

SECTION 6

6. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Issues and concerns were identified through the research conducted by ASWP and GAI as described in Sections 1 through 5, and through the implementation of an extensive coordination effort. This included public meetings, distribution of surveys, participation in community events, meetings with organizations and individuals, coordination and meetings with municipalities, coordination with regulatory agencies, and information exchange via the Project's website.

The information obtained through these sources was used to identify issues of concern to watershed stakeholders.

6.1 PUBLIC COORDINATION EFFORTS

An extensive public coordination and involvement effort was implemented to disseminate information and obtain input for the preparation of the Plan. These efforts included:

- Steering Committee coordination;
- Coordination and meetings with municipalities;
- Personal interviews;
- Coordination and meetings with local organizations;
- Displays at community events;
- Media coordination;
- Newsletter; and
- Project website.

These efforts are discussed in further detail below. In addition, several rounds of public meetings were held. These are discussed in Section 6.2.

6.1.1 Steering Committee

ASWP convened a steering committee at the inception of the project to guide and review the development of the watershed conservation plan. The steering committee was developed to include broad representation of watershed stakeholders and included representatives from local governments, industry, organizations, and landowners. Steering committee members included:

- David Beale, Armstrong Conservation District
- Roger Claypoole, Creekside Mushrooms, LLC
- R. John Dawes, Western Pennsylvania Watershed Program
- Dave Gallagher, Arrowhead Chapter Trout Unlimited
- Ryan Harr, Butler County Conservation District
- David Johnston, Butler County Planning Commission
- Brian Lasko, Creekside Mushrooms, LLC
- Travis and Virginia Lindsay, Birdsfoot Golf Course
- Jeffrey Miller, Snyder Associated Companies, Inc.
- Deb Simko, Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
- Ray Smetana, Buffalo Township Planning Commission

- Paul Suorsa, Farm Bureau of Butler County

The steering committee met periodically throughout the development of the plan to select a consultant, provide guidance on plan contents and coordination efforts, and provide guidance on public meeting efforts.

6.1.2 Coordination with Municipalities

ASWP has made extensive effort to coordinate with local municipalities. These efforts included providing initial information on the development of the plan and request for support, direct invitations to the initial round of public meetings and to participate in plan development, and meetings with municipalities where requested. Meetings included discussions with the Buffalo Township Supervisors and the consultant for development of the Buffalo-Clinton Joint Greenway Plan and Buffalo Township Mini-Recreation Plan.

As a result of these efforts, nine of the 18 municipalities with substantial watershed area have passed resolutions of support for the Buffalo Creek Watershed Conservation Plan. These include:

Armstrong County

- East Franklin Township
- South Buffalo Township
- Sugarcreek Township
- Worthington Borough

Butler County

- Buffalo Township
- Clinton Township
- Fairview Township
- Jefferson Township
- Saxonburg Borough

Additional resolutions of support were received from the Butler County Association of Township Officials, Butler County Conservation District, and the Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation. Copies of these resolutions are contained in Appendix K.

6.1.3 Personal Interviews

GAI and ASWP conducted interviews with a number of persons identified as key stakeholders or information sources for the watershed. These included:

- David Beale, Armstrong Conservation District
- Charles Bier, Local Landowner and Senior Director – Conservation Science, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
- Tim Bruno, Watershed Manager, DEP Northwest Region
- Roger Claypoole, Local Landowner and President/CEO, Creekside Mushrooms, LLC
- Greg Holesh, Watershed Manager, DEP Southwest Region
- Terry Laux, Herpetology authority
- Travis Lindsay, Local Landowner and Owner, Birdsfoot Golf Course

- Brad Mallory, Waterways Conservation Officer, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- Ron Steffey, Armstrong Conservancy

6.1.4 Coordination with Local Organizations

GAI and ASWP initiated efforts to involve local organizations in the development of the watershed plan through mailed invitations, email requests, personal visits to offices or meetings, and requests for information. The organizations contacted included:

