

# Watershed Alliance of Adams County

*AdamsWatersheds.org*

Newsletter, March-April 2014

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## Message from the President

*Mark D. Berg*

I imagine you’re as pleased as I am to see spring arrive. I remember snowy winters, but never one with so many days with temperatures in the single digits or in the teens.

You know the importance of water, and you know the mission of the Watershed Alliance is to monitor, improve, and protect water resources in Adams County. That’s why you and many others joined WAAC.

WAAC had a busy year again in 2013. Here are a few of the highlights.

- ◆ WAAC was the lead sponsor of **Strawberry Hill’s Environmental Education Conference and Grant Competition** that provided educators with academic content and monetary resources to support field trips, to facilitate in-classroom environmental programs, and to conduct school visits.
- ◆ WAAC also assisted the **Land Conservancy of Adams County through a Challenge Grant** to help preserve the headwaters of Marsh Creek.

- ◆ In June, WAAC members and volunteers carried out its **annual stream clean-up**, this time using canoes along a section of Marsh Creek.
- ◆ In November, WAAC held a **public meeting about the proposed “Big Pipe”** that would channel up to 2 million gallons of water per day from the Susquehanna River to the Gettysburg Municipal Authority (GMA). WAAC invited representatives of GMA and the York Water Company, the provider, to the meeting to explain the proposal and answer questions from members of the affected communities. The meeting was well attended and covered by the local newspapers.



*Preserving Marsh Creek*

- ◆ Again on the second Friday of every month, the **Gettysburg Times included a column** written by members of the Watershed Alliance of Adams County to educate residents about water issues and to advocate for sound public policies which protect water resources.

Without the financial support of our members, none of our success would have been possible.

I hope you will join us.

## Annual Membership Meeting

The annual Membership Meeting of the Watershed Alliance will take place on Monday, April 28, at 7pm, at the Adams County Agricultural & Natural Resources Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, in Gettysburg. Light refreshments will be served.

During the brief business portion of the meeting, WAAC's officers and members of the Board will review WAAC's accomplishments during 2013 and discuss plans for the remainder of 2014. Suggestions from members are important in planning WAAC's efforts now and in the future. There will also be an election of new Board members.

Following the business meeting, Nick Colonna, Director of the Adams County Planning & Economic Development Office, will speak about the County's Comprehensive Plan. Of particular interest will be the role of water in the Comp Plan.

## Environmental Action for Senior Involvement (EASI)

Are you 55 years or older and would like to become involved in protecting our resources and educating the public about the natural world? If so, the Environmental Alliance for Senior

Involvement (EASI) program wants you.

EASI participants carry out a variety of important tasks. According to Melinda Hughes-Wert, President of Nature Abounds, the organization that manages Senior Environment Corps programs in Pennsylvania – which has chapters in Adams, York, and Lancaster Counties – “This spring, we're hoping to see more folks take an interest in clean water and a healthy environment.”

Hughes-Wert continued, "Senior Environment Corps members have monitored water quality, helped to inventory wildlife, and educated the next generation of environmental stewards. Seniors in Pennsylvania really can make a difference. In fact, the value of the SEC programs across Pennsylvania is estimated at over \$3,000,000 a year."

For more information, contact Linda Thompson at the Adams County Office for Aging at 334-9296.

## Middle School Essay Contest

This spring, the Watershed Alliance will sponsor a writing contest to raise awareness about the importance of improving and protecting water resources within Adams County among students and in the community at large.

The contest is open to middle school students in all six school districts in Adams County. First prize is \$100; the next two winning essays will receive \$50 each. Winning essays will be published in the *Gettysburg Times* as WAAC monthly columns.

The entries will be judged by a highly-experienced retired English teacher and by members of the WAAC Board. For information, contact Mark Berg at [MABerg175@comcast.net](mailto:MABerg175@comcast.net).

## As seen in *The Gettysburg Times*

The following are recent columns; previous columns can be found at WAAC's web site.

## Water Emergencies

*Charles Skopic, February 2014*  
*Past President of WAAC*

Chemicals leaking from a storage tank near the river supplying water to Charleston, West Virginia and surrounding communities was national news. Because of the contamination, residents in that area had no water for drinking, cooking, bathing, or any of the everyday uses we take for granted. Could such a situation occur in Adams County, and, if it did, how would it be handled?



