



NATURE AT RISK

By Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association

What is a Creek, Anyway?

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A creek is body of water, yes, of course. A stream, a brook, a minor tributary of a river. A rivulet, rill, freshet. During snowmelt, it may be a deluge, torrent, or cascade. During a drought, a trickle.

But anyone who's ever spent a summer afternoon messing around in a creek knows — a creek is so much more than its water. It's a whole world.

Tiny, strange creatures live on the sandy, pebbled, or rocky creek bed. The fifty-cent name for them is “aquatic invertebrates,” and they are the larvae of bugs, beetles, damsel flies, dragonflies, true flies, butterflies, moths, mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis flies.



The tiny creatures eat water plants, decomposing leaves, and each other. They are eaten by trout, frogs, toads, turtles, salamanders, birds, and mammals.

Just like those larger creek-dwellers, they rely on water that stays cold year 'round — about 55 degrees — shaded by hemlocks and rhododendrons and other native trees like oak and maple. They need the water to be clean and the banks to be stable, not eroding and flooding the creek with suffocating mud.

They need people to be kind enough not to mow the top of the bank, not to use weedkiller, and be very, very sparing about fertilizer. They need people to keep livestock and pets out of their world.

The world of a creek is far more than its cold, pure water. It extends to the natural, forested streambanks that protect the water, and to the native plants that aquatic creatures of all sizes depend on.

The world of a creek can even include humans when we approach with care and reverence.

The Brodhead watershed is full of creeks where this world exists. At least one of them is near you. What are you waiting for?

For more information:

<https://www.dep.pa.gov/OurCommonWealth/pages/Article.aspx?post=60>

<https://www.brodheadwatershed.org>