well pads, compressor stations, and most recently, injection wells. When we saw the first proposed injection well in Fayette County, we had to jump in.

TAKING FAST ACTION AGAINST INJECTION WELLS

In July 2023, a company called G2 STEM proposed to repurpose a conventional gas well in Nicholson Township. G2 STEM wanted to pump fracking wastewater, which often contains heavy metals, PFAS chemicals (toxic, man-made compounds used in everyday products), and radioactive materials, back into the hole left by the drilling that produced it. The site was just hundreds of feet from nearby homes, a quarter mile from abandoned underground mining operations, and adjacent to a tributary to the Monongahela River.

In July, EPA hosted a virtual public hearing on the proposed injection well. More than 100 residents from Nicholson Township gathered in a nearby church, all demanding that the EPA not issue the permit to G2 STEM. MWA worked with partner organizations to submit comments on the proposed development. Following the hearing, MWA organized two additional town halls that had hundreds in attendance.

Within months, G2 STEM withdrew their proposal. Additionally, Senator Charity Grimm Krupa (R), who is from Nicholson Township, has since introduced legislation (House Bill 1656) proposing to ban injection wells in PA. Her bill has been co-sponsored by another Republican from Berks County, PA.

MWA has also been providing resources to the Fayette County Commissioners who have proposed an ordinance restricting injection wells in the county. We're hopeful that our work in Nicholson Township has a lasting impression that keeps our communities, and our state, safe.

INDIAN CREEK VALLEY

Mountain Watershed Association was started to defend the Indian Creek Valley against a proposed coal mine. This area is near to our hearts, and we continue to support it today.

COMMUNITY SUPPORTS PUBLIC WATER UTILITY



In late 2022, MWA learned that the Indian Creek Valley Water Authority began conversations with PA American Water to potentially sell and privatize their water system. This could have significant impacts on water quality and customer rates. In early 2023, MWA sent a survey to the community, along with an informative blog post written by our staff, and found that more than 80% of the respondents were opposed to the sale. After over a year of organizing around this issue, no sale has been confirmed, and it appears negotiations have halted for the time being. With private water supplies being threatened by extractive industries in the area, it is imperative that our public water supply remain efficient and affordable.

MOUNTAIN PINES MAY EXPAND, WITH CONDITIONS

Mountain Pines was granted a Special Exception to expand their campground onto the old Clifford Pritts school property. MWA and the Indian Creek Citizens Council opposed the expansion, and submitted requests for conditions on the Mountain Pines expansion, many of which were approved by the Fayette County Zoning Hearing Board. These conditions will limit the number of sites allowed, the number of fire rings, prevent permanent structures from being built, and attempt to decrease overall pollution load in Indian Creek. Some of the conditions were appealed by Mountain Pines and brought to an oral argument at the Fayette County Courthouse. Right now, we're awaiting a decision on the matter.



INDIAN CREEK WATERSHED FESTIVAL

Next year's Watershed Festival will be on September 28, 2024, at CW Resh Park in Indian Head. This fun community day features free fishing for kids, food, educational games and crafts, and the famous Indian Creek duck race. We hope to see you there!

PETROCHEMICALS

MWA acts as a watchdog to monitor the impacts of the ongoing petrochemical buildout in the Youghiogheny River watershed and the greater Ohio River Valley region.

NURDLE PATROL SHOWS EVIDENCE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION



We began our rigorous nurdle sampling program in Fall 2020 to assess plastic pollution in our rivers before Shell's Beaver County Ethane-Cracker Plant came online in November 2022. Since then, we've continued to conduct patrols in partnership with Three Rivers Waterkeeper to monitor and report plastic pollution coming from the facility. In September 2022, we found more nurdles than we've previously ever recorded. They came from an outfall swarmed by schools of feeding fish, completely surrounded by the small plastic pellets.

In October 2023, Three Rivers Waterkeeper filed a complaint with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the source of pollution was identified as another company, called Styropek. Our groups continued to track the outfall and report violations to DEP. After a year of attempting to coordinate with DEP, we supported Three Rivers Waterkeeper in filing a Notice of Intent to Sue Styropek for violating the Clean Water Act.

