

# Integrated Public Education and Outreach & Public Involvement and Participation Programs

South Park Township, Allegheny County

September 2021

This Plan considers portions of the “Public Education and Outreach on Stormwater Impacts” and “Public Involvement / Participation” MCMs together because there are obvious connections to the principles contained within them. The Township’s philosophy is to use outreach and educational opportunities to bring increased awareness of water quality and quantity issues to a larger audience through time. This, in turn, should inspire behavioral change as well as direct participation in various cleanup events and similar activities. South Park Township does not have an active watershed specific to its own tributaries, but does have an active watershed group within the larger Peters Creek Watershed that conduct considerable outreach and physical projects for the common good: Peters Creek Watershed Association.

This Plan has a five-year horizon and will be updated annually. The Township will ultimately be responsible for creating, editing, and implementing this plan; however, broad community support and input is will be used to guide the ultimate end state. There is a natural nexus between this mid-range perspective and our MS4’s coverage under the Commonwealth’s General Permit (PAG-13) from March 2018 through March 2023. Annual reporting is required of the Township to the PA DEP, and we have established a system to track progress of the entire Stormwater Management Program, including the efforts detailed within this Plan targeting MCMs #1 and #2.

## **DRIVING FORCES**

Water is a resource that some take for granted, whether it is the drinking water that comes out of the tap, a stream that is home to aquatic life that fishermen flock to, or the giver of life to crops and livestock. Unlike other areas of the United States, our community has an adequate supply of surface and groundwater that we use for many purposes. What impacts this vital resource the most here is its quality. Water can be degraded by soil erosion, nitrates, phosphates, household chemicals, and other things in excess.

As the population in South Park Township grows, the complexion of land uses shifts from large agricultural and mining tracts to a greater number of smaller properties and more property owners. With a mix of homes, businesses, and industry, there are multiple sources of pollution – but also more opportunities to make *positive* impacts. The more people in our community that are aware of the issues affecting water quality, the better chance there is that improvement will come about through collective action. Watershed awareness is a fundamental building block of this type of grassroots movement. As shown in the stormwater map, all of South Park Township falls under the Peters Creek Watershed.

There are several strong reasons for encouraging a better of understanding of what makes up a watershed and in which a person lives or works. For starters, Allegheny County has dozens of watershed groups that span municipal boundaries to bring about results that people can join and volunteer in. This

concept creates a personal connection between individual actions and water resources when someone understands which local waterway could be affected by particular decisions or actions. Finally, individual watersheds and sub-watersheds may be impaired by different pollutants or in varying degrees and subject to individualized Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).

With the above factors driving South Park Township to improve our connection with the public for water quality and quantity purposes, the following goals are established:

1. Contribute to meeting attainment levels for our surface waters.
2. Create a better understanding of the links between land use, runoff management, water quality, and flood control.
3. Promote awareness of the storm sewer system as an essential component of the municipal infrastructure, and how household or business pollutants must be eliminated from the system.
4. Encourage public participation in community activities such as waterway cleanup or restoration.
5. Work with the business and residential community to reduce illicit discharge to waterways.
6. Participate in and support the local watershed association.
7. Satisfy the requirements of the MS4 General Permit.

The remainder of this plan is intended to serve as a strategic guide for the Township to play a more effective role in educating and involving the citizenry as stewards of our water resources. It details different segments and sub-groups of the population to better craft tailored messages and approaches that appeal to them. “Branding” the program can offer a more cohesive umbrella that residents and businesses will eventually recognize and hopefully embrace. The Plan also lays out numerous initiatives that we will pursue throughout the five-year period from 2020 to 2025, one that is certainly open to additions and modifications as time goes on.

## **Section 1: POPULATION SEGMENTS/KEY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS**

### **Overview**

While a one-size-fits-all approach may make sense in certain situations, such as publishing articles in the Township e-Newsletter, outreach is more effective if the overarching message is customized to a specific part of the population. Residents of a neighborhood may gain more from information about the storm drains running under their streets than would a farmer served by a road without such infrastructure. Similarly, a cost breakdown of water treatment costs due to excessive nutrients in the groundwater may be suitable for the adult population but not necessarily for elementary school children. Identification of key stakeholder groups is a vital step in adapting the main goals to hit home with the proper message. Below are descriptions of such groups that take into account both the general makeup of the population and the attributes of our community. Furthermore, the segments are not mutually exclusive, in that someone may fall into more than one area because of varied interests or lifestyles.

