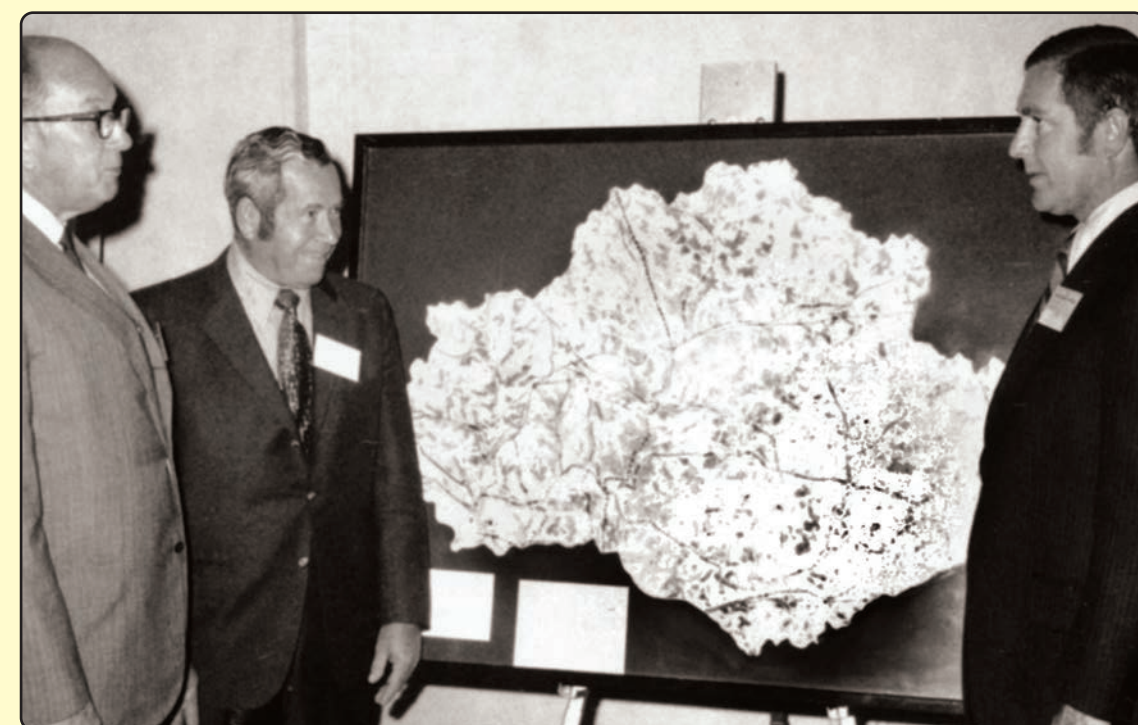


2026

J. Roy Houston Conservation Partnership Award Turtle Creek Watershed Association



Westmoreland Conservation District Manager Elwood Leslie (center) helps TCWA plan in the early 1970s.

Established in 1970, Turtle Creek Watershed Association (TCWA) is one of the oldest watershed associations in Pennsylvania. TCWA initially began as an environmental planning agency focused on erosion and sedimentation, flood control, sewage and abandoned mine drainage issues. Today, one of TCWA's main purposes is to promote natural resource conservation throughout the Turtle Creek Watershed, a 147-square-mile area encompassing all or part of 33 municipalities in Westmoreland and Allegheny counties, which includes farmland, industrial areas, forests, abandoned mine lands and urban and suburban communities.

With just one staff member and a dedicated group of volunteers, TCWA remains very active in the community and hosts several events throughout the year. The annual Rubber Duck Race and Nature Festival with Irwin Borough offers educational activities for the whole family and brings together various community organizations. TCWA volunteers also participate in annual litter cleanups and host stream walks to educate residents about streambank stabilization and storm-water management. They also partner with the Municipality of Monroeville to assist the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission with spring trout stocking.



Streambank stabilization along Turtle Creek in Murrsville's Duff Park.



The Rubber Duck Race begins at the Nature Festival in Irwin.

TCWA is a long-standing partner of the Westmoreland Conservation District. They have worked together for decades on projects that improve water quality, protect streambanks and restore aquatic habitat throughout the watershed.

TCWA partnered with the District and the Municipality of Murrsville in 2024 to stabilize streambanks at Duff Park. This included grading and the installation of single-log deflectors to redirect stream flow away from vulnerable areas and reduce erosion. In 2023, TCWA and the District worked together to stabilize approximately 1,700 feet of streambank along Haymaker

Run, a High-Quality stream. With assistance from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the project also included retrofitting existing fish habitat structures, installing additional structures, and improving areas for fishing, environmental education and recreation. Through a mini-grant, TCWA, the District, and Franklin Regional School District also collaborated on creating six interpretive signs along Haymaker Run, highlighting in-stream habitat structures, riparian buffers, wetlands, aquatic organisms and the importance of litter cleanups.

Perhaps TCWA's largest partnership project is also its most ambitious. The Irwin Discharge and Biddle property abandoned mine drainage and land restoration project is a long-term effort to address one of Pennsylvania's largest sources of abandoned mine drainage pollution in terms of flow and pollutant loading. This discharge is currently contributing around 9 million gallons per day of polluted mine water into the Turtle Creek watershed.



The Irwin Discharge is one of the largest abandoned mine drainage pollution discharges in Pennsylvania.

TCWA purchased the former Biddle Coal Mine's 49-acre property in October 2024 and, with assistance from the District, Westmoreland County, Triad Engineering, Inc. and Hedin Environmental, plans to construct an active treatment plant to treat the iron-rich mine water before it is discharged back into Brush Creek. The Biddle Property is currently covered with coal refuse material. Not only will this project involve the design of a treatment system for the mine water, it will also determine the best course of action to restore the property. The Biddle property will be the site of the active mine water treatment system once its land reclamation is complete.

This project is currently in its initial study phase, with engineering, design and construction to follow. While this is a long-term undertaking that will require many years and significant grant funding, the completed project will play an important role in restoring habitat and increasing recreational opportunities along Brush Creek for years to come.

For more than five decades, TCWA has demonstrated what can happen when a small but dedicated group of people commits to protecting the natural resources in its community. Through volunteer efforts and partnerships with organizations like the District, TCWA continues to turn that commitment into projects that will benefit local waterways, wildlife and residents for generations to come.



Purchase of the Biddle abandoned mine land property will provide an area to treat the Irwin mine water discharge.



Thanks to Congresswoman Summer Lee, Westmoreland County received \$1.07 million in federal Community Project Funding to treat pollution from the Irwin Discharge.

Westmoreland Conservation District