Our Nurdle Patrol program has since expanded to other locations in southwestern Pennsylvania, including Washington County and our own Youghiogheny River watershed. Through our monitoring, it is clear that DEP is not holding plastic manufacturers accountable for releasing plastic pollution into our environments. It is our hope that, through the nurdle patrol program and our partnerships, we can force DEP to take action on this significant source of pollution in the state.

DIRECT SUPPORT FUND

This fund is a grants program hosted by MWA that focuses on providing resources to grassroots groups and advocates working toward social change on shale gas, coal, and petrochemical infrastructure.

\$169,000

In 2023, we distributed over \$169,000 to grassroots projects, over \$20,000 more than we gave out last year! There were 34 total applications from Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Funds helped groups in Ohio organize around the East Palestine train derailment, allowed people in Chester, Pennsylvania spread awareness about Liquified Natural Gas, and helped groups in West Virginia to create an education campaign about the Mountain Valley Pipeline project.

Thanks to new donors, we can now award funds to projects that organize communities in response to environmental issues like:

- petrochemical buildout
- shale gas development
- coal mining operations
- air pollution
- lead contamination
- climate change legislation

Interested in learning more? Reach out to James@mtwatershed.com

DEFEND THE YOUGH!

MWA works alongside communities directly affected by the pollution discharge, poor air quality, and health impacts of hazardous waste landfills.

RIVERKEEPER'S REPORT

The future of the Youghiogheny River is in your hands! The environmental health of our watershed is in constant change. Projects that remediate and reclaim abandoned mine lands have allowed many of our streams to heal.

Let's not stop there.

Simple actions you can take like pumping and inspecting your septic system (every 3 years) or creating a "No Mow" zone near surface water will drastically improve downstream water quality.

There are many sources of pollution and different types of contaminants. Our region has issues with elevated bacteria levels in our waterways after heavy rains. New emerging contaminants (PFAS for example) were found in Yough Lake. Sediment is still the largest pollutant in United States surface waters. These are all issues that we are actively working to address, but we need your help!

• *Eric Harder, Youghiogheny RIVERKEEPER™*

PARTYING FOR A CAUSE

Over 400 friends and supporters of MWA attended the Yough Defense Party in 2023, making this our biggest event yet! In total, we profited over \$20,000 from this awesome event with our river community.



BRIDGE THREATENS WILD & SCENIC YOUGH

Last summer, Garrett County and the Maryland Department of Transportation proposed to replace the failing bridge on Swallow Falls Road. The land around the bridge is home to an old-growth hemlock forest and within the Youghiogheny Scenic and Wild River Corridor.

Because of the classification, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources had to approve an exception to the protective regulations for construction to happen. DNR reviewed the county's application, which included construction of an offset, 35-foot-wide bridge.

The department conditionally granted the county's exception request, calling it "consistent with the legislative intent of the Scenic and Wild Rivers Act."

DNR's decision contradicted a recommendation from the Youghiogheny River Advisory Board, which said the new bridge should follow the same alignment as the current span, and be 28 ft. wide at most.

Opponents of the project appealed the exception to build the new structure, which DNR filed a motion to dismiss. The judge denied the motion, so the appeal will continue with a hearing in April.

FUNDRAISING

FUNDING SUMMARY

We achieve our mission through a variety of initiatives, including abandoned mine drainage remediation, water quality monitoring, trail development, educational programming, grassroots organizing, and legal advocacy. The broad scope of our work requires diverse funding sources.

Grants and donations are vital to our mission of protecting and preserving our region's natural resources. Grants fund specific projects like maintaining AMD treatment systems, watershed sampling, and staff salaries. Donations provide flexibility for spontaneous needs, such as equipment and lab analyses.

