

Forward Maya K. van Rossum the Delaware Riverkeeper

The Delaware River is the last major free-flowing River in the eastern United States. It flows for 330 miles through 4 states, 42 counties and 838 municipalities. Rather than serving as a dividing line among these communities, the Delaware River is a unifying element in the landscape. Throughout history and today, communities within the region regardless of political boundaries have been drawn together by this River, recognizing it as a living resource that supports their lives.

Recreationally, there is no off-season for the Delaware. In the warmer months you can find folks enjoying the River at all hours of the day or night -- fishing, boating, swimming, birding or just idly sitting on its banks and watching it flow by. Even in the coldest winter months kayakers and die-hard anglers are out there enjoying the River and its Bay. Preserving and enhancing the health of the River is critical for sustaining these recreational uses and protecting the local economies that rely on them.



The rich ecological history of the river region, still evidenced today, has not only been critical to the success of the recreational uses and associated eco-tourism, but has been the foundation upon which the region's culture and sense of identity has evolved. Historic and ongoing community vigilance has preserved unique cliff formations overlooking the River; natural islands, rapids, a remarkably well-established green riparian buffer including wetlands, and magnificent and unparalleled ecological phenomena including the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds coming to feast on the eggs of the Horseshoe Crab, a species that has lived and spawned in our Delaware Bay since before the dinosaurs.



Many reaches of the River are still graced with the presence and history of the Native Americans. It is well documented that the Lenape and Minisink lived, fished, travelled and traded along the banks of the Delaware River.

Additionally, the Delaware River holds a special place in the European history of this country and is viewed by many as the place where America was born. Washington crossed the Delaware River and fought the Battle of Trenton on the banks of the Delaware. It was this battle which was the turning point for the American Revolution and the birth of our nation.

The sense of community created by the Delaware River has harmonized otherwise diverse and disparate voices in support of the River's protection and restoration. Still, more needs to be done.

There was a time in the mid-20th century when the Delaware River had become so polluted that it prevented migration of the historically important Shad upriver to spawn. Implementation of environmental laws and concerted action by concerned citizens and communities restored the River's water quality and ecosystems and supported the return of the Shad to the Delaware River.

While the pollution-induced fish block is now gone, the Delaware River today suffers different problems than in the past. Toxic and other legal and illegal pollution discharges to the River continue; damaging development that floods our communities, pollutes our waterways, and destroys sensitive and important ecosystems continue and are on the rise; the funding of structural flood control options and allowing communities to build, remain and grow in floodplains and in the path of dangerous floods are still the norm; the use of outdated technologies that degrade our clean water or needlessly kill billions of fish is still accepted; the proliferation of industrial activities such as natural gas extraction threatens water resources; overharvesting species, spoiling habitats, and scouring river bottoms continue – all this to accomplish goals that could be better achieved in other ways without such irrevocable harm. In short, many continue to treat our River and its ecological communities as though they are disposable.

But our River is not disposable, it is priceless and irreplaceable.



Access to pure, life-sustaining water that supports diverse and healthy aquatic communities is an inalienable right of all beings, and of the Delaware River itself. The Delaware River and the watershed it supports is our opportunity to receive the benefits of this inalienable right. No one entity, person, corporation, industry, town, county or state, has the right to use the Delaware River or any of the streams that feed it in a way that harms others or infringes on this right.

Protecting, respecting and restoring a clean, healthy and free flowing Delaware River provides the greatest level of protection, healthy growth and quality of life to our communities. A healthy Delaware River including floodplains, flows, tributaries, aquifers and habitats protects our communities from flood damages and drought, provides clean and abundant drinking water at a sustainable level to our communities, supports growing businesses of all types, supports healthy commerce, encourages both commercial and recreational fisheries providing safe food, creates vibrant recreation, encourages growing ecotourism, increases the marketability and market value of our homes, and makes our communities more desirable places to live and be.

This report is designed to document and demonstrate many of the unrecognized values and benefits that a healthy Delaware River brings to our communities, to help people make River protection among their highest priorities, and to expand and enhance appreciation for the beauty and the power of a healthy Delaware River.

The most important take-away from this report is that the Delaware River is a living ecosystem rich in beauty, culture, and community that needs to be protected and, where necessary, restored to continue to be the vibrant and contributing member of our community we all desire and need.

Thank you for your role in appreciating, protecting and restoring the Delaware River, its streams and watershed. It is your care, your voice and your action to Remember the River every day and in all you do that will make the difference.

***Maya K. van Rossum
the Delaware Riverkeeper***

River Values: The Value of a Clean and Healthy Delaware River

Delaware Riverkeeper Network

Stretches of the Delaware River and its Tributaries Included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System



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