

## Spotlight on Success:

### **Introducing the Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards, a new watershed group in the Lehigh Valley**

This is a success story about the people whose creative thinking, passionate energy, and professional expertise has led to the creation of a new watershed group with several early and impactful outcomes. There are over 160 existing community watershed organizations in PA, some have existed for close to 50 years, but it is not every day that a new group is created and is able to realize so many successes so quickly. But this group is not just thinking about what they can accomplish today; they are planning for a sustained and long-term impact on the water and watershed resources of the Little Lehigh Creek.

The backstory: The Little Lehigh Creek watershed is the largest watershed in the Lehigh Valley and includes urban, suburban, and agricultural land uses. It also provides drinking water to the citizens of Allentown and the surrounding communities. So, there is a lot to protect, a lot to care about and steward, but also a lot of potentially conflicting uses and competing interests in the watershed.

About a year and a half ago David Roth approached the Watershed Coalition of the Lehigh Valley to inquire about doing a stream habitat project along the Little Lehigh Creek and asked why there wasn't a citizen-based watershed association for the creek and its watershed, like there were in nearby watersheds. Rebecca Kennedy, WCLV President, responded that she had tried on a number of occasions to generate interest in such a group and maybe now was finally the time to get it off the ground. Erin Frederick, Statewide Master Watershed Steward Coordinator, joined the effort and she and Rebecca worked with David, Scott Alderfer, as well as a few more local dedicated watershed residents to get things organized just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year.

Scott, President of the Little Lehigh Trout Unlimited chapter, and David, who has been "hooked" on fly fishing almost his entire life, realized that there could be a powerful alliance between the existing TU chapter with members who are, like themselves, passionate about preserving the coldwater resources, and a new watershed group who could attract volunteers and leadership with more diverse backgrounds and conservation and community improvement interests. As the group took form, Mary Rooney, a civil engineer by training and a Master Watershed Steward, stepped into the role of Chairperson, bringing with her many of the skills she has honed working for her own consulting firm. Simon Molloy, who is a retired resident of the watershed and a Master Watershed Steward, also came into the fold as a volunteer with both the time and passion for the current and future hands-on work of this group.

Surprisingly, some of the limitations on indoor in-person meetings inflicted by the pandemic actually allowed for a focused effort to get the Little Lehigh Stewards watershed group up and running with safe outdoor volunteer stewardship activities like cleanups and tree planting events in local neighborhoods. The initial success of these events in drawing and connecting interested members of the community generated a lot of momentum and support for the group for moving forward.

In addition to these events, the Little Lehigh Stewards are carrying out ongoing water quality testing in collaboration with Lehigh County Water Authority. They are also planning to make tree planting project maintenance a priority realizing that as a critical part of the long-term success of this stream restoration best management practice. The current leadership is making it a priority to grow into a lasting organization that meets the needs of its volunteers, community stakeholders, local partners, and the creek and its watershed.

The Little Lehigh Stewards, currently a ‘committee’ of the WCLV, but with plans to incorporate as a 501(c)3 at some point, is and will remain “Dedicated to the Protection and Stewardship of the Little Lehigh Creek and the Surrounding Watershed.”

Want to get involved? Learn more and connect:

<https://www.facebook.com/LittleLehighStewards>

<https://watershedcoalitionlv.org/little-lehigh-watershed-committee/>