*Elk River, West Virginia, Chemical Spill*

It would be virtually impossible for all water supplies in our county to be contaminated by a major chemical spill or similar event because we have diverse and widely-distributed water sources and suppliers. About 90% of our water comes from wells, either private or public, sprinkled throughout the county. Municipal water suppliers also use water from streams such as Marsh Creek, but primarily rely on wells.

But we could have localized water emergencies. Hazardous materials are all around us (even

small amounts in our homes and garden sheds). Trucks and trains travelling through or within the county carry industrial chemicals, fuel, pesticides, herbicides, and other materials that can be toxic if they enter streams or underground aquifers. That could happen with a truck crash or train wreck. There are also gas pipelines crossing the county, fuel and chemical storage tanks, and other potential contamination sources. Both federal and state laws and regulations cover the transport and storage of potentially hazardous materials, so the possibility of serious incidents is reduced – but not eliminated.

After a recent incident at a local apple processing facility, where flammable toxic material stored in a parked trailer caught fire, I met with the Director of the County's Emergency Management Agency (EMA) and a staff member responsible for handling such incidents. I learned they do much more than just handle 911 calls, the usual source of information that initiates a coordinated response by local, state, and possibly federal officials. First responders at the incident site provide the initial report about the situation. They need information about any toxic materials involved to avoid making the situation worse, such as dousing a fire with water and possibly spreading toxic chemicals. In many situations, EMA personnel are on site to provide technical assistance or get additional technical information if needed.

If a hazardous material incident occurs, the water supply for some residents may be interrupted, but we can rely on a team of trained professionals, from first responders to technical experts who will contain and minimize the problem. There are other situations, however, where the outlook is less certain.

A water emergency can occur if a public water supplier experiences failure of equipment such as well pumps, water treatment apparatus, or ruptured pipes due to age or damage. There are about three dozen community water systems in the county, with from 26 to over 10,000 customers. Most of the systems are small and typically do not have back-up equipment on

hand if failure occurs. This situation deserves more attention than space allows in this article.

Another water emergency can occur if we experience severe drought. These don't occur very often, but they can cause significant problems. Based on the severe droughts occurring elsewhere in our country during the past several years, a record-breaking drought in our area is possible. Let's hope for the best but plan for the worst if it occurs.

## Where Does it All Go?

*R.B. Lasco, March 2012*

Just five years before the Battle of Gettysburg, the "Plunger Closet" was patented. It was the first modern toilet. Today, we just flush. Something we need to think about occasionally is "Where does it all go?" Adams County has 13 major and several small scale waste water treatment plants.

Watershed Alliance members think the plants do a pretty good job, at least for Rock and Middle Creeks. They did a year-long study of those creeks using water testing equipment. Both showed satisfactory results of water treatment. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection is responsible for guidelines and monitoring of waste water plants.

Just how do the plants do it? They simply screen, settle, skim, strain and finally chlorinate. As the effluent comes into the plant, large mesh screens catch anything too big for the rest of the process. Then the effluent goes into sedimentation tanks, where heavier solids drift to the bottom. The bottom layers form a sludge, which must be disposed as a solid waste matter.

While the settling is in progress, skimmers move over the surface of the tank to remove oil, soap scum and grease. These will be added to the sludge and treated by anaerobic digestion. I did not know what that Greek-derived word meant either. It was made up by biologists. Here is what Wikipedia says about it:

"The digestion process begins with bacterial hydrolysis of the input materials to break down insoluble organic polymers such as carbohydrates, and make them available for other bacteria. A cidogetic bacteria then convert the sugars and amino acids into carbon dioxide, ammonia, and organic acids."

That sounds complicated, but the point is that it really works. The separated waste water is usually strained through sand as a final filter. The last step is to add enough chlorine to kill residual bacteria, but not enough to show up as residue in a stream.

Many households in Adams County use septic tanks. The rest of us might take a lesson from them. Tank users know that many products are not good for their systems. Just so with a treatment plant. The oil, soap scum and grease which must be removed with the sludge, could be reduced if we were more aware of what should not go down our drains. For example, leftover cooking oil should be put into a disposable container in the fridge, solidified and disposed as garbage. Washing machines are a surprising source of problems. Some kind of lint filter should be used for the sake of the home owner's own pipes, and thereby less bulk is added to the sludge. *Many* people making a *little* effort can have *big* results.

