

Lehigh Valley Greenways Conservation Landscape SUCCESS STORY

By: Lehigh Gap Nature Center

Watershed Education – River and Trail Engagement (Awarded 2017)

SUMMARY

Throughout the summer of 2017, Lehigh Gap Nature Center (LGNC) partnered with Wildlands Conservancy and Northeast PA Kayak School to provide hands-on watershed education experiences for youth and families on the Lehigh River Watershed. The highlights of this initiative were a five-day River Camp attended by 20 youth, plus three Lehigh Gap Bike and Boat adventures for families. All programs sought to foster an appreciation for the Lehigh River – and the rich natural and cultural history it supports – through engaging land and water-based explorations. As part of this initiative, LGNC also enhanced its trailside watershed engagement display to better inform trail users on the watershed.



CHALLENGE

Everyone lives on a *watershed*. Yet, despite its importance, this term remains commonly misunderstood by youth and adults alike. And while waterways are the lifeblood of the Lehigh Valley (providing local communities with natural beauty, a source of clean drinking water, and countless opportunities for recreation), few consider the fact that what we do on the land impacts the water we depend on and enjoy. A fundamental challenge thus lies in educating people that watersheds are the land we inhabit, and that human land use directly and indirectly impacts the waterways around us.

Waterways and their respective watersheds also provide vital habitat for the region's native wildlife. Another challenge lies in the stewardship of these habitats. Because conservation of the water depends on conservation of the land, youth and adults must be motivated to take action to protect the watershed they inhabit. This includes not only limiting individual impact, but also actively supporting healthy, native habitats in backyards and communities.

FUNDING

Grant Award:
\$4,000.00

Match:
\$8,683.00

Total Project Cost:
\$11,801.58

PARTNERSHIP IS KEY

Army Corps of Engineers
(education partner)
Fowler Family Foundation
(financial partner)
Lehigh River Stocking
Association (education partner)
Northeast PA Kayak School
(outfitter/education partner)
Wildlands Conservancy
(outfitter/education partner)
William Penn Foundation
(financial partner)



SOLUTION

Through a combination of experiential and hands-on learning, LGNC's River Camp and three Bike and Boat adventures sought to bridge the disconnect that local residents might have with the land and the water. Our primary goal was to familiarize program participants with the Lehigh River Watershed through fun and engaging experiences, such as paddling, biking, and hiking. Along the way, participants were immersed in the ecology and history of the watershed as they learned from LGNC educators, as well as partners from Wildlands Conservancy, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Lehigh River Stocking Association. Once program participants developed a sense of their place on the watershed, LGNC engaged them in investigations of water quality and human impact, allowing them to gain a sense of responsibility for the health of the watershed and local waterways. LGNC also took this message to the trails with an interactive watershed display complete with live macroinvertebrates.

RESULTS

The majority of participants in LGNC's watershed engagement programs expressed a greater connection to the Lehigh River Watershed as a result of their experience. On days one and five of River Camp, participants were shown a photograph of a wooden shed next to a lake alongside a mountain, and were asked to write an open-ended description of the watershed that was depicted. On day one, only two of the 15 students surveyed accurately identified the watershed as the land, with the majority identifying the watershed as the wooden shed. On day five, all 15 of the students surveyed accurately identified the watershed as the land. Most students further described the watershed's relationship to the lake and discussed how humans can impact the watershed. This result demonstrates that the campers developed a fundamental understanding of watersheds through the five-day experience.

LGNC received similarly positive feedback from participants in the Bike and Boat adventures. Everyone surveyed after the program felt confident that the Lehigh River is clean and safe for drinking/recreation, and all said they are likely to bike and/or boat along the Lehigh River in the future. The Times News joined LGNC for one of the programs and wrote an article from a participant's perspective (published at this link: <http://bit.ly/2HXLXSu>).

Contact



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