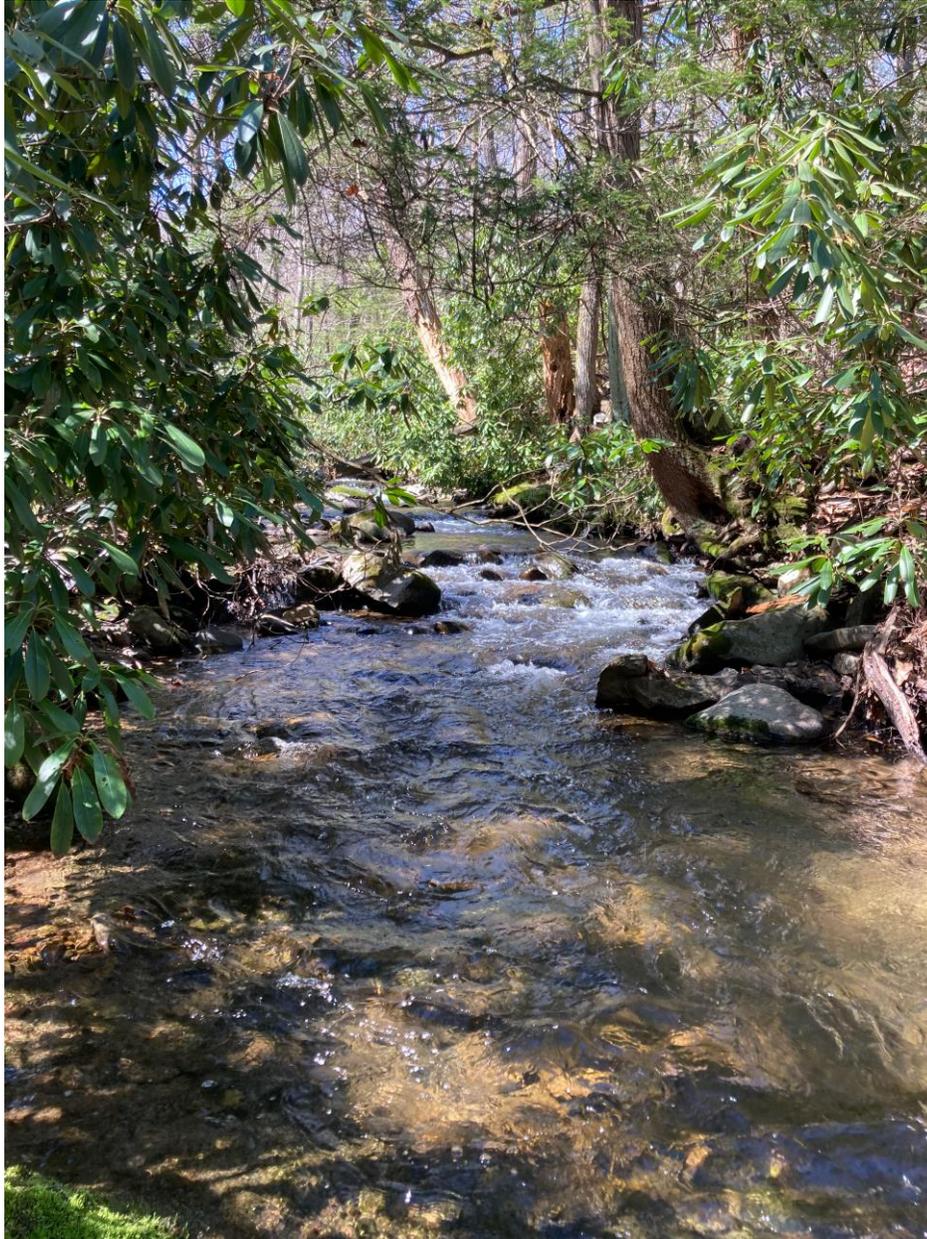


Water at Risk Series: “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness....”
Written by: Carol Hillestad for the Brodhead Watershed Association



Caption: Forest Hills Run, pictured here, is a local creek that has suffered degradation but is coming back to health thanks to the activism of Brodhead Watershed Association and commitment by the Mount Pocono Municipal Authority.

America's founding words echoed around the world — not just in 1776 but in aspiring democracies ever since. Those simple, beautiful words express a promise to everyone.

And yet...the words also contain responsibilities: those solemn promises cannot be kept when tainted air, undrinkable water, ruined soil, and vandalized forests foul our natural world.

The people of Pennsylvania recognized those responsibilities, by approving a “green amendment” to our state constitution more than 50 years ago. The voters declared that “The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment.”

The vote wasn't even close. It was approved by a four-to-one margin, despite opposition from the coal/steel/railroad and other industries. And it took many years before state court decisions caught up to the will of the people.

Industries, warehouses, and even some private citizens still push back, declaring that their right to use their land however they choose supersedes our human right to clean water.

Volunteer organizations like Brodhead Watershed Association and Pocono Heritage Land Trust stand up for the environment every day — but there's only so much they can do.

County conservation districts and your local municipality's land use ordinances are the essential front line. Their regulations and enforcement are what make Pennsylvania's green amendment work in our own backyard.

Just as important, it's you and your voice that keep local officials focused on your right to clean air, pure water, and a livable world for you, your kids, and generations to come. Be true to the promises of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — be a champion for a clean, livable world. And happy Earth Day!

About the work of defending our right to clean air and water:

<https://www.delawareriverkeeper.org/ongoing-issues/pennsylvanias-green-amendment-generations>

Before the Green Amendment to the state constitution, many creeks in Pennsylvania ran orange with acid mine drainage, a legacy of the coal industry. According to conservationadvocate.org, the joke was that if you fell into one of them, “you didn’t need to worry about drowning. You would dissolve first.”

Efforts are underway around the country, but currently Pennsylvania is one of only four states that have green amendments. The others are Montana, Massachusetts, and, most recently, New York.

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