LAND PRESERVATION FUND

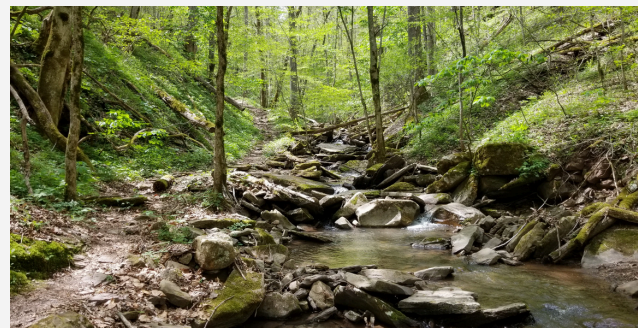
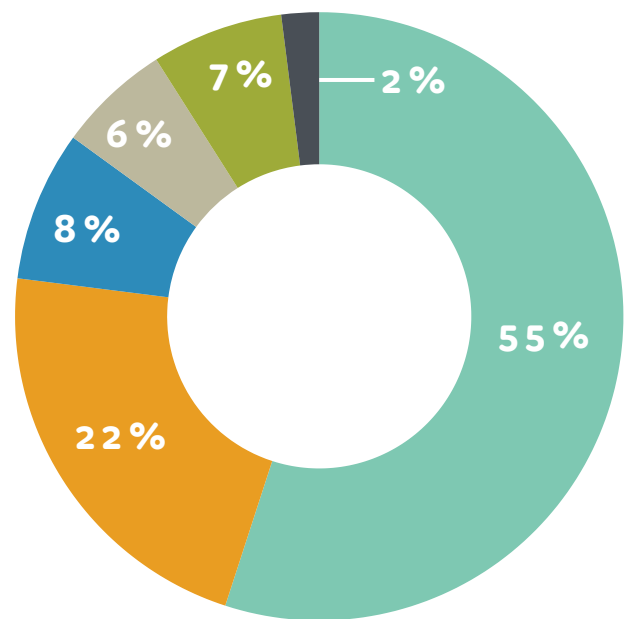
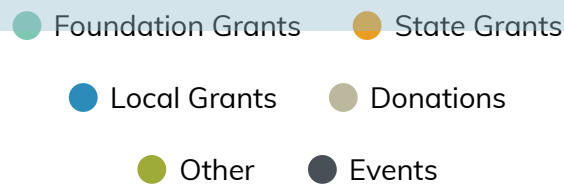
Help us protect and conserve land in the Youghiogheny River watershed! We value properties with high biodiversity, available mineral rights, riparian buffers, or properties at risk of being harmed.

LEGAL DEFENSE FUND

Protect the health of our watershed and all who depend on it. Support our legal challenge of the Rustic Ridge Deep Mine expansion. Fighting the expansion of this underground mine will be a multi-year endeavor estimated to cost **\$500,000**.

INDIAN CREEK VALLEY TRAIL GORGE WASHOUT PROJECT

Help us repair the Indian Creek Valley Trail through the gorge! In July of 2021, the Indian Creek Valley Trail experienced a storm that caused a portion of the "gorge" section of trail to wash away. This is a safety concern, due to the steep drop off exposed by the storm. The estimated cost of repairs and engineering will total **\$160,000**.



LEAVE A LEGACY IN CONSERVATION

MWA is dedicated to protecting and restoring land and water in the Youghiogheny River watershed. By participating in planned giving with us, you can leave a lasting legacy for our region's exceptional places. Join us in creating a sustainable future, ensuring clean water, abundant wildlife, and recreational opportunities for all. Together, we can make a difference that will be felt for generations to come.

Contact Hannah Spencer, Program Development Manager, at Hannah@mtwatershed.com.

GET INVOLVED!

We're thankful for all of our volunteers who help with activities such as community organizing, water sampling, litter cleanups, fundraising, trail maintenance, and event organizing.

VOLUNTEER



ROUTINE WATER SAMPLING

Commit to consistent water monitoring from May through September for our Swimmable Waters and Roadside Springs sampling. Training is provided! Email Taylor@mtwatershed.com.

ATTEND A RIVER CLEAN-UP

We float down the river, pulling tires and trash out of the water as we go. Bring your own boat, or borrow one of ours! See the event schedule on the next page for dates.

Learn more about ways to get involved:
[MTWATERSHED.COM/VOLUNTEER](https://mtwatershed.com/volunteer)

BECOME A TRAIL STEWARD

"Adopt" a section of the Indian Creek Valley Trail! Walk or bike your adopted section once a month to report potential issues and provide cleanup.

