

Water at Risk: Nature Knows What She's Doing

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CAPTION: Creek-land along Forest Hills Run in Paradise Township was heavily timbered in recent years. Rhododendrons were trampled in the process and so much hot sun reaches the forest floor that native forest plants struggle. It will take decades for the land to heal itself.

In their natural state, our glorious Pocono creeks look a lot alike. They're shady, with old rhododendrons ganging the banks, along with trees large and small. Thanks to that shade, the greenish dusky air is cool even on hot summer days. Ferns, blueberries and other low-growing native plants stretch away in the understory on either side. The clear water gurgles as it tumbles over the rocky, sandy bottom.

This is what is meant by the technical expression "forested riparian buffer." Every creek is at the heart of an entire self-contained, self-sustaining world, a tangle of life made of water, plants, soil, animals, birds, bugs, fish — with each tiny part of the creek-lands essential to the whole.

That forested buffer keeps the water of the creek cool, pure, and safe. It filters out impurities more efficiently than man-made water systems, without pipes, chemicals, or water bills. Anyone who tells you that there's nothing wrong with mowing, clear-cutting, building on, or otherwise messing with the land along a creek is trying to fool you.

You can't fake a forested riparian buffer. Suggesting that a few spindly saplings can replace 75 years of native growth is just, well, insulting. You can't skimp, either. The minimum natural, forested buffer to allow creek-lands to do their job is 150 feet in both directions.

Our local government officials set regulations that control construction activities around our creeks. Many of our creeks in the Brodhead watershed are designated "Exceptional Value" by the state of Pennsylvania, and they have special layers of protection.

So now you know. If you're lucky enough to live along a creek, respect what nature has done there: plant and encourage only native trees, shrubs and flowers, don't mow, and leave the fertilizer and insecticide on the shelf. Let your township or borough know that you care about our creeks and creek-lands. And when developers want to build a warehouse, or industrial solar complex, or housing development in your township or borough that will affect a creek — and they all do — stand up for pure water.

Nature knows what she's doing. But sometimes we all need a helping hand.

Know Your Local Ordinances

Local government officials can, and should, require a minimum, science-supported forested buffer of at least 150 feet in their ordinances. A list of approved native plants — not cheap foreign invasives — should be part of the regulations, too.

For more information:

<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-11/bmp-riparian-forested-buffer.pdf>

Brodhead Watershed Association protects water quality and quantity throughout our area. Get involved! Become a member! www.brodheadwatershed.org