### **Stakeholder Groups**

1. *Residents and Neighborhoods* – This broad category includes households and neighborhoods within the Urban Growth Area as well as the rural subdivisions scattered throughout the

Township. Many of the lots in these areas are smaller than one acre, have lawns, and are likely to be served by stormwater infrastructure like subsurface pipes, curbed streets, and/or inlets.

- a. Due to the diversity within this group, the focus will be to push our public education strategies and awareness campaigns to the HOAs and community groups. HOAs have a vested interest in preventing water quality degradation as it could affect the aesthetics or their development. Furthermore, many HOAs own their respective Stormwater Facilities, and understanding Township goals and Best Management Practices is a means to cost effectively maintain their systems.
  - b. Each community group listed below is interested in the preservation and beautification of the Township in one facet or another. The mission of maintaining water and environmental quality is an aspect of these organizations' missions, either directly or indirectly, and should be a way of pushing this plan and future message to residents and their respective neighborhoods:
    - i. Lions Club—civic organization dedicated to volunteerism in the community
    - ii. Historical Society—focused in preserving South Park History
    - iii. Friends of South Park Library—dedicated to programs within the library, including preschool programs.
    - iv. Montour Trail Council — a non-profit all-volunteer group that builds, operates, and maintains the Montour Trail that runs through the Township.
    - v. Tri-Community Anglers Association — a group that is dedicated to cleaning up the banks of Piney Fork and Peters Creek to improve the aesthetic quality of the stream as well as remain vigilant of government and industrial projects which may jeopardize the water quality and endanger the aquatic life in the stream.
    - vi. VFW (Library and Broughton)—Veterans of Foreign Wars
    - vii. South Park Women's Club – a group that fundraises and awards scholarships for needy families in the community. Two members of the Women's Club distribute vests, collection bags, and other supplies during the Township's Spring and Fall Clean Up Days.
2. *Business and Industry* – Despite this being a generic category, the business community can be a powerful ally in the water quality conversation. Pooled financial resources conveyed through activity sponsorships, a broad audience reach, and the unique land use characteristics of business and industry enterprises also make this group an important target.
- a. Industry—there are not many industrial sites left in the Township. However, it will be important to push the plan and message out to the couple sites.
    - i. Bethel Park and Pleasant Hills Treatment Facilities—The facility deals with wastewater rather than Stormwater, but is a major factor in overall water quality, and could be helpful ally in trying to motivate the community about the broader importance of water and environmental quality.
    - ii. Bureau of Mines/ Department of Energy—although they operate under their own MS4 Permit, it is important to work together, as their site is integrated into multiple watersheds within the Township. It is important to get them involved in public education and bridge jurisdictional lines within the watershed boundaries.
    - iii. Waste Management Landfill—although they do not fall under our permit, their actions affect the Township watersheds. It is important that despite being on different permits, our education and participation plans complement each other

to ensure that a comprehensive message is being received throughout the Township.

- b. **Businesses**—The business districts are small and separated within different business districts in the Township. However, it is important that all businesses receive and understand the importance of the plan. Due to the lack of large business, the easiest way to push the message out is through the comprehensive business list on file at the Township.
3. **South Park School District** – The School District, which serves South Park Township, is a direct conduit to the children of our community and their families. Water quality education and hands-on experiences are part of the curriculum, and the Township has an opportunity to coordinate with this along with the Peters Creek Watershed, who is active in the municipality.
  - a. There are only three schools in the area, which are under one school board. Ensuring the Central Office receives the plan and distributes education materials is the best way to ensure the message is received to all involved.
4. **Municipal Staff** – South Park Township owns and maintains several sites throughout the municipality. At each of these locations, there are opportunities to utilize proper operational practices to reduce impacts on runoff and waterways.
  - a. The Public Works, Police, Fire, and Administrative Staff will receive directly through training. The plan requires the municipal staff to be aware and involved in order to foster community acceptance of the plan.
  - b. Public Works implementation of the housekeeping/ and maintenance plan will be vital in order to set the example around the Township of how and why MS4 is important.

