The Brandywine-Christina watershed spans some 583 square miles across Delaware and Pennsylvania, stretching from the Amish farms around Honeybrook — a town named for the sweetness of its water — to the City of Wilmington, where the watershed empties into the Delaware River and Bay. The Brandywine-Christina is comprised of four sub watersheds, including the iconic Brandywine Creek — inspiration to its own school of American Art — and the White Clay Creek — designated “Wild & Scenic” by the United States Department of Interior. The bulk of the watershed lies in Pennsylvania, but most of the people (close to 600,000) live in the Delaware portion of the watershed. The Brandywine-Christina provides drinking water to approximately 60% of Delaware’s residents. Land use in the watershed is distributed in roughly equal portions amongst agriculture, forests and wetlands, and urban and suburban. In this sense, the Brandywine-Christina is emblematic of many East Coast rivers that have evolved from the founding of our nation, through the industrial revolution and are now being asked to meet the ever-increasing demands of an urbanized society.

The Challenge

Each year, a host of venerable non-profits, local municipalities, state and federal agencies and private organizations spend millions of dollars on conservation work...
throughout the Brandywine-Christina watershed. These efforts often are not well coordinated, and most funding is limited to traditional grants and private philanthropic contributions. Despite much good work, water quality remains degraded. Large stretches of rivers and streams are subject to fishing and swimming restrictions, and water must be heavily treated before being pumped to our faucets. Storm water runoff — both suburban/urban and from agricultural areas — is of growing concern to water quality. Finally, increasingly severe storms are causing damaging floods, erosion and additional threats to our drinking water and our vital but fragile natural systems.

The Solution

Under a grant from the William Penn Foundation, The Nature Conservancy in Delaware is working with the University of Delaware to establish the “Brandywine-Christina Healthy Water Fund.” Water funds are financial vehicles designed to facilitate investments by downstream water users in upstream conservation measures that improve water quality and reduce flooding. The concept was pioneered by The Nature Conservancy in Latin America, and we are taking it to the next level in Delaware. The Brandywine-Christina Healthy Water Fund will consolidate and leverage public and private funding sources into an independently administered investment fund. Investors may include high-volume water users like water utilities, industry and municipalities, and conservation-minded private investors. The Fund may also provide a vehicle for local governments to comply with storm water regulations. The Fund will pool and increase available capital for investment in conservation practices scientifically prioritized to achieve the best water quality outcomes. The ultimate goal of the Brandywine-Christina Healthy Water Fund is to restore the watershed to fishable, swimable, potable status on an accelerated timetable and, in the process, transform the way we manage our freshwater resources.

How You Can Help

The William Penn Foundation has generously funded much of the Water Fund’s start-up costs. The Nature Conservancy in Delaware is endeavoring to leverage the Foundation’s investment to raise approximately $500,000 in additional funds to accelerate development of the fund and help ensure its success. Please help us build this enduring legacy for one of America’s most iconic rivers.

The Brandywine-Christina Healthy Water Fund will dramatically accelerate the pace of watershed conservation, secure freshwater resources for a majority of Delawareans and ensure ecological, social and economic benefits long into the future.

Contact

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