

Protecting Clean Water Together: Why Our Watery World Thirsts for Forested Land

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CAPTION: Brodhead Watershed Association works with volunteers and people who own land along our creeks to remove non-native plants, keep established woodland healthy — and intact — and encourage the preservation of this essential resource. Barrett's Scout Troop 89 has been a big help in planting native trees and shrubs.

You were probably in about second grade when you learned that Earth is mostly water. Looking at those enormous oceans on that big blue ball, it was perfectly clear we were awash in water.

Do you remember learning later that only about three percent of Earth's water is freshwater, the kind land-dwelling animals, plants, and we humans need to sustain life? And did you ever learn that only about one-half of one percent of Earth's freshwater is actually safe and available to use?

Probably not. No need to terrify you so early in life.

But it's true. The "water of life" is a pretty scarce commodity, and extremely easy to pollute. In our area we're in luck, blessed with a wealth of surface and ground water. Keeping it safe is in our own best interest.

And safe, pure water safe depends on natural, forested land. Here's why.

Think about the heavy rains this spring. In the forest, trees and undergrowth slowed the falling rain, softening its impact, allowing deep layers of roots, fungi, humus, moss, dead leaves, and layers of decay to accept that water, drawing it deep, seeping slowly into the aquifer and being purified in the process. On parking lots, warehouse roofs, roads, and other manmade surfaces, it was a different story: the water pounded down hard, pooled and flooded, and tore its way to the nearest creek, eroding and rushing away — contaminated with dirt, oil, and debris. And lost to the aquifer and our wells.

So protecting land and keeping it in its natural state slows runoff, holds water, and protects creeks, the water, and us. Still, some people insist on mowing right to the edge of creeks, using fertilizers and pesticides like there's no tomorrow, building patios with solid-surface products instead of pervious pavers, and letting non-native invasives like knotweed flourish.

The choices you make matter. Support your municipality's rules about buffers along water bodies and maintaining septic systems. Don't mow or build anywhere near creek banks. Garden with native plants. Limit fertilizer and pesticides. And learn how to "knock out knotweed" at <https://brodheadwatershed.org/greening-mountainhome/>

Even if you don't live right on a creek, what you do makes a difference. Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member!

An archive of "Clean Water Is Up to You" stories is on BWA's homepage at www.brodheadwatershed.org. BWA's sister organization Pocono Heritage Land Trust works with large landowners to conserve their land — for clean water, and for the future. Visit www.phlt.org.