## **Section 2 CRAFTING THE MESSAGE**

### **Overview**

As annotated above, each stakeholder group is important to the overall success of the Stormwater Management Program. In order for these groups to take action, the Township’s water quality message must appeal to the collective citizenry in a cost-effective manner and inspire action throughout the community. The foundation for this public campaign is summarized by these principles:

1. Water resources are extremely valuable, and will become more so for future generations that will have a larger population depending on them.
2. Improvements to water quality are made on both large and small scales by individual residents, and business operators.
3. Watershed awareness leads to a stronger connection between people and water resources.
4. Stopping current sources of pollution and sedimentation to waterways and surface water supplies is the first step in improving water quality.
5. When armed with good information, many individuals will choose to make decisions that benefit the common good.
6. Community based organizations, such as watershed groups, are powerful vehicles that unite residents and community leaders to protect and enhance water resources.
7. Cost-effective and/or naturally-based solutions often involve simple techniques that many people can implement.

We have utilized the Township e-Newsletter and website to broadcast watershed and water quality information to residents and businesses. In addition to other local and regional awareness-building efforts, our outreach to date has introduced our involvement in this widespread issue to the citizenry.

But further outreach efforts will require a cohesive and customized approach to be effective. Customized messages must relate to each of our population segments. These messages can be created by asking questions like:

1. What are the most common threats to water quality?
2. What common vision can the entire community relate to?
3. What costs are associated with impaired or polluted waters, and who bears them?
4. Who is affected by the loss of wildlife habitats?
5. How can the amount of sediment and other pollutants in our surface waters be conveyed in identifiable figures, like truckloads or bags or fertilizers?
6. Can certain desired behaviors be portrayed as “doing the right thing” and justified as economically sensible?
7. How can municipal staff demonstrate proper “good housekeeping” procedures at Township owned facilities?

### **Customizing the Message**

Different audiences can have different motivations for wanting to positively affect our collective water resources. Throughout the life of South Park Township’s public outreach campaign, the list below will likely evolve and expand. However, the task of pairing motivations and functions with the identified population segments lays the ground work for customizing the overarching message.

#### **Residents/ Neighborhoods:**

- Lawn fertilization is an easy target for behavioral change. Frequency of application, amount, and proper technique can reduce pollution from residential areas.
- Awareness of how the storm sewer system works, where it drains to, and why dumping any substance into it has a negative impact on waterways is needed; creating this awareness can reduce pollution.
- HOAs and subdivisions that have developed into close-knit neighborhoods may be easier to reach for waterway cleanup projects (often sponsored by watershed associations) and other events that encourage positive behavior and/or productive activity.
- Disconnecting runoff generated by an individual lot from the storm sewer system in a safe manner can benefit the entire community.
- Importance of managing stormwater associated with increases in impervious area.

#### **Business and Industry:**

- Establishments that cater to a clientele that visits a physical store or office can support municipal and/or watershed group efforts by displaying posters, distributing handouts, sponsoring events, etc.
- Keeping a “clean shop” is of particular importance with non-residential land uses that use cleaners, chemicals, or other types of process liquids that flow into waterways or the storm sewer system.
- Since non-residential uses can have more impervious coverage (area and percentage of total lot), runoff can be pre-treated with green infrastructure techniques like rain gardens and infiltration before reaching waterways or the storm sewer system.

#### **South Park’s School District:**

- Continued success in improving water quality relies heavily on future generations, such as our school-age children.

- Sources, amounts, and effects of common pollutants should be discussed with our youth in terms that are comprehensible by various age groups.

South Park Township Municipal Staff:

- Municipal staff must exhibit "good housekeeping" principles at its facilities, including the Township buildings and community parks, to maintain water quality and provide a positive example to the citizenry.

### **SECTION 3: DISTRIBUTING THE MESSAGE**

#### **Overview**

South Park Township must be resourceful in broadcasting the water quality campaign since staff time and budget constraints are not conducive to a costly program employing a full-time staff member. This places a premium on partnerships with other organizations, use of electronic contact methods, and reaching out to established neighborhood groups for education and participatory activities. All material will be on display as soon as it is produced and published. Certain flyers will be continuously handed out, such