

Water Quality 2022

We gotta love water. Truly. The need for water is built into our biology. About 98 percent of our body weight is said to be water. Find a picture of an Egyptian mummy, wrapped and desiccated a couple thousand years, and the premise becomes easy to believe.

We need water on an emotional level, too, as witnessed the price of water-carved land compared to the same size parcels set back from the water. To attain the same profit as would be possible for a home along a shoreline, a developer must build and sell many more homes on the land away from the water.

Streams start somewhere, normally identified by a muddy spot in the woods from which water constantly drains – because water, unassisted by human-built pumps, always flows downhill. Eventually, the water evaporates and becomes clouds and, when conditions are right, rain. If we are lucky, the rain falls more or less where it arose, and corn, soybeans, and posies of many colors sprout from the land.

Pennsylvania claims more than 85,000 miles of flowing rivers and streams, of which about 1,284 miles flow in Adams County. All but two of those waterways begin right here in the county, and contribute to the supply used by county residents for fishing, swimming and drinking. The rest of the waters flow to the Susquehanna or Monocacy Rivers, thence to the Chesapeake Bay, where the gazillions of molecules of hydrogen and oxygen prepare for their trip back to the mountains and the aforementioned nearly 1,300 miles of streams and rivers. Unfortunately, the value of those flowing molecules wanes if we do not keep it clean.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recently published its draft 2022 Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Report, the latest edition of a biennial report required by the 1972 federal Clean Water Act. According to the report, water quality in Adams County has been mostly unchanged since the 2020 report. Which is good, because the report shows that with few exceptions, Adams' waterways meet safety standards. At least some of the credit goes to efforts by county agencies to monitor and safeguard the water.

For more than 20 years, the Watershed Alliance of Adams County (WAAC) has conducted a monitoring program in coordination with the Adams County Conservation District to track the effects of county agriculture and residential development on the waterways. Historically, volunteers have regularly visited specific sites to collect and measure samples and, periodically, to collect and count macroinvertebrates – bugs big enough to see without a microscope. The populations of those bugs is important since many of them cannot live in polluted water.

Recently, WAAC has embarked upon a new program to discover potential pathogens in waters where humans congregate and recreate. The samples are collected monthly by volunteers and submitted to a certified lab for analysis. Collected data can support DEP's efforts to protect the Commonwealth's waters in the face of budget and staffing constraints. It is a great way to get outside and help keep clean water flowing from our streams and faucets. If you would like to participate, e-mail Cliff Frost at clifford.frost@gmail.com for more information.

And to peruse the Pennsylvania 2022 Integrated Water Quality Report, and to participate in the public comment period ending March 1, visit the DEP newsroom at <https://www.dep.pa.gov/Citizens/Pages/DEP-Newsroom-.aspx> for the introductory press release and links to the report's components.

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