Your updates will be brought to the Trail Committee each month.

Email Taylor@mtwatershed.com to become a Trail Steward!

3,046

Our volunteers donated over 3,000 hours in 2023.



\$80,687

The monetary value of volunteer time is \$29.78 per hour in Pennsylvania.

JOIN A COMMITTEE *All meetings are held in-person at the MWA office and virtually.*

Deep Mine Committee: Second to last Thursday of every month at 6:30 pm.

Contact Stacey@mtwatershed.com

Fundraising Committee: Second Wednesday of every month at 9:30 am.

Contact Hannah@mtwatershed.com

Indian Creek Valley Trail Committee: Third Monday of each month at 6:30 pm.

Contact Taylor@mtwatershed.com

Land Conservation Committee: Third Thursday bi-monthly at 6:30 pm.

Contact Taylor@mtwatershed.com

Watershed Festival Committee: First Monday of every month at 9:00 am, April to October.

Contact Lindsey@mtwatershed.com

UPCOMING EVENTS



February 18: Intro to Fly Tying Clinic

April 27: Celebrate Trails Day: Guided walk on the ICV Trail

April 28: Women & Nonbinary Fly Fishing Clinic at Laurel Hill State Park

May 4: Birds & Blooms Hike in the Indian Creek Gorge

May 18: West Newton River Cleanup hosted by Bloom Brew

June 7: Golf Scramble to benefit the Indian Creek Valley Trail,
Donegal Highlands Golf Course

June 15: Family Field Day at Laurel Hill State Park

July 13: Guided Hike at Twin Lakes Park

July 20: Lower Yough Loop Race in Ohiopyle State Park

July 28: Yough River Float Trip hosted by Hazelbaker's

August 3: Connellsville River Cleanup

September 14: West Newton River Cleanup hosted by Bloom Brew

September 28: Indian Creek Watershed Festival, CW Resh Park

October 9: Yough River Convergence, Location TBA

October 16: Member Appreciation Party, Bear Rocks Club

November 21: Yough Defense Party, Falls City Pub

**RSVP for these events and more at
mtwatershed.com/events**

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We'd like to extend our deepest gratitude to Jeri Lowe for her years of dedication to MWA as she steps down from her role as Co-President, and we welcome Mary Lou Kuhns to this new role!

Jerry Gearhart, Co-President
Mary Lou Kuhns, Co-President
Paige Dix, Co-Vice President
Roger Pritts, Co-Vice President
Kurt Limbach, Co-Secretary
Stephanie Novak, Co-Secretary
Kelly Kruper, Executive Board Member
Jeri Lowe, Executive Board Member

Cathy Anderson
Mike Cordaro
Michael Dezort
Kate (K.D) Ferrari
Ken Gfroerer
Peggy Mansberry
Shelley Meyers
Sarah Rowe

Faith Sartori
Barbara Shaffer
Rob Walters
Emma Wolff

DONATE TO DEFEND

Join the effort to protect, preserve, and restore the Youghiogheny River watershed!

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE

EMAIL

☐ \$10

☐ \$25

☐ \$50

☐ \$100

☐ \$250

BECOME A MAJOR DONOR

☐ \$500

☐ \$1,000

☐ \$1,500

☐ \$2,000

Interested in a monthly donation?

Scan the QR code to
access our online
donation page or visit
www.mtwatershed.com



I would like my donation to support:

☐ Legal Defense Fund
(Rustic Ridge)

☐ Land Preservation Fund

☐ Indian Creek Valley
Trail Fund

☐ General Fund
(Membership)

You can make a donation or renew your membership on our website OR mail a check to:
Mountain Watershed Association | PO 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



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PO Box 408
Melcroft, PA 15462

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Visit our website: www.mtwatershed.com

After 30 years working to defend the Youghiogheny River, Mountain Watershed Association has a brand new logo, designed by local artist and paddler Harris Wright! Our design process took months to perfect and align the logo with our core values. The result – a design we absolutely love! We hope you like it as much as we do!

