

CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSIONS

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The Pennypack Creek Watershed is a watershed with great potential. The watershed is rich in natural, economic and intellectual resources. Much of the lower portion of the Creek is surrounded by private and public natural lands, offering one of the most natural urban stream corridors in the region. Many efforts are being conducted by agencies, organizations and institutions (such as the Philadelphia Water Department, Pennypack Ecological Restoration Trust and Temple University) to harness these resources to improve the watershed. Glimpses of the watershed's potential can be seen in the proposed greenways and trail linkages, restoration of native fish populations and the financial resources being directed into this watershed from private organizations, local, state and federal agencies for studies, planning and implementation of improvement projects.

The Pennypack Creek Watershed is also a watershed facing challenges. Over eighty percent of the stream's river miles are listed on the PA 303d list of impaired waters due to flow variation and damage to stream systems from high velocity stormwater flows. Large areas of the watershed have antiquated stormwater management systems or no stormwater controls at all. This situation, combined with vast areas of residential and commercial land uses, make this watershed susceptible to damage and economic losses from flooding. Invasive plant species and high densities of deer in parks and natural areas are disrupting natural forest regeneration and native ecosystems. Many of the watershed's streams possess degraded physical habitats, the result of erosive stormwater runoff, poor riparian management, channelization, and undersized bridge constrictions. Uncontrolled discharges from CSOs and illegal cross-connections are on-going problems that undermine the use and value of the Creek as a recreational resource. Most watershed residents, despite acknowledging the importance of watershed issues, are not actively involved in stewardship efforts.

The need for a coordinated, active, and strategic watershed restoration program is great. Without question, promoting the watershed's potential and facing the watershed's challenges will require a long-term, coordinated, and sustained effort on the part of all watershed stakeholders. This River Conservation Plan is one of a number of guiding documents that identifies positive actions to improve the watershed. Successfully accomplishing this plan's objectives will require political will and financial commitment from watershed communities, as well as investment of "sweat equity" from volunteers and residents.

The good news is that the mechanisms to accomplish these goals and objectives and to face the watershed's challenges are already in place. Organizations and volunteer groups are already very active in the watershed, implementing innovative solutions to difficult challenges. The seeds of local municipal cooperation throughout the watershed have been sown and the watershed will continue to benefit from new research and land and watershed management techniques.

The watershed issues are largely identified. Steps to improve the watershed have been proposed. The challenge now is to move forward and implement these steps, appreciate the successes and learn from the failures. Hundreds of years of land development, stream channel alterations and management efforts based on municipal versus natural boundaries have contributed to this watershed's ills. Helping the watershed to become a stable, urban stream that is healthy and a treasure to its watershed communities will likely take many years of dedicated action to accomplish. Efforts currently underway in the watershed, including this River Conservation Plan, are just the first steps in achieving this vision.