

Your Winter Report

PennEnvironment study: Microplastics contaminate our cleanest streams

PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center released a study about plastic contamination in Pennsylvania's rivers, lakes and streams this past October. While the results were alarming, they sadly were not surprising.

Plastic, plastic everywhere

Through our report, "Pennsylvania's Pristine Waterways and Microplastics," our staff and volunteers tested samples from 50 waterways that are considered among the cleanest and most ecologically valuable in Pennsylvania for "microplastics" (pieces of plastic smaller than a grain of rice).

State environmental officials categorize these clean streams as Exceptional Value (EV), High Quality (HQ), and Class A Cold Water Trout (Class A) waterways. Every waterway sampled was contaminated by plastic.

"Our society's addiction to single-use plastic products is polluting our waterways and threatening our health," said PennEnvironment Zero Waste Advocate Faran Savitz. "Pennsylvania communities should act quickly to stem the tide of plastic pollution by passing local bans and other restrictions on bags, polystyrene foam, bottles, utensils and more."

PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center staff held news conferences in major cities across Pennsylvania to release the report's findings and raise flags about plastic contamination in the state's cleanest streams. News conferences were held in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Allentown and Erie, and our staff were joined by experts and local officials alike to discuss the study's data.



PennEnvironment staffer Olivia Perfetti collects samples from Hell's Run.

The report's findings were met with great interest from Pennsylvania's media outlets, including news stories on NPR affiliates across the state, ABC-TV Pittsburgh, Fox-56 Scranton, WFMZ-TV Allentown, the Easton Express Times and the Pocono Record.

"If we are serious about protecting our children and our communities, we need to get serious about reducing the amount of plastic ending up in our state's waterways," said State House Democratic Leader Joanna McClinton. "Microplastics harm our wildlife, contaminate our food and risk our neighbors' health. We know that taking steps toward reducing our reliance on

Continued on page 3 ►

Thanks
for making it
all possible

Pennsylvania to add three new state parks

There are few things better than hiking, camping or exploring in Pennsylvania's beautiful state parks. That's why it was so exciting to hear state officials announce their plan to add three brand new parks to Pennsylvania's state park system.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) announced the creation of Susquehanna Riverlands in York County, Vosburg Neck

growth of renewables—wind, solar and geothermal—combined.

The report also detailed the rapid gains achieved nationally over the past decade: The nation as a whole produced more than three times as much renewable electricity from the sun and the wind in 2021 as in 2012.

“So far, Pennsylvania has been missing out on the renewable energy party happening nationwide, but it doesn't have to be that way,” said Ellie Kerns, climate change associate with PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center.

“Our report offers a timely reminder that we have an immense, largely untapped opportunity when it comes to clean energy here in Pennsylvania.”

PennEnvironment releases two new reports for Clean Water Act's 50th anniversary

October 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of one of the nation's bedrock environmental laws: the federal Clean Water Act.

To celebrate this monumental anniversary, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center joined with our national partners to release two new studies to highlight the headway made over the past 50 years, as well as the need for action over the next 50 years.

In September, we released “Wasting our Waterways,” which showed that industrial facilities in Pennsylvania reported releasing the ninth highest amount of toxic pollution in the nation.

In October, we released “Clean Water for the Three Rivers,” which showed that 2.7 billion gallons of sewage overflows are projected to plague Pittsburgh's rivers and streams by 2036 if stronger protections aren't implemented.

“Pennsylvania's waterways should be clean for swimming, fishing, providing drinking water and supporting wildlife,” said David Masur, executive director for PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center. “As the Clean Water Act turns 50, it's time to turn the tide on this toxic pollution.”

in Wyoming County, and Big Elk Creek in Chester County. These new state parks will add nearly 3,500 acres of public lands to Pennsylvania's network of state parks for the public's enjoyment, creating recreational opportunities and protecting habitat for wildlife.

To celebrate this announcement, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center hosted a webinar with DCNR Secretary Cindy Dunn to give interested Pennsylvanians more information about each new state park, their ecological value, and the recreational opportunities they provide. A recording of the webinar is available on PennEnvironment's Facebook page.

Solutions when renewables aren't on the rise in Pennsylvania

PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center released the latest edition of its report on renewable energy production in Pennsylvania this fall, “Renewables on the Rise 2022.”

Sadly, the report showed that Pennsylvania had some of the slowest growth in the U.S. Pennsylvania ranked fourth worst for growth in solar power and fifth worst for overall



Courtesy Snyder Susquehanna Riverlands

Pennsylvania is proposing to add 3,500 acres of new public lands to our state park system by creating three new state parks that will be located in York, Chester and Wyoming counties.

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Staff

Page 1 story continued:

Microplastics contaminate our streams

single-use plastics can impact the health of our communities.”

