

# Lehigh Valley Greenways Conservation Landscape **SUCCESS STORY**

## River Snorkeling Program: Exploring the Ecology of Our Water (Awarded 2017)

### **SUMMARY**

The goal of our River Snorkeling Program is to provide a unique perspective of the ecology of the Lehigh River water trail to students and families of the Lehigh Valley. Most people are awed at the incredible diversity of fauna that is found by experiencing the full depth of the water column.

With the river snorkeling program, we are able to create outdoor recreation and trail connections, provide local education and outreach, and promote the region's water trails in order to increase appreciation of natural resources.



### **CHALLENGE**

In a boat, only the top one or two feet of the river is observed but snorkeling provides a whole new way to discover the underwater secrets our river holds- a sunfish guarding its nest, a school of fish, or a freshwater eel escaping from underneath a rock.

The slow-moving water found in the Lehigh Valley section of the Lehigh River providing an ideal, safe location for a professionally guided personal experience. With our 18 years of river expertise through our nationally award-winning Bike & Boat Adventure program, and over 40 years of providing environmental education, Wildlands Conservancy is in a unique position to combine a recreational urban wilderness adventure woven into a vetted environmental education lesson.

For so much of the population we work with, this may be their one and only chance to connect this deeply with the Lehigh River, giving them a chance to truly understand their role in the ecosystem.

### FUNDING

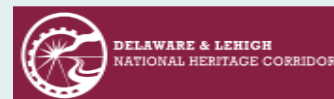
**Grant Award:**  
**\$3,500.00**

**Match:**  
**\$10,670.00**

**Total Project Cost:**  
**\$14,170.00**

### PARTNERSHIP IS KEY

Southern Lehigh High School partnered with us to help cultivate this educational offering by being one of our first snorkeling groups.



## SOLUTION

We were able to offer our River Snorkeling program to a very diverse audience, many of whom would never have the opportunity to explore the river on their own. Guided by trained naturalists and river safety staff, school students experienced a very hands-on Lehigh River Watershed lesson plan, with the result of students making a closer connection to nature and the Lehigh River.

Since July, 2017, we have taken about 150 people snorkeling, exploring areas as diverse as the Bethlehem area of the Lehigh River Water Trail, the Northampton Park area of the Lehigh River, and the Lehigh Falls in Stoddartsville. The falls offered the most diverse types of animals, and the greatest number, which is not surprising considering the very high water quality above the dam in White Haven. Unfortunately, access to this site is extremely limited so we are unable to offer a lot of programs here. The best snorkeling opportunity is as a free, add-on activity to any of our Bike & Boat Adventure trips, where we are able to disembark at Sterner's Island and explore underwater in a clear, low-flow area.

As evidenced by the attached photos, children really enjoyed their snorkeling experience and were consistently surprised at what they found. One inner-city boy said about his experience "I like being able to see all the little fish, frogs, and all the seaweed kind of stuff."

Now that we have all of the equipment, we are continuing to offer this program as a stand-alone program in different areas of the Lehigh River, and hope to expand to other streams and rivers.

### Contact



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