- Armstrong County Historical Museum and Geneological Society
- Armstrong Conservancy
- Arrowhead Chapter Trout Unlimited
- Buffalo Valley Sportsmens
- Butler County Historical Society
- Butler-Freeport Trail Association
- Freeport Area Historical Society
- Saxonburg Area Business Association
- Saxonburg Sportsmans' Club
- Tarentum District Sportsmans' Club
- Western Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

6.1.5 Community Events

ASWP sponsored two public events to enlist support and volunteers for the watershed coalition. Both events were open to all interested persons and groups. A watershed awareness meeting was held at the Freeport Area High School on August 28, 2007 to provide information on watershed planning, needs, and opportunities to participate in the formation of the watershed coalition and other activities. A field-oriented Buffalo Creek Watershed Training Workshop was held on September 15, 2007. This workshop was based at the Horrigan Tract of Todd Nature Reserve. Activities included presentations on the watershed plan and proposals for a watershed coalition, and field activities including a tour of stream restoration sites and an electroshocking fish survey of Buffalo Creek.

ASWP also hosted Todd Naturefest at Todd Nature Reserve in July 2007 and July 2008. This annual event was open to the general public and included numerous presentations and field trips on local natural and human history, and including presentations and static displays concerning the development of the watershed conservation plan.

ASWP staffed a display at the 2007 and 2008 Buffalo Township Community Day celebrations (held each May). This display included information on the watershed planning process.

6.1.6 Media Coordination

ASWP provided notices to local newspapers concerning upcoming public meetings and events concerning the watershed plan. In addition, the development of the plan was featured in newspaper stories in the December 7, 2007 Butler Eagle (Butler, PA) and the December 27, 2007 Valley News Dispatch (Tarentum, PA). The plan was also the subject of an editorial in the January 3, 2008 Valley News Dispatch.

6.1.7 Newsletter

ASWP developed a watershed planning newsletter that was distributed throughout the watershed during the summer of 2007. The newsletter included information on the development of the conservation plan, an invitation to participate, and information on how to obtain further information (Appendix L). A total of 4,000 copies were distributed to the public through local businesses and Todd Nature Reserve.

6.1.8 Project Website

A Project website (www.aswp.org/buffalo_creek_rcp) was launched concurrently with the initial round of public meetings. The website contains information on the watershed, the planning process, downloadable copies of the current version of the watershed conservation plan, and materials distributed and public meetings and events including survey forms, informational flyers, and details on outdoor activities and conservation efforts in the watershed.

6.2 PUBLIC MEETINGS

6.2.1 Initial Public Meetings

An initial series of two public meetings was held in February 2007 to introduce the Project. The first meeting was held in the northern portion of the watershed at the Worthington–West Franklin Volunteer Fire Department on February 7, 2007. Twenty-five people registered at this meeting. The second meeting was in the southern portion of the watershed at the Freeport Area High School on February 11, 2007. Thirteen people registered at this meeting.

At these meetings, a PowerPoint presentation and static displays were used to introduce the plan development process, the goals and intent of the plan, and provide an overview of the watershed and its resources. An open discussion visioning forum followed the formal presentation, and a survey form was distributed to obtain input on issues and concerns. A meeting summary, PowerPoint presentation, registration forms, a copy of the survey form and survey results, and copies of the handouts from this meeting are contained in Appendix G.

6.2.2 Draft Plan Review

Following the completion of the Draft Watershed Conservation Plan in December 2007, ASWP hosted a public meeting at the Freeport Area High School. This meeting was held on December 6, 2007. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the Draft plan and to obtain comment on the document. Twenty-four people registered at the meeting.

A PowerPoint presentation was used to summarize the contents of the Draft plan, followed by a question and answer session. A comment form was distributed for attendees to provide input. The Draft plan was also posted on the Project website along with a copy of the comment form. A 30-day comment period was provided.

A meeting summary, PowerPoint presentation, registration form, a copy of the survey form and survey results, and copies of the handouts from this meeting are contained in Appendix G.

Comments were received from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and several individuals. No substantive new issues were raised in these comments. However, respondents

did provide or request additional information concerning various topics in the plan, including planning, mining activities, forest resources, agricultural resources, rare and invasive species, and cultural resources.

