



BIG SPRING WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

2024 Year in Review

Notes from the President by Mark Spicka

The Big Spring Watershed Association kept busy in 2024 in our efforts to restore, protect, and enhance the Big Spring. We continued to conduct our biannual creek cleanups in April and October. Volunteers picked up the accumulated trash from the headwaters down through Newville. In October we were joined by State Representative Barb Gleim and members of the Newville Cub Scouts. West Pennsboro Twp. provided the truck to haul away the trash. In April, Mary Blakeslee, Laszlo Bockh, and Linda Watson took part in the Earth Day fair at the Big Spring Middle School. Through various interactive activities, they helped educate the students about the Big Spring watershed and its unique karst geology. In September, BSWA again hosted Project Healing Waters in which wounded veterans enjoyed a day of fly fishing. The Big Spring Fish and Game Association generously made available their pond for fishing and provided food for the event. Our birders continued to hold bird watching walks along the spring on the first Saturday morning of each month. Volunteers worked hard to maintain and expand the pollinator habitat at 380 Big Spring Road. After leading the planning, establishment, and maintenance of the habitat for over a decade, Mary Blakeslee is handing over leadership to Paul Christman. Don Horn and Paul Christman continued to conduct monthly monitoring of water quality, testing for pH, temperature, nitrogen, phosphates, and conductivity. (Continued on next page.)



Volunteers for the Fall Cleanup in October 2024

Upcoming Activities: Fly Tying Classes

Starting on Thursday, January 23 at 6:30pm we will be holding fly tying classes at the First United Presbyterian Church in Newville. The classes will be held on Jan 23, 30, Feb 6, 20, 27, and March 6. BSWA will provide materials for the fly patterns and no experience is needed. Contact Linda Watson at fishmorekane@gmail.com for more information.

Spring Cleanup in April

BSWA will hold its spring cleanup on a Saturday in April with the exact date to be determined. It will run from 9-11 am and we will meet at the headwaters parking lot. Contact Linda Watson at fishmorekane@gmail.com for more information as we determine the exact date for the cleanup.

Monthly Bird Walks

Bill Franz leads bird walks along Big Spring on the first Saturday morning of every month at 7:00. Click [here](#) for a list of the birds that have been found along the Big Spring. Contact Bill Franz at wlfraenz1@yahoo.com to find out more about the bird walks.

BSWA Website

For more information about the ecology, geology, and history of the Big Spring along with information on how to get involved in BSWA's activities, follow this link to our website.
<https://bigspringwatershedassociation.org/>

BSWA on Facebook

Click on the Facebook logo below and like our page to get updates on our activities and projects.





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(Continued from the previous page.) Looking forward to 2025, we are working with the Cumberland County Conservation District and the PA Fish and Boat Commission to do in-stream habitat restoration from the “willow tree pool” parking lot downstream 1200 feet to Nealy Road. This stretch of the creek is silted in and holds little productive holding water for trout. PAFBC and the County Conservation District are applying for a County Action Plan Grant from the DEP in fall 2025 and we hope for the work to be done in summer 2026.

We continue to be highly engaged in the evaluation process of the proposed warehouses near the Big Spring headwaters. See the column to the right for details.

Thank you to all of the volunteers! Your tireless efforts have made all of BSWA's accomplishments possible. We encourage all members of the community to join BSWA's activities. Membership dues also support our activities. If you have not already, please consider renewing your membership or making a donation to BSWA. Click [here](#) for the membership form.

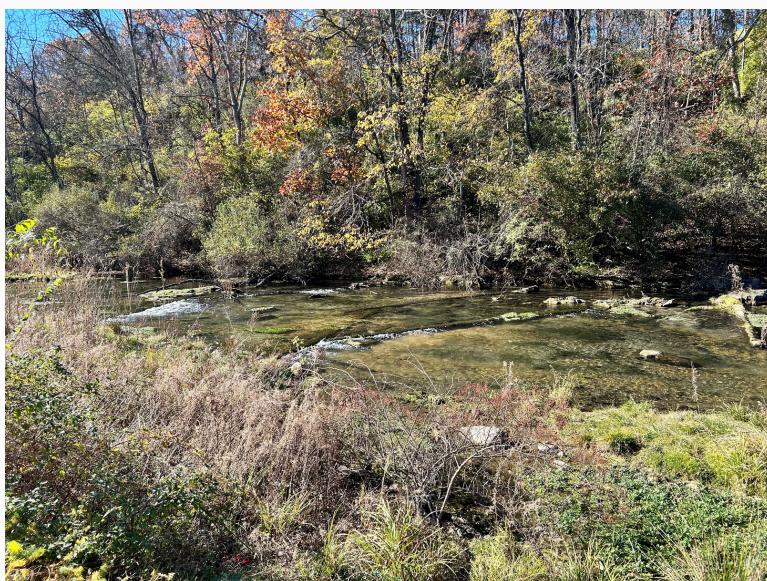
Proposed Warehouse Plans Under Review by the DEP

