



# 2016 Annual Report



Our mission is to protect, preserve and restore the Indian Creek and greater Youghiogheny River watersheds. Your support, both financially and through volunteer efforts, has made this possible and we thank you. With our Annual Report we would like to share some of our 2016 achievements.

---

## 2016 by the Numbers...

**315** Number of water samples from throughout the Yough analyzed at our in-house lab through our Swimmable Waters program.

**\$100,000** Amount raised for expansion of the Indian Creek Valley Trail into the scenic Indian Creek Gorge.

**4.4** Stream miles now protected by Exceptional Value status in the Stony Run watershed.

**3,000** Number of people reached through our shale gas organizing and advocacy efforts.

**25** Macroinvertebrate surveys performed in the Indian Creek watershed to document improving water quality.

**\$16,269** Record amount raised at our 2016 Yough Defense Party to support our monitoring, advocacy and legal efforts in the Yough River watershed.

# A letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friend of the Watershed,

You have probably noticed a current trend to encourage local patronage. I try to buy locally myself, eat at local restaurants, and purchase my flowers from the local florist. Why is this important? By shopping locally you build community, enhance your neighborhood economy, create a healthier environment by supporting businesses with a smaller footprint, help to increase your neighbor's wealth and create jobs.

In an article published by the American Independent Business Alliance, "Top Reasons to Buy Local, Eat Local, Go Local," these telling numbers were cited:

- Each dollar you spend at independent businesses returns 3 times more money to your local economy than one spent at a chain (almost 50 times more than buying from an online mega-retailer).
- The multiplier effect created by spending locally generates lasting impact on the prosperity of local organizations and residents. Not only do independent businesses employ more people directly per dollar of revenue, they also are the customers of local printers, accountants, wholesalers, farms, attorneys, etc., expanding opportunities for local entrepreneurs.
- Small businesses donate more than twice as much per sales dollar to local non-profits, events, and teams compared to big businesses.

By purchasing goods locally we are essentially buying services and a healthier community quality of life. We seek the protection, preservation and restoration of the Indian Creek and greater Yough River watersheds. We offer information about your water resources, evaluate land uses that might harm you or devalue your property, and improve the local fishery. Our mine drainage treatment systems continue to improve Indian Creek. For every \$1.00 spent on improving the fishery, our community will enjoy a \$2.40 benefit. There is no cost to our community, but improvements in water quality and quality of life are noticeable and benefit us all. Thank you for sharing in our successes this year.

With great appreciation,

Beverly Braverman  
Executive Director

2016

# Water Quality Continues to Improve

Coal mining in the Indian Creek Valley and surrounding areas during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a plethora of mine drainage discharges. These discharges resulted in many streams being deemed biologically dead. Miles of streams, including portions of Indian Creek, ran orange with iron.

Indian Creek has seen a substantial recovery as a result of our efforts and those of our community. Portions of the Indian Creek watershed that were once devoid of life have been restored as evidenced by vibrant aquatic life and healthy fish populations. These improvements would not be possible without the installation and maintenance of our six abandoned mine drainage treatment systems. We continue to work toward comprehensive restoration of Indian Creek, and in 2016, PADEP completed phase I at the Marsolino site—the second worst discharge in the entire watershed. We also recently received a Growing Greener grant to establish a treatment system for the Rondell-Correal discharge—once deemed untreatable by PADEP.

One method we use to gauge improving water quality is macroinvertebrate monitoring. Macroinvertebrates are aquatic insects that serve as a primary food source for fish. Having a viable macroinvertebrate community is vital to restoring a healthy stream and fishery. In 2016, we conducted 25 macroinvertebrate surveys to document water quality.

Our extensive monitoring program includes a variety of other efforts. Many of these have expanded to the larger Youghiogheny River watershed. Dataloggers are deployed in streams and take conductivity readings every 15 to 30 minutes. Chemical grab samples are collected to ensure that our treatment systems are functioning properly, to document baseline water quality, and in response to citizen complaints. Through our Swimmable Waters program we collect samples to determine if streams are safe for swimming, splashing and paddling. Our sampling efforts continue to show improvements in water quality throughout the Indian Creek and Youghiogheny River watersheds.



Above: Downloading datalogger information to a laptop in the field.

## Special Exception for Curry Mine Declared Void

On April 19, 2016, after a nearly 10 year legal battle, the Fayette County Court of Common Pleas granted our land use appeal and declared the special exception for the proposed Curry Mine to be void.

The special exception originally granted to Amerikhol Mining expired per the Fayette County Zoning Ordinance which generally provides that the holder of a special exception must act upon it within a year of obtaining it, and must complete the special exception use within a year of acting upon it. Even if the company had acted on its special exception, the proposed mine was not completed within a year of that, which is what the rule clearly requires.

The proposed site was located less than a thousand feet from the Yough River and Great Allegheny Passage, surrounded on all sides by public lands and high quality waters, and in a section of the Yough River gorge used heavily for recreation. It posed an immediate threat to water quality, drinking water supplies, recreation and the wild and remote nature of the Yough River gorge. We have opposed this project since it was originally proposed in 2007. We are thrilled to have succeeded in protecting this area of the Yough River gorge from strip mining.

## Additional Protections Secured for Stony Run



Above: A sculpin found during our sampling of Stony Run.

In 2016 we secured additional protections for Stony Run, a tributary of Indian Creek in Springfield Township, Fayette County. As a result of a petition we submitted in 2013, Stony Run was placed on the Pennsylvania DEP's Existing Use list as an Exceptional Value stream, a designation reserved for the Commonwealth's cleanest streams.