6.2.3 Final Plan Presentation

A final series of public meetings will be held to present a summary of the final plan contents to the community and to provide an impetus for the development of the watershed coalition.

6.3 ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following issues and concerns were raised during the coordination efforts. One issue that is relevant to all categories discussed below is that approximately 99 percent of the watershed is in private ownership. Therefore, many initiatives in the watershed will depend on private landowners for success. Initiatives need to be consistent with private property rights and landowner preferences, and landowners must be part of any planning process.

6.3.1 Land Resources

Rural Landscapes - Stakeholders perceive the rural nature of the landscape as a key component of quality of life in the watershed. The mixture of agricultural, rural residential, forest, and small town elements contribute greatly to the sense of community and are important to residents as well as those who visit the watershed for recreation.

Forest Resources - The outstanding diversity and extent of forest communities within the watershed is of regional if not larger importance. Furthermore, the large extent of forest contributes significantly to the rural landscape that is highly valued by stakeholders. This resource needs to be maintained. This does not mean that it should not be used, as forests are a renewable resource. Rather, it needs to be used wisely and appropriately. However, appropriate balance needs to be established between forests that are used as economic resources and those maintained for primarily ecological and recreational purposes.

Development Many stakeholders are concerned that increasing residential and commercial development threatens to adversely affect quality of life through impacts to landscapes, water quality, air and noise pollution, light pollution, and loss of the sense of rural community. At the same time, there is concern that inadequate employment opportunities make it difficult for families to maintain residence in the watershed. A need for smart planning and controlled growth, including zoning, is perceived to be an important factor in maintaining important qualities of the watershed.

Planning - Concern was expressed that planning in a number of communities is insufficient, outdated, or nonexistent. Planning is seen to be vital to the maintenance of the rural landscape.

Agriculture - Farming is a vital component of the rural landscape that is valued so highly by the watershed's stakeholders. However, it is increasingly difficult for agriculture to survive in the face of rising land values and declining profit. There is widespread concern that the future of family farms must be assured in the watershed. Community supported agriculture (member-oriented produce farms) represent a new and existing means of maintaining agricultural livelihoods.

Greenspace - The large extent of greenspace is an important existing quality that defines the watershed for both residents and visitors. There is concern that this greenspace needs to be maintained for the aesthetic, recreational, and ecological benefits that it provides.

Mining - Extensive strip mining in the upper portions of the watershed has the potential to affect current and future land uses and aesthetic values, as well as impact water quality. It is important that these areas be restored at the end of operations. It is also important that both surface mining or deep mining activities throughout the watershed be directed through proper planning and permitting to compatible locations and avoid areas of ecological, aesthetic, or residential values.

Dumping - Illegal dumping of household and construction wastes is a problem in many areas. The dumping of deer carcasses has become a serious health and aesthetic concern in recent years.

Light Pollution - Increasing development is leading to light pollution as a result of excessive or poorly designed lighting. This reduces the rural character of the landscape as these sources are often visible for many miles at night. A need is perceived to incorporate planning and design requirement for lighting within county and/or municipal regulations pertaining to new development.

6.3.2 Water Resources

While existing water quality is generally perceived to be good, there are a number of issues that threaten to degrade quality of both surface water and groundwater. These include:

Data Gap - There is no current and readily accessible monitoring program to assess water quality in the watershed. Data need to be collected and assessed to provide a comprehensive status of water quality issues and threats. Then appropriate planning measures can be developed to address these issues.

Stormwater Runoff - Inadequate stormwater controls are seen as a threat from all types of development. Lack of controls leads to erosion, high sediment loads, introduction of pollutants, flooding, and creates unnatural hydrologic conditions that damage stream ecosystems. Appropriate stormwater planning and enforcement are seen as priority needs.

Wastewater - Inadequate or malfunctioning septic systems are a problem throughout the watershed. These lead to contamination of both surface waters and groundwater. Municipal or community sewage systems can alleviate these problems, however they also create a new suite of issues, including increased development pressure in areas served by sewage systems. In addition, the construction of sewer lines and treatment plants typically occur along streams. These have had substantial adverse impacts on natural communities in the stream valleys in the southern portions of the watershed. These issues need to be addressed by PaDEP and local municipalities, who must take a firm role in protecting ecological integrity of their stream corridor resources.

