

# **Executive Summary**

## **Wiconisco Creek Watershed Conservation Plan**

Prepared by:  
The Dauphin County Conservation District  
For  
The Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation

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### **Introduction**

The Wiconisco Creek is a 42-mile long stream located approximately 20 miles north of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The Wiconisco Creek Watershed consists of 116 square miles (74,450 acres) of the Appalachian Mountain section of the Valley and Ridge Physiographic Province in northern Dauphin and western Schuylkill Counties. The watershed encompasses all or part of 11 townships and 7 boroughs within the two counties.

The Wiconisco Creek Watershed Conservation Plan was created to: Promote awareness and conservation of the Wiconisco Creek; to restore, maintain or enhance the creek's resources; and to provide the Wiconisco Creek Restoration Association with a tool for education, setting goals, and establishing projects. The overall goal of the plan is "To establish and maintain the best possible quality of life for all watershed residents".

Interested groups or municipalities who are interested in implementing conservation projects should contact the Dauphin County Conservation District to obtain a copy of the Recommended Actions tables. The complete Watershed Conservation Plan is available at the Conservation District office and at the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation (EPCAMR) office.

### **Resources**

#### **Land**

The Wiconisco Creek Watershed lies within the Valley and Ridge Province of Pennsylvania, which is characterized by folded, faulted, and often steeply dipping stratified sedimentary rock sequences. Two of the five geologic formations within the watershed are ridge formers and the anthracite coal bearing formations in Pennsylvania. These formations were extensively mined by surface and underground methods wherever they occurred in the watershed. The valleys consist of siltstone, claystone, and poorly cemented sandstone. Forests dominate the mountains within the region and comprise approximately 57% of the watershed land area, however the valleys have been mostly cleared for agricultural purposes and contain a significantly smaller number of trees.

The Upper Wiconisco Creek Sub-watershed is dotted with many abandoned strip mines, mine tunnels and associated crop falls. These areas pose a definite hazard to hikers, hunters, and others due to the instability of the surrounding earth and/or the dilapidated condition of the tunnel structures. While some work has been done to address these issues, the watershed continues to be impacted by Abandoned Mine Drainage.

## **Water**

The Wiconisco Creek is fed by numerous tributaries. Bear Creek and Rattling Creek are two of the main tributaries entering the western end of the Upper Wiconisco Creek and account for over 20% of the Watershed. The Little Wiconisco Creek enters at the Lower Basin and accounts for 15% of the entire Wiconisco Creek Watershed. Most of Bear Creek and the Little Wiconisco Creek are impaired according to the PA Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP). A large portion of the Upper Basin of the Wiconisco Creek is impaired due to past mining activities in the region. The Lower Basin experiences somewhat of a recovery due to the influence of less impacted streams and metals precipitating in the Upper Basin. However, agricultural practices become more of a concern in the Lower Basin. The Little Wiconisco Creek is impaired due to sedimentation and nutrients from agriculture.

## **Biological**

Wildlife habitat in the Wiconisco Creek Watershed is diverse and supports such species as: white-tailed deer, wild turkey, ruffed grouse, black bear, and cottontail rabbit. The watershed is also home to a variety of Natural Communities, which support several rare plants and animals.

## **Recreation**

Residents of the watershed are afforded a variety of public and non-public recreation opportunities. Over 8,000 acres of State Forest are within the watershed as well as a significant portion of State Game Lands 210 and 264.

## **Historical**

The upper part of the Wiconisco Creek Watershed lies in the extreme southwest section of the anthracite coalfields of Pennsylvania. As a result, the region at the northeastern end of the watershed was heavily mined until the 1930's. Coal production had historically driven the local economy and contributed to the development of the local municipalities. Fertile agricultural land in the valleys in the Lower Basin also contributed to the area's economic base. Transportation of agricultural products and coal became paramount in this rural area. As a result, the "Wiconisco Feeder" canal was constructed and eventually was replaced by an extensive railroad system. The Millersburg Ferry, which is the last wooden stern paddlewheel ferry in the country, was used to provide the residents of Millersburg with the supplies they needed and also to distribute the area's goods to other communities.

## **Issues and Concerns**

Three public meetings were held in 1999 at several sites in the watershed with the purpose of informing the public about the study and to gather information on problems, local issues and concerns, and to get suggestions on areas of the watershed that need improvement. Topics and concerns expressed during these meetings are listed in Section VIII. After organizing these concerns by topic, management options for each concern were addressed in Section IX.

## **Recommended Actions**

During the final public meeting in November 2003, participants were given the opportunity to prioritize the recommended actions that were formulated based on the initial issues and concerns. The goals and prioritization results for the recommended actions are presented in Section XI of the full plan. Prioritization results for the recommended actions from pages 77-79 of the plan are included as pages 4-6 of the Executive Summary. In an effort to assist municipalities and other public/private agencies in locating funding to carry out prioritized projects located within this Watershed Conservation Plan, a list of State and Federal Financial and Technical Assistance Programs is given in Section X of the full plan.

## **Conclusion**

The information contained within this Executive Summary can be found in more detail in the full Wiconisco Creek Watershed Conservation Plan. This final document has resulted in a planning program that seeks to relate, harmonize and balance the economic, physical and social functions of the watershed. It is our intention that the Wiconisco Creek Watershed Conservation Plan will serve as a guide for future development, environmental and infrastructure needs. It will also serve to increase public awareness and connect municipal decision making to the health of The Wiconisco Creek.

The DCCD and its partners have prepared what they believe to be a thoughtful, effective document that is practical. Upon submission of the Plan to the DCNR, the watershed partners will petition the state to place the Wiconisco Creek on the Pennsylvania Rivers Conservation Registry. Once on that list, the watershed will be eligible for matching funds for the implementation of projects identified in the Plan.

With watershed residents and municipalities taking the lead, water quality and the quality of life within the watershed will continue to improve for generations to come.