

Op-ed: Cleaning the Chesapeake Bay Starts With Improving Local Water Quality: What We Can All Do?

Pause for a moment and consider your nearest stream. Do you know where it goes? Chances are, if you live in one of the 41 counties covering central Pennsylvania, that water finds its way to the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay. This week, June 5-11, marks the first-ever Chesapeake Bay Awareness Week. It's a time to celebrate the Bay watershed's diverse waterways and landscapes, rich history, immense economic impact, and the aesthetic and recreational offerings it and all of its local waters provide to the 18 million people who live in its watershed.



The actions we take individually and collectively here in Pennsylvania have a profound influence on water quality in our backyards and in the Bay. There are a number of factors that impact water quality, from agricultural and urban stormwater runoff, to development, and the use of lawn fertilizers, among others. Because there are so many factors influencing water quality, we need everyone to help address the impact of these activities and to meet the challenge of cleaning up our streams.

Pennsylvania has renewed its commitment to improving our streams and improving local water quality and the health of the Bay. To coordinate this approach and improve our local waterways, the Wolf administration has established a Chesapeake Bay Office within the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). With the Department of Agriculture and the State Conservation Commission, we have begun connecting with farmers to better understand the work they have already done to reduce runoff and improve local water quality, and to identify what we need to do to implement low-cost, high-value best management practices to continue this good work. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is leading an effort to work with numerous agencies, partners and landowners to expand forest buffers along waterways in the commonwealth as one of those best practices.

We are working with municipalities to better manage urban stormwater. Many of our Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems are getting ready to implement new permit requirements and will, for the first time, be obligated to achieve specific stormwater pollutant reductions in 2018. To help these communities understand these obligations, DEP is planning a series of workshops across the commonwealth this summer.

We need all the help we can get to celebrate the successes and focus on the challenges. There are some simple things you can do to support our streams and reduce the impact we all have on the Bay. For example, be judicious when applying fertilizer and pesticides on your lawns, gardens and farm fields. Install a rain garden to manage water from your gutters instead of sending it into the street. Dispose of waste properly. Do not flush medications down the toilet. Compost your yard waste, or participate in a local clean-up.

Finally, make sure you take advantage of the vast opportunities that exist within Pennsylvania's rivers and streams. Go fishing. Rent a kayak. Hike along a rail trail. Visit a state park. We promise you that as you connect with these resources, you'll come to the same conclusion we have: it is worth the effort to improve Pennsylvania's streams and rivers, and join the effort to clean up the Chesapeake Bay.

Media Contact: Neil Shader, 717-787-1323
By Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding,
Department of Environmental Protection Acting Secretary Patrick McDonnell, and
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams-Dunn