

### **Protect Water Quality and Quantity**

1. Municipalities that contain Special Protection Waters as designated by DEP should recognize these waters in their comprehensive plans and protect them through their implementing ordinances.
2. Riparian buffer strips should be established, or improved where appropriate, along the edge of water bodies. Buffers should contain a sustainable community of native trees, shrubs or other vegetation capable of providing multiple buffer functions. The function of a buffer should determine the buffer width. Pennsylvania's Stream Releaf Initiative is recommended as a guide.
3. Wetlands and wetland margins should be protected from encroachment and inappropriate development activities. Since the NWI does not include all wetlands, additional wetland delineation and mapping is encouraged.
4. Floodplains should be protected. The County encourages municipalities to establish a floodplain management program with measures that both rectify existing problems and prevent new problems from developing.
5. The County will prepare a comprehensive Water Study that assesses hydrogeologic factors, and provides recommendations to protect the quality and quantity of our groundwater resources.
6. The County will support the preparation of watershed protection plans and environmental assessments by qualified organizations and agencies.

### **Protect Environmentally Important and Sensitive Natural Areas**

1. The County encourages the formation of Environmental Advisory Councils at local and multi-municipal levels, to advise local government on environmental issues.
2. The County encourages all levels of government, as well as private non-profit organizations and land trusts, to acquire conservation easements or properties in order to protect critical environmental areas; and promotes the voluntary protection of wetlands, floodplains, and natural areas by private landowners.
3. The County will establish a Conservation Zoning Incentive Program (CZIP) that provides technical and financial assistance to municipalities to enact effective conservation zoning regulations in natural resource areas.
4. The County will provide municipalities with updated information on the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory Sites. Municipalities should incorporate the natural diversity inventory and conservation procedures into the land use planning process.
5. The County will support equitable taxation and assessment policies for critical natural resource areas that are being preserved. (e.g. Act 319 Clean and Green Program of use value taxation).
6. Encourage landowners of forestland to participate in the State's Forestry Stewardship Program.
7. The County encourages the use of sensitive site design that preserves the natural hydrologic conditions. This includes the preservation of natural drainage features, the reduction of the amount of impervious surfaces and the implementation of stormwater best management practices to reduce erosion and sedimentation, manage stormwater runoff, enhance water quality and recharge groundwater.
8. Any land disturbance should be avoided or severely limited by strict disturbance standards on slopes of 25% or greater.

## **Protect Agricultural Areas and Rural Character**

1. The County supports agriculture as a primary land use and a valued element of the County's economy. While respecting individual property rights, the overriding consideration is to maintain the agricultural economy and to conserve farmland for future agricultural use.
2. The County will continue to administer the Agricultural Conservation Easements (ACE) Program through its Agricultural Land Preservation Board. It will concentrate on purchasing easements of contiguous parcels of suitable farmland, giving priority to parcels located in Agricultural Preservation Areas, and not within Growth Areas.
3. The County will promote the best management practices (BMPs) and nutrient management plans to promote good stewardship of the soil and water resources.
4. Through its Agricultural Zoning Incentive Program (AZIP), the County will give local municipalities technical and financial assistance to encourage them to enact effective agricultural zoning regulations in agricultural preservation areas.

## **STRATEGIES**

The Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association has spent the past two years developing this plan to build a case and a strategy for the protection of the natural resources of the Pine Creek Watershed. This process has involved cooperation and input from local landowners and municipal officials, as well as other non-profit organizations, and this cooperative spirit has built a base of support for the next step, which is *implementation of the Protection Plan*.

Implementing the recommendations of the plan will be the mission of the Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association and its partners during the coming years.

There are many opportunities to enlist other local groups and constituencies interested in protecting the excellent water resources and scenic rural agricultural and historic attributes of Pine Creek as well as adjacent watersheds. These groups include the Pike Oley District Preservation Coalition, the Pike Township Environmental Advisory Council, the District Township Advisory Council, the municipalities of District, Pike, Rockland and Oley Townships, The Berks County Conservancy, Nature Conservancy, Wildlands Conservancy, and Tulpehocken and Upper Perkiomen Chapters of Trout Unlimited. In addition, County and State technical and financial assistance will be key to the accomplishment of some of the more ambitious goals.

The Pine Creek Protection Plan will serve as a tool to develop watershed awareness, enhance appreciation of watershed qualities and values, and promote stewardship of the area's exceptional natural resources. It will be helpful in educational and outreach activities, especially contacts with landowners who may be interested in creating a streamside buffer, or protecting their land with conservation easements. It will also be helpful in providing some background information for the joint comprehensive planning activities that are just beginning. And the biological studies that were part of the study can serve as baseline data for future research and monitoring.

In addition to the education, communication and action projects, such as those that expand the environmental resource inventories to adjacent watersheds, there will be a major emphasis on resource protection both at the municipal level and through private landowner action.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES**

The goal of this Plan is to protect and sustain the environmental quality of the Pine Creek Watershed through the development of an ongoing organized rural conservation initiative based on education, outreach and action projects. A secondary goal is to use the Plan as a regional model for conservation efforts to extend to protection initiatives in other EV streams in the Oley Hills Region. This expanded scope has gained impetus in recent months through the conservation interests of the newly established Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) in Pike Township, and the increased activism of the District Township EAC, which has received a Water Resources Network Education (WREN) Grant for a regional watershed education project. The timing also coincides with the initiation of municipal joint planning projects, which emphasize a regional approach.

It is anticipated that Volunteer Task Forces will be organized in the fall of 2002 as the start of a dynamic grassroots watershed protection program. Pine Creek and Oysterville Creek will both be included in the initial phase of Implementation. These task forces will include:

**Education and Communication:** Sponsor educational meetings, field trips, surveys, newsletters and brochures about project activities and conservation issues. Design and maintain web site that is regularly updated to present watershed-related topics. Organize field-learning programs in cooperation with local schools.

**Stream Study:** Initiate on-going volunteer stream monitoring program, under Pennsylvania Citizen's Volunteer Monitoring Program guidelines. Conduct training sessions and field trips. Work with local schools and/or colleges, if feasible. Establish archive of monitoring data and interpretation of annual results.

**Natural Area Study:** Continue natural area studies in Pine Creek and other watersheds. Identify important habitat areas for biodiversity as a guide to protection priorities. Include school and college students in research projects.

**Hands-on Improvement Projects:** Establish a fieldwork crew to engage in stream bank improvement and habitat improvement projects.

**Land Preservation:** Establish outreach program to landowners of large tracts encouraging land preservation options such as conservation easements, ag security areas, Berks County Ag Land Preservation Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Forest Stewardship Program, etc. Demonstrate a desire to help landowners meet mutual goals of preservation, protection and enhancement. Develop conservation incentives and a fund for the purchase of Conservation Easements.

**Planning and Zoning:** Meet regularly with supervisors, planning commissions, environmental advisory councils, and joint planning groups in advocating watershed protection initiatives. Assist with GIS mapping and with grant writing where feasible.