Streams that have been designated as special protection — those with either “High Quality” or “Exceptional Value” status — are subject to additional scrutiny if activities that could degrade water quality are proposed. In the case of Stony Run, permit requests involving proposed discharges that may affect the watershed will have to demonstrate the proposed discharges will never degrade the existing Exceptional Value level of water quality.

# Elizabeth Township Denies Gas Plant Request

In front of a packed house, the Elizabeth Township Zoning Hearing Board voted in June of 2016 to deny Allegheny Energy Center, LLC's request for use, noise, and height variances to construct a 550 MW natural gas-fired power plant along the banks of the Youghiogheny River in Elizabeth Township, Allegheny County. We partnered with Protect Elizabeth Township to formally object to Allegheny Energy Center's variance request.

The decision by the Elizabeth Township Zoning Hearing Board protects the Youghiogheny River and residents and visitors who rely on it as a source of drinking water, recreation and economic development. So much has been done over the past several decades to improve water quality and quality of life in the river corridor. We are grateful the Board has recognized their role in protecting that progress. This is a huge first-round win for Elizabeth Township residents, the Youghiogheny River, and our region. Allegheny Energy Center, LLC has appealed the Board's decision and we have been granted leave to intervene in the proceedings which will continue in January 2017.

## Funds Obtained for Further Trail Expansion



Our local Indian Creek Valley Trail has the potential to extend up to 26 miles long with community support. In 2016, we received a \$100,000 Department of Community and Economic Development grant to assist with finishing the section of trail in the incredible Indian Creek gorge. We hope to receive a matching \$100,000 grant from the Department of Conservation and

Natural Resources. These grants will allow us to finish 4.3 miles in the gorge — a jewel in the crown of natural diversity with plant species seen in very few locations in our area.

In 2016, we also formed the Indian Creek Trail Council. While in the early stages of development, the Trail Council provides our community with an opportunity to participate in trail development, maintenance and oversight.

The trail is open to the public from Route 31 south to Indian Head. Additional sections are open near White's Bridge and upstream of the Mill Run Reservoir. We encourage you to spend a day biking, walking, skiing or running on the trail. Find a map at [mtwatershed.com](http://mtwatershed.com).

# Shale Gas Organizing and Advocacy Efforts Increase

In 2016, we worked diligently to combat the expansion of oil and gas development and to fight for better protections for communities already at risk. Working together with FracTracker Alliance, we created an interactive zoning map for southwestern PA to help citizens gain a better understanding of local zoning processes in their communities. We have plans to expand the map's features in the coming months to add greater context and improved functionality to the current information.

We also conducted targeted outreach to local communities facing a sudden increase in proposed oil and gas infrastructure or experiencing negative impacts from drilling including Salem and Donegal Townships in Westmoreland County and Elizabeth Township in Allegheny County.

We participated in the permitting process regarding Sunoco's proposed Mariner East 2 pipeline. Collaborating with Clean Air Council, we submitted comprehensive comments regarding deficiencies located within Sunoco's Chapter 105 and 102 permit applications, along with personal comments read aloud at our region's public hearing in August. The PA Department of Environmental Protection then issued hundreds of pages of deficiencies to Sunoco, many of which were noted in our comments. While the permitting process is still ongoing, we believe our efforts during this comment period were instrumental in DEP's denial of Sunoco's original applications.

As we move into 2017, MWA will continue fighting for better protections for local citizens, tighter regulations on industry operators, and a just transition to a clean and renewable energy future.



Left: Rally opposing the Mariner East pipeline which could impact the Yough River watershed.

# 2016

## Swimmable Waters Program Expands

We collected 315 *E. coli* samples as part of our 2016 Swimmable Waters Program. We sampled at several sites on the Yough and its tributaries weekly from May through September. These samples were analyzed at our in-house laboratory and made available to the public so river users could determine where to safely swim, splash or paddle throughout the summer. Sample results were available on our website, on [theswimguide.org](http://theswimguide.org), and through text message alerts. We promoted the program throughout the summer using images submitted by members and supporters on social media (at right). To be featured next year, tag your photos #youghswimmablewaters! Photo credit: Clifton Loosier.



## Community & Watershed Protection

We continue to work diligently to prevent the proposed Rustic Ridge deep mine from being permitted in Donegal and Saltlick Townships. The proposed mine brings with it the very real potential to undo so much of the hard work our organization and our community has done to restore life to the Indian Creek watershed.

This summer, we were granted a meeting with DEP representatives in which we presented the findings of our scientific expert consultants including flaws in the application related to mine engineering, noise pollution, stream ecology, and stormwater management. Due to the sheer volume of deficiencies in the application, reading a very shortened version of our expert's reports took over an hour and half. We also recently discovered the DEP has issued yet another deficiency letter outlining remaining concerns. This letter specifically mentioned points we've raised regarding dangerous flaws in the application. More than 200 pages of additional information was subsequently submitted to DEP by the company.

On November 21st DEP issued a bond request letter to LCT and we believe they are still planning to issue the permit. We continue to work with our team of passionate experts to review the most recent set of application materials submitted. We are committed to protecting our watershed and our community from this threat.



1414-BICV Road/P.O. Box 408  
Melcroft PA 15462

---

**Staff**

Beverly Braverman  
Executive Director

Krissy Kasserman  
Youghiogheny RIVERKEEPER®

Charlotte Shetler  
Office Administrator

Carla Ruddock  
Field Technician

Stephanie Novak  
Community Organizer

Jordan Hoover  
Community Organizer

Melissa Marshall  
Community Advocate

Jena Shaffer  
AmeriCorps Volunteer

Non-Profit Org.

U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

Melcroft, PA

Permit No. 002

Postal Customer