BSWA continues to monitor and comment on the approval process of the proposed development of three warehouses on Route 11 that could negatively impact the Big Spring and surrounding residential wells. The proposed warehouses sit on about 110 acres of land at 3485 Ritner Highway. This site is within the Big Spring surface watershed. It is about 4000 feet from the headwaters of the Big Spring and less than 3400 feet from lower sections of the Big Spring. The development plans would include 1.3 million square feet of warehousing space plus impervious surfaces such as parking lots for trucks. Stormwater carrying contaminants from roofs and parking lots could drain into the Big Spring and the area's groundwater, adversely affecting water quality.

Of particular concern is the proposed construction of seven subsurface stormwater infiltration basins that would be sitting directly on porous limestone bedrock. Some of these subsurface infiltration basins would be up to 35 feet under the current surface grade, requiring blasting deep into the limestone bedrock. Current plans do not follow the DEP's best management practice of 2 feet of soil separating the subsurface infiltration basins and bedrock for filtration of stormwater. Furthermore, the plans do not follow recommended ratios of the area of impervious surfaces to infiltration basins. The concern is that such a design of the basins would encourage the creation of sinkholes on the site and that stormwater would not be adequately filtrated before entering into the ground water. With its proximity to the Big Spring, contaminated water could quickly find its way into the Big Spring, which also serves as Newville's secondary water source. Furthermore, the wells of surrounding residents could be negatively impacted by contaminated stormwater from the site getting into the aquifer.

In March 2024 the West Pennsboro Twp. Board of Supervisors approved the plans pending their approval by the DEP. The plans are currently under review by the Cumberland County Conservation District and the DEP for the permitting of the stormwater management plans. BSWA has worked with local partners and citizens to submit comments to the DEP expressing concerns about the plans. The Borough of Newville has hired a hydrogeologist who has recommended further analysis of the site and has identified the potential danger of contamination of the ground water.

It is imperative that members of community let their concerns be known to the permitting authorities. For current updates on the status of the proposal, follow BSWA's Facebook page [here](#). Also, follow the link [here](#) to see BSWA's comments submitted to the DEP and click [here](#) for the hydrogeologist's report.



Big Spring Creek with its fall colors

Membership Drive: Please support BSWA's efforts to restore, protect, and enhance the Big Spring. Your membership dues go to support all of our activities. Click [here](#) to download the BSWA membership form.

Thank you for your support!

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Young and old enjoy taking part in fly tying classes.

BSWA Continues Tradition of Fly Tying Classes

From late January to early March 2024 BSWA held fly tying classes at the First Presbyterian Church in Newville. The event is organized by Linda Watson and includes tyers of all experience levels. Different BSWA members led a session on a given night and walked participants through the completion of several flies. Emphasis is on learning basic techniques that can be applied to a wide variety of flies. Everyone enjoyed a relaxed atmosphere and a great exchange of tying knowledge. This past year Marilyn Miller donated several fly fishing items of her late husband Bob to BSWA to give to the several young tyers in the group. See the photo of the group below. Thank you Marilyn for your generosity!



Volunteers work on the pollinator habitat in November 2024

Pollinator Habitat Update: This spring and summer was spent removing invasive and unwanted plants from the habitat. Later in the summer and into fall, volunteers completed light maintenance and assessment in preparation for seeding the disturbed areas. The work in the habitat culminated in the fall clean up and seeding in November and December. In early spring we would like to seed again and then start planning a new fence on the borders of the habitat.



For over a decade former BSWA president and current treasurer Tom Smithwick has helped organize the hosting of veterans for a day of fly fishing as part of Project Healing Waters. It has been wonderful to see familiar faces over the years and see their fly fishing skills grow and grow. To the left are some participants taking part in a day of fishing.

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