To help concerned Pennsylvanians and local officials know which streams were included in the study, the PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center created an interactive online map at www.pennenvironment.org/microplastics2022 that shows the specific waterways sampled and what types of microplastic contamination were found.

Moving toward a cleaner future

The report outlines a broad range of policy solutions to tackle the problem. These include passing single-use plastic bans at the local, state and federal levels; introducing producer responsibility provisions like a statewide bottle deposit in order to shift the burden of dealing with waste onto the corporations that create the waste in the first place; and updating Pennsylvania’s cornerstone recycling law, Act 101, in order to bring

the commonwealth’s waste management practices into the 21st century.

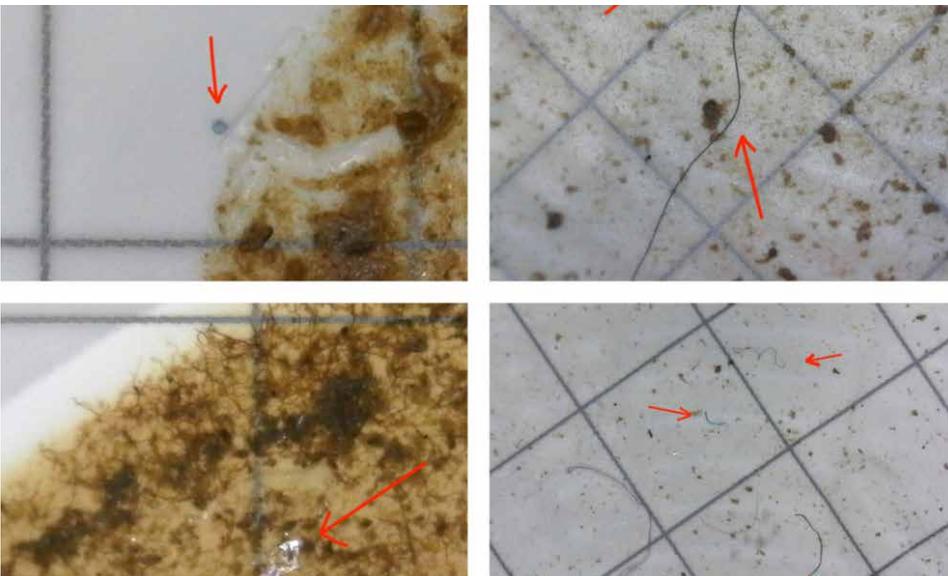
Concern around plastic and microplastic pollution has led to widespread local action in Pennsylvania.

In 2022 alone, PennEnvironment worked closely with local officials in nine townships to pass laws tackling single-use plastics that are expected to reduce plastic bag use in the Keystone State by over 170 million bags each year and reduce nearly 940 tons of plastic waste annually.

“There is no silver bullet solution for the mini-menace of microplastics” said Faran. “Fundamentally, we need to cut plastic pollution off at the source and change the way society deals with our waste if we want to protect our environment and our health from this threat.”

Upper photo: Field Director Flora Cardoni speaks about microplastics found in local waterways including in the Monocacy Creek, seen in backdrop.

Lower photo: A microplastic fiber and film piece from Neshaminy Creek.



Staff

Featured staff



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David Masur
Executive Director

As executive director, David spearheads the issue advocacy, civic engagement campaigns and long-term organizational building for PennEnvironment. David has served on the environmental transition teams for Gov. Tom Wolf and Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney, and he has been named one of Pennsylvania’s “40 under 40” environmentalists by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. Under David’s leadership, PennEnvironment has won the two largest citizen suit penalties in Pennsylvania history against illegal polluters under the federal Clean Water Act.



PennEnvironment and The Public Interest Network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.

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PennEnvironment

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Your 2023 Winter Report

Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind PennEnvironment. We focus exclusively on protecting air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

PennEnvironment named to Gov. Shapiro environmental transition team

Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro announced the appointment of PennEnvironment Executive Director David Masur to his transition team in December to help formulate environmental priorities for the incoming administration. This includes policies to address global warming, increase renewable energy production in Pennsylvania, ensure clean air and clean water, and hold polluters that violate cornerstone environmental laws more accountable.

“Pennsylvanians gave us a mandate to bring people together and get things done—and this diverse, experienced group of leaders and policy experts from every region across the commonwealth will advise our transition on the most pressing issues and priorities we face,” said Gov. Shapiro.

“I’m honored to be included on the Shapiro-Davis transition team for the environment,” noted David.

“It’s inspiring to have the opportunity to assist the incoming administration in developing its policy priorities to tackle climate change, promote clean energy, protect our great outdoors and ensure clean air and clean water for all Pennsylvanians, now and for generations to come.”

PennEnvironment Executive Director David Masur (right) will lend his environmental expertise to Gov. Shapiro’s transition team.



Staff