

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan has been a publicly driven process. Watershed citizens are stakeholders that have the opportunity to provide input into how their watershed is restored, maintained, and enhanced. Conservation of natural resources occurs most effectively when the public is encouraged to take ownership of the resources and protection is afforded through a fostered sense of place. Residents of the French Creek watershed live, work, and play in this watershed. It is home to many and visited by many more who come to enjoy clean, free-flowing waters, abundant fish and game, and numerous other recreational opportunities. The natural resources offered in the French Creek watershed bring renewed economic opportunities to this region and deserve to be protected. The residents of this watershed are the key to ensuring the conservation ethic is passed from this generation to the next. While some may enjoy short-term benefits that result in the degradation of this watershed, everyone reaps the long-term benefits of protecting it.

The conservation planning process began in the fall of 1999 with a public meeting to announce the conservation plan and gain insight into what citizens perceived to be major issues facing conservation of the French Creek watershed. Public involvement was again incorporated into the planning process in the spring of 2000 with a series of public meetings held throughout the watershed by the French Creek Project and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Citizens once again had the opportunity to provide feedback on threats and opportunities in the watershed. This public involvement continued to guide the development of the Plan through citizen involvement in WPC's technical steering committee. The steering committee met periodically to guide the conservation planning process and provide firsthand insight on issues in the French Creek watershed. In the fall of 2001 the public was once again called upon to offer insight and comments on the drafted French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan. These comments were incorporated into this final French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan that will serve as a guiding document and tool for the conservation of the French Creek watershed. Public involvement in the conservation of French Creek will continue to be important as recommendations and action plans are implemented.

Public comments received at the spring 2000 meetings and during the fall 2001 public comment period are located in Appendix B.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and the FCP will continue to provide the public convenient access to the French Creek Watershed Conservation Plan via their web pages at <http://www.paconserve.org/> or <http://frenchcreek.allegheny.edu> and through hard copies at WPC's Northwest Field Station located on Lake Pleasant in Erie County and FCP's office at Allegheny College in Meadville. Hard copies of the Plan are also available at public libraries throughout the watershed and at county planning, conservation district, and PA Department of Environmental Protection offices. The Plan and accompanying GIS is also available electronically by contacting WPC.