

the WATER'S edge



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PROTECTING THE OYSTERVILLE WATERSHED: A Project Unveiled

The Oysterville Valley is one of the region's most scenic areas. However, it is particularly vulnerable to development, since its riparian corridor consists primarily of open farmland, rather than the wooded slopes commonly found in most other local Exceptional Value streams. This farmland is not currently protected by zoning or by agricultural preservation easements. It is sub-dividable into two or three acre tracts. Recently, lots have been sold for large modern homes. Fortunately, the farmers who own the major tracts have not yet decided to sell. If their land is sold, the trend in Eastern Berks is clearly escalating toward large residential sprawling developments.

The Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association collected extensive information about this watershed and its exceptional natural resources for the compilation of the *Oysterville Creek Watershed Protection Plan*, published in June 2006, with the assistance of a DEP Growing Greener Grant. To follow up on the grant recommendations, a targeted stewardship initiative has begun. The overall goals are to maintain excellent water quality, to protect ecologically important natural areas, and to preserve farmland and rural character.

This new initiative is being partially funded by a Delaware Estuary grant to carry out education, outreach and conservation planning in the Oysterville Valley. Its objective is to encourage long term stewardship that will assure protection of the upper section of the watershed, classified Exceptional Value, and improvement of the riparian corridor in the lower section, classified Cold Water Fishery.

This work has already begun. Landowners of larger properties along the stream corridor have been contacted and individual and group meetings have been held. Information is provided about the region's special environmental qualities and the various funding programs available to assist in their protection.

Because the Oysterville Creek is located in the *Oley Hills* region, it has benefited from a top priority ranking for natural resource protection. As a result, other regional conservation organizations are participating in education and action projects. Berks County Conservancy, Natural Lands Trust, and Stroud Water Research Center are among the non-profit agencies offering to work with local landowners and municipalities. Berks County has recently passed bond funds for the protection of both agricultural and natural areas through its *Natural Land, Farmland and Open Space Conservation Program*, which offers land protection grants to non-profits and municipalities.

The recognition being given to Pine Creek, Oysterville Creek and the Oley Hills area is a very strong endorsement of all the efforts expended by the Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association in protecting this region over the past nineteen years. Welcome, Partners!

- Phoebe Hopkins



Visit our website at pinecreekwatershed.org

WHERE DOES SPRING START?

Spring is my favorite season of the year! Below the cold frozen ground there is a wonderful surge of life waiting to be born. Nobody really knows where spring starts. But Edwin Teale says in his book "North With The Spring" that it starts somewhere south of Lake Okeechobee, deep in the swampy wilderness of the everglades. Here spring comes alive, surges forward like a big wave of energy and moves quickly.

In the Florida everglades down to the rural part of Miami you will see Sawgrass and Hammocks growing in abundance. Here and only here you will see the Sawgrass sea of the everglades. There is no other plant known that produces so much peat as quickly as Sawgrass.



The Cypress Swamps at this time of the year have light green leaves enveloping the Cypress. And the bright red tongues of the air plants show the first sign of the nearness of spring. The Cypress is the only tree in this area that stands without a leaf for winter.

The bird life in Florida heralds in the spring season with the Pintail Ducks being the first among the waterfowl to fly north. The Redwings and Bluebirds lead the procession of song birds. You will always see a Robin early in the spring and all year long.

In Florida there is an intermingling of seasons. Autumn flowers bloom in the spring and spring flowers bloom in the fall. The Cinnamon fern that we see in our area of Pennsylvania in spring usually unrolls its fruiting leaves in the fall. In Florida summer and spring flowers bloom side by side in December.

Soon the skies will be filled with the flow of migration up the continent. And so we notice our days getting longer. And we do have spring in the sky. For the honey bees, spring comes when they can collect pollen; for the swallows it comes when they catch insects flying in the air; for the bear and the wood chuck spring comes when they wake up after their long winter sleep.

Years ago our grandparents when spring arrived gave us a dose of sulphur and molasses as a spring tonic to tone up our body after a long winter. For the cow it means good green grass; at this time ocean tides reach their highest peak; the chemical composition of our blood will change somewhat in the spring. We instinctively feel the coming of the season in our body and our spirits soar.

As spring pushes into our area, it seems to be more controlled here and to move at a slower pace than elsewhere. In February the lovely yellow Aconite

will push through the snow and bloom beside my old mill-stone door step. It is a harbinger of spring and reminds me of large yellow buttercups. The fragile white Snow Drop snuggled beside the rock wall pushes its head out of the snow and hangs its head from the cold.

Following the trails at my cousins' Long Lane Farm in Berks County is a natural treasure hunt. Here the wild things grow as they please and never feel the blade of the bull dozer ripping out their roots, causing extinction.