As we have seen, the sewage plant process does not deal with the most dangerous item in our wastewater: pharmaceuticals. Prescription or any other drugs should never be put down drains. As for most household chemicals, as the label says: **"Please read the label before disposing."**

We all benefit from the plants that safely and efficiently manage and dispose of what we do not want to dispose of ourselves. Being just a little more conscious of what we put down our drains and toilets will help them do their best work

## WAAC Members Testify about the “Big Pipe”

### Critics testify against 'big pipe' proposal

November 14, 2013

By Jim Hale

Gettysburg Times Staff Writer

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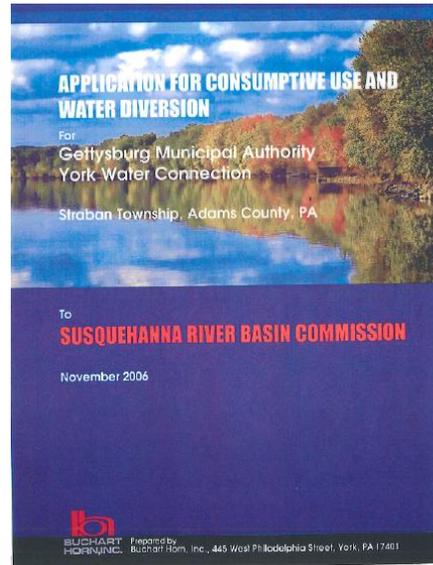
Eight speakers offered fiscal, political, and environmental arguments against a proposal to interconnect the Gettysburg and York water systems Wednesday afternoon during a hearing convened by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC). Speakers asked the SRBC to reject or delay consideration of a proposed "big pipe" that would link the York Water Company (YWC) and Gettysburg Municipal Authority (GMA). The former draws from Codorus Creek in the Susquehanna watershed, while GMA's area drains partly into the Potomac River basin.

No one spoke in favor of the proposal during the 75-minute session at the state Capitol in Harrisburg. It was attended by SRBC staffers and Andrew Zemba, Pennsylvania's second alternate member of the SRBC, which may make a decision Dec. 12 in Annapolis, Md. "If you were a ratepayer in Gettysburg right now, would you want to pay for water you didn't need?" Al Ferranto asked, testifying on his own behalf and not in his role as a Cumberland Township supervisor.

Those who testified repeated numerous facts and contentions, including:

- GMA's current capacity exceeds peak use.
- Current GMA ratepayers should not be asked to underwrite "speculative" future development.
- The GMA board does not include representatives from Cumberland and Straban townships, though a potential board expansion is pending.
- Joint planning efforts among the borough and the two townships are just beginning and need time to work.
- Less expensive alternatives such as increasing water storage capability are possible

- Additional development is incompatible with Adams County's economic mainstays of heritage tourism and agriculture.
- The SRBC should hold a hearing during evening hours in Adams County so more residents can speak.



The proposal is "insane" in terms of water quality and conservation, said York City Council member Michael Helfrich, who was not testifying for the council, but as "riverkeeper" for the Stewards of the Lower Susquehanna. "It's preposterous, the exact opposite of any kind of water conservation we're trying to promote," Helfrich said, adding that officials told him Codorus Creek's water was orange recently because its flow was too low to dilute industrial pollution. Reducing the flow further by diverting water to the GMA would make no sense, he said.

Sue Naugle testified that, as a GMA board member, she cast the lone vote in June against renewing the big pipe application initiated in 2006. In the intervening years, she said, the housing boom crashed, a casino for Adams County was rejected, and well capacity was increased. The GMA system's capacity is 3.5 million gallons per day (GPD), she said, the "safe yield" to be expected from wells and Marsh and Rock creeks is nearly 2.9 million GPD, peak use is 1.7 million GPD, and average use is 1.2 million GPD. Even during this

summer's 150th battle anniversary there were no problems, she said. The big pipe's multi-million cost would be borne by ratepayers who are primarily in the landlocked borough, while significant development is only possible in surrounding townships. The proposal has "huge consequences" for the borough and townships, Naugle said, and local officials need more time to study the matter collaboratively. She is also a Gettysburg Borough Council member, but was not speaking for that body.

It's not just "anti-development rabble-rousers" who are concerned about development that could "engulf" the county's historic and agricultural "identity," said former Highland Township Supervisor Joe Breighner, who noted that 75 percent of the county's voters approved a bond issue for land preservation in 2008. He warned against "subsidizing future land speculation" because "if you build it, they will come."

Newly elected Cumberland Township Supervisor James Paddock said his successful campaign included his expertise as a landscape architect and land planner to balance development and the area's small-town, agricultural character. Also citing the 2008 bond issue vote and other preservation efforts, Paddock said the county's people are "oriented to protect" the land rather than see "urban sprawl" "detract and degrade" it, he said.

