Watershed program seeks new volunteers

Lehigh Valley residents who want to learn more about the environment and get involved in local efforts to protect water can look to the Penn State Extension Master Watershed Steward program.

No previous experience is necessary, just a desire to give back.

This program brings together university educators from varied disciplines, environmental professionals and local conservation agencies to deliver 40 hours of training to a select group of recruits who in turn volunteer to help protect the Lehigh Valley’s water. Lessons in topics such as water quality, stream health and restoration, recreational use, groundwater and geology equip the trainees for many projects that benefit the community.

Applications are now being accepted for the 2020 Lehigh and Northampton training class.

The 2020 Master Watershed Steward training program starts March 11 and continues 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesdays through mid-June. The course also includes three hands-on Saturday field trips.

Classes will be held at partnering environmental organizations throughout the Lehigh Valley. The fee for the program is $125, which helps offset the costs for program materials and professional guest speakers.

Scholarships are available for those with financial hardships.

Information sessions will be offered 6:30-8:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Penn State Extension office, 4184 Dorney Park Road, Allentown. To register, go to extension.psu.edu/master-watershed-steward-information-meeting or call 877-345-0691 and 6:30-8:30 p.m. Feb. 5 via ZOOM Webinar at extension.psu.edu/master-watershed-steward-information-webinar

For information, contact Brad Kunsman at 610-813-6613 or email bjke2@psu.edu.
Master Watershed Stewards

Many states throughout the nation offer natural and water resource steward volunteer programs through university extension services; these programs train citizen volunteers in the basics of water resources stewardship. Now Penn State Extension, with the help of other local environmental groups, has launched Pennsylvania’s own Master Watershed Steward program.

Where is the program offered?

Allegheny
Bucks
Cumberland
Dauphin/Lancaster/Lebanon
Lackawanna/Luzerne/Wyoming
Lehigh/Northampton
Monroe
Montgomery
Philadelphia
York

How do I become a Penn State Master Watershed Steward?

Contact your local extension office for program information and training opportunities.
What is the Penn State Master Watershed Steward Program?

The Penn State Master Watershed Steward program was established to educate and empower volunteers to protect environmental resources. The program provides interested individuals with extensive training in watershed management and natural resources. In return for the training, participants dedicate volunteer time to educate the community about environmental stewardship based on university research and recommendations.

Training and volunteer service are coordinated at the county level by extension staff, partners, or trained volunteers. Each year 15-20 people per county are selected for the program. Those accepted to the program attend training classes that focus on a broad range of water and natural resource topics, including groundwater, stream ecology, wetlands, invasive plants, water recreation, wildlife, forestry and stormwater management. There is a one-time registration cost to those accepted into the program, with scholarships available to those with financial hardships.

What do Penn State Master Watershed Stewards do?

Master Watershed Stewards volunteer in the community to improve the health of our streams, rivers and other natural resources.

Volunteer Opportunities include:

- Organizing educational events such as rain barrel building workshops and seminars on backyard stormwater management.
- Participating in stream restoration projects.
- Sampling water quality and stream assessments.
- Coordinating and conducting stream clean-ups.
- Planning and carrying out habitat improvement projects.
- Working with municipal officials on stormwater.
- Teaching adults and children about the environment.

What is required of a Penn State Master Watershed Steward?

To become a Master Watershed Steward, you need a **keen interest** in the environment, a **willingness to learn** and most importantly, a **strong desire** to **make a difference** in the community. Whether you are a teacher, an accountant, a construction worker, a homemaker, or retired, **YOU** can become a Master Watershed Steward!

To become a certified Master Watershed Steward, you must complete a minimum of 40 hours of training and fulfill 50 hours of volunteer service. In subsequent years, you can maintain your Master Watershed Steward status by giving at least 20 additional volunteer hours and attending at least 10 hours of continuing education annually.