Streambank Erosion - Erosion of streambanks is of concern throughout the watershed. This is exacerbated in some areas by inadequate riparian buffers, particularly in agricultural areas. The permitting of unrestricted livestock access to streams in some areas not only

eliminates riparian buffers, but results in direct destruction of streambanks and introduction of animal wastes directly to the stream.

Abandoned Mine Drainage - While generally not an obvious problem in most of the watershed, there are several abandoned mine discharges (AMD) that are of visible concern. However, obvious visual cues such as the precipitates are not always present. Therefore, there is a need for monitoring to determine if problems exist elsewhere. Several discharges into Buffalo Creek present substantial aesthetic and ecological impacts to both the creek and the Allegheny River and should be addressed. Installing passive treatment systems may be an option for some sites in the watershed.

6.3.3 Biological Resources

Data Gap - Inventories of biological resources in the watershed have been conducted since the 1880s. However, the distribution of these efforts has been disjunctive, and while some portions of the watershed are well documented, others are relatively unknown. A Natural Heritage Inventory is needed for the Armstrong County portion of the watershed. In addition, there is no monitoring program in place for stream communities. Data need to be collected and assessed to provide a comprehensive status of water quality issues and threats. Then appropriate planning measures can be developed to address these issues.

Natural Communities - The extensive diversity of natural communities is seen as one of the key assets of the watershed on both a local and regional scale. Important areas need to be protected and maintained.

Invasive Species - The introduction of invasive species is a critical issue in some portions of the watershed. Japanese Knotweed has had a severe impact on native vegetation communities in the lower Buffalo Creek valley. Other exotic-invasive herbaceous species such as Japanese Silt Grass, Garlic Mustard, and Multi-flora Rose may also prove detrimental to these natural communities. Exotic pest species such as Gypsy Moth, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer, and others pose serious threats to the vegetation communities that make the watershed a unique area. These issues need to be addressed immediately before the problem worsens.

Deer Overpopulation - White-tailed Deer populations are perceived to be excessively high. Population levels are so high in many portions of the watershed that natural vegetation communities are being severely impacted. Changes in the vegetation community result in changes to the entire ecosystem. In addition, deer are a threat to life and property as a result of increasing collisions with vehicles.

6.3.4 Cultural Resources

Stream Access - There is inadequate access for both fishing and boating. This problem is particularly severe in the lower watershed. Landowner liability issues and littering are seen as key contributors to this problem. In a number of areas that are open to fishing in the upper watershed, there are no sanitary or parking facilities available to meet the needs of the large numbers of visitors during the early weeks of trout season. Buffalo Creek could be a regionally significant canoeing destination, but the total lack of public access points prohibits this.

Fishing Opportunities - Lower Buffalo Creek and Little Buffalo Creek represent an outstanding regional Smallmouth Bass fishery. There is little or no recreational use available of

this resource at present due to access restrictions. Similarly, there is no trout stocking effort in these areas due to lack of access. Opening of additional areas could relieve pressure on the upstream trout fishery and provide for a higher quality of experience for all fishermen. Finally, the single youth and handicapped accessible site in the watershed is heavily used. More facilities of this type are needed.

Public Parks - The current public park and open space lands are perceived to be inadequate to serve the existing population. This problem is exacerbated as the population grows. While there are a number of facilities available for team sports, opportunities for passive recreation on public lands is severely limited. Future planning needs to include the provision of additional parks and open space. In addition, facilities at some existing sites need to be upgraded. For example, restroom facilities are lacking on the Butler-Freeport Trail.

Historic Resources - Stakeholders perceive that there is a wealth of historic resources and stories within the watershed. These are considered to be important qualities of the watershed. However, there is little information available on what these resources are and how they can be preserved or enhanced. Preservation and interpretation of historic resources could be a component of existing and future park developments. Local planning should take historic preservation into account and information on the resources available for historic preservation needs to be more accessible to interested individuals and organizations.