Beside a big rock sheltered from the woods the dainty Hepatica grows with its hairy stem and liver-like leaves and lavender bloom. Nearby the Christmas ferns put out new tendrils to create new plants. The Spleenwort fern is coming up through a pile of leaves beside the brook. Trailing Arbutus with its pink and white blossoms is crawling down through the woodland soil. The Spring Beauties that like to have wet feet are starting to bloom with their pink and white striped flowers. The lovely yellow Marsh Marigold tends to stay around water and peeps through the dead brown leaves on the woodland floor.

Walking up the trail we see a clump of early Saxifrage and the larger Mouse Eared Chickweed. Nearby is the Rue and Wood Anemone making their home in the deep peat and woodland soil. Looking like a snow drift in the woodland is a great plantation of Bloodroot. This is the only spring flower with its stout stem and dainty blossom that has its bloom wrapped in one of its leaves. And when the earth warms up the blossom rises to the top with the leaves protecting the stem and blooms in a "patch of beauty". The Indians used to use the red juice that is hidden inside the stem and leaves as paint for their crafts. A honey bee stops by and drinks from the golden yellow center of the eight-petaled flower.

Down in the swampy meadow is a plantation of Bluets or Quaker Ladies. These dainty spring flowers, which grow on small stems and thrive in colonies, like to have wet feet. Their blooming period is short but oh what a treat to view.

And down in the pond life is starting to wake up with the spring peepers calling during their mating season, "knee deep, knee deep". Here is a sure sign of spring. These little frog like creatures no bigger than a man's thumb pull themselves out of the mud and climb up in trees and sing until their little necks puff out like mini balloons. If you are ever fortunate to see one, count yourself lucky.

(continued on next page)

Where Does Spring Start (continued)

There is nothing like a clump of daffodils blooming beside the woodland. It is a sight to see! William Wordsworth immortalized that sight in these famous lines excerpted from his poem "Daffodils".

*I wondered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze . . .*

*I gazed - and gazed - but little thought
What wealth to me the show had brought . . .*

*For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

- William Wordsworth

The future of these precious gems of nature must be preserved. Nature's flora, fauna, and wildlife will vanish unless we all work to preserve these treasures and help Mother Nature keep her balance of life.

- Jean Stoneback

Jean Stoneback, writer, naturalist, horticulturist, and storyteller, graduated from Ambler College where she received a degree in general horticulture. Jean has always had a deep and abiding love of nature and the "wild things". Her column "From My Kitchen Window" which regularly appears in the Emmaus Free Press has delighted thousands for over fifty years and has become an institution among many. Jean is the author of several books and of numerous children's stories. Perhaps best known as "Aunt Lillie", she has captured the hearts of many over the years as a storyteller and performer. Pine Creek is delighted to be able to share Aunt Lillie's "Where Does Spring Start?" with its readers which was previously written for us and is now republished with her permission. We thank Aunt Lillie for preparing this special piece for us.

THE HAWTHORN

*Now blooms the Hawthorn, green and white,
Along the lanes, atop the hills,
Beneath my window by the lake,
And down the road to Buckingham.*

*Its beauty paints the shires white,
Its drifting scents perfume the land,
The people stop to see and smile,
The Hawthorn has returned to them.*

*Alas, they know it will not last,
And knowing this, they love it more,
A poignancy is in their hearts,
As for a child come briefly home.*

*And yet each year the Hawthorne comes,
To tell them they are not forgot,
That it's indeed a faithful friend,
Who lifts them from their daily lot.*

*But as for now the Hawthorne blooms,
And everywhere's a wonderment,
It is a renaissance of love,
But yet, like love, it soon will go.*

*Spring and the Hawthorn both are gone,
Life's cycle has come round again,
We look for it, but it is gone,
And roses smile where once the Hawthorn bloomed.*

William B. Butz

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William B. Butz, the author of "The Hawthorn", passed away on September 12, 1986. Lawyer, banker, and poet, he enhanced his community through his life long dedication to music, to the arts, and to the protection and conservation of land and natural resources. His legacy of charitable giving lives on in his family, friends, and the foundation which bears his name. The Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association gratefully acknowledges the generous and continuing support of the William B. Butz Memorial Fund, Inc.

PCVWA: Celebrating its 20th Anniversary!

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The Pine Creek Valley Watershed Association, Inc., a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation, was formed in 1987 for the purpose of conserving the Pine Creek Watershed and the natural resources of the Oley Hills region of eastern Berks County, including its *Exceptional Value* watersheds and its woodlands and open space areas. Its mission is to protect these sensitive areas and to ensure that the Federal, state and local rules and regulations governing streams, wetlands and watersheds are enforced.

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