Cumberland resident Charles Skopic called the big pipe "a solution for which there is no present or foreseeable problem" and recommended that the SRBC let the proposal lie dormant for another seven years, or at least until inter-municipal planning efforts now underway have a chance to reach completion. Whatever happens to a historic site like Gettysburg will reflect on the nation and state, Skopic said, urging the SRBC to "think about future generations."

Pat Naugle, who testified before the SRBC on the previous big pipe application in 2007 and is a member of water-related advisory panels, noted that a state-mandated critical area resource plan for the watersheds of Marsh and Rock creeks recommends water importation as an

option. However, he said, the plan also includes many other recommendations such as groundwater protection ordinances, local well construction standards, and land preservation easements that ought to be considered first. He noted that Adams County is actually ahead of the rest of the state in terms of local water planning, and said such foresighted "stewardship" is a better option than the proposed water diversion.

Helfrich echoed Naugle. "Ten years ago, I would not have imagined Adams County would be this forward-thinking in their water planning," Helfrich said. "As a rural county, this is some of the most advanced planning for water resources that I've seen throughout the commonwealth." Helfrich also expressed concern that the big pipe would facilitate development that would increase runoff and damage water quality. He too called for the SRBC to "take a step back" and allow more time for study.

Paul Kellett said he is no "tree-hugger" but a real estate agent and developer in Adams County who opposes the big pipe because, according to his extensive calculations, GMA could serve another 10,000 homes with its current capacity. For far less money than the big pipe would cost, he said GMA could maintain "water independence" and guarantee itself a steady supply even in times of low creek flow by constructing a storage reservoir. He also said approving the proposal in order to support potential development rather than to provide for demonstrated current need would "set a dangerous precedent" for the SRBC.

The application approved by the GMA board in June would permit it to import up to 2 million gallons GPD from York, with purchases to begin at 125,000 GPD and increase according to need. In addition to addressing growth, Utilities Manager Mark Guise said in June, the additional supply would also provide reserve capacity should problems or increased regulation affect wells or Marsh Creek. The interconnection could also facilitate reduced use of wells, allowing natural replenishment of the aquifer that feeds them, he said.

Building the pipeline could cost \$2.5 to \$3 million, resulting in a 20- to 30-year bond issue and the addition of perhaps \$10 to the average quarterly bill, Guise told the Gettysburg Borough Council's Public Works Committee in July. In addition, he said then, the logical route of the pipeline along U.S. 30 matches the likely location of development that would contribute to increased demand. York would build westward from the New Oxford area, GMA would build eastward from near Cavalry Field Road, and the two would meet near the boundary of Straban and Mount Pleasant townships near Kilpatrick Road, Guise said, estimating GMA's portion at three miles.

*Editor's Note: Mr. Guise estimated that \$10 would be added to the average quarterly bill. However, the GMA-YWC agreement would require GMA customers to purchase 1,200 gallons/month from YWC, which would actually add \$26.35 to each quarterly bill.*

## About the Watershed Alliance

The mission of the Watershed Alliance is to monitor, improve, and protect water resources within Adams County.

WAAC is a member-based, non-profit organization whose goals are to

- ◆ Help residents better understand the complex watershed issues affecting Adams County;
- ◆ Encourage sound water management and land use practices that will promote a sustainable watershed resource;
- ◆ Support a county-wide water monitoring program and data base to use for evaluating water resources; and
- ◆ Identify and carry out watershed improvement projects

## Save the Date

The stream clean-up will be on May 10.

## How to Join the Watershed Alliance

*Not yet a WAAC member?  
Join us now!*

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### Membership Application

**WAAC is a 501(c)3 organization under the rules of the IRS. Membership dues are tax-deductible to the extent of the law.**

### Membership Benefits

- ◆ Members' Newsletter
- ◆ Member events and field trips
- ◆ Satisfaction of protecting water resources
- ◆ Joy of community service

### Annual Dues

◆ Individual	_____	\$20
◆ Family	_____	\$30
◆ Protector	_____	\$50
◆ Guardian	_____	\$100
◆ Conservator	_____	\$250
◆ Steward	_____	\$500
◆ Life Member	_____	\$1,000

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you!

Please mail your check to:

**Watershed Alliance of Adams County**

P.O. Box 4329

Gettysburg, PA 17325