Tourism - The Buffalo Creek Watershed is increasingly gaining recognition as a regional destination for its passive recreational opportunities, rural landscape, and small-town atmosphere. This attention could result in substantial economic benefit to local communities. However, this issue is currently not addressed in a comprehensive manner and as a result, opportunities are being lost to other areas that aggressively pursue this sector. The regional infrastructure necessary to support an increased tourism industry needs to be nurtured and developed. This would include county or regional planning to identify and direct resources; the development of support services such as restaurants, bike and canoe rentals, stores, campgrounds, and bed and breakfast accommodations; increasing stream access, providing more hiking and biking opportunities, and development of additional recreational opportunities such as agrotourism and historic sites; and the appropriate advertising and signage necessary to implement plans.

6.3.5 Coordination

Many stakeholders expressed frustration at a lack of information and coordination among municipalities, organizations, and interested individuals in the watershed. While there are numerous initiatives and opportunities being pursued by these various interests, there is no centralized source of information or advocate for the watershed as a whole.

6.4 SURVEY RESULTS

Questionnaires were distributed during the initial project coordination efforts at the public meetings, community events, meetings with organizations, and via the project website. A copy of the questionnaire form as well as a summary of responses at each of the public meetings is contained in Appendix G. Overall results are summarized below.

Q: What are the most important qualities of the area?

- Rural
- Open Space/Green Space
- Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
- Forests and Streams
- Small Town Atmosphere
- Fishing Resources
- Close to Pittsburgh
- Natural Beauty
- Family Friendly
- Clean Drinking Water

Q: What are the most important challenges facing the area?

- Development
- Water Quality
- Groundwater
- Sewage
- Bank Erosion
- Invasive Species
- Lack of Planning
- Runoff
- Education
- Strip Mining
- Deer Population
- Lack of Jobs

Q: How can the watershed be improved?

- Control Runoff
- Sewage Treatment
- Education
- Assess Water Quality
- Identify Threats
- More/Better Planning
- Reduce Invasive Species
- Water Pollution Ordinances
- Reduce Light Pollution
- Reduce Abandoned Mine Drainage
- Keep it the Same
- More Trees
- Streamside Re-vegetation
- Zoning
- Less Dumping
- Control Streambank Erosion
- More Natural Landscapes

Q: Rank the following in terms of important issues to be addressed in planning for the watershed (1= most important):

Number of First Place Scores

<u>12</u>	Natural Landscapes
<u>11</u>	Water Quality Improvement
<u>10</u>	Outdoor Recreation Opportunities
<u>8</u>	Agricultural Preservation
<u>8</u>	Environmental Education
<u>8</u>	Historic Preservation
<u>7</u>	Rural/Small Town Atmosphere
<u>7</u>	Flooding
<u>5</u>	Job Opportunities
<u>5</u>	Commercial Development
<u>3</u>	Residential Development
<u>1</u>	Other (Biodiversity)

Q: Rank the importance of the following outdoor activities to you (1 = most important):

Number of First Place Scores

<u>15</u>	Hiking/Walking
<u>8</u>	Biking
<u>7</u>	Canoeing/Boating
<u>6</u>	Birding
<u>6</u>	ATV Riding
<u>5</u>	Fishing
<u>4</u>	Camping
<u>4</u>	Swimming
<u>3</u>	Hunting
<u>3</u>	Photography
<u>1</u>	Horseback Riding
<u>1</u>	Running
<u>1</u>	X-C Skiing
<u>1</u>	Team Sports
<u>0</u>	Other

Q: Describe the current state of the watershed.

Responses ranged from High (but on the brink of decline) to poor.

Q: Are there specific resources/opportunities/challenges that should be considered in the plan?

- Butler Freeport Trail Improvement/Access
- Buffalo/Little Buffalo Valleys Protection
- Rural Preservation

- Recreational Access/Trails and Parks
- Greenspace
- Flooding
- Support Agriculture
- Effective Planning
- New Approaches to Growth
- Develop Forest Protection Tools
- Stream Access
- Historic Resources
- Environmental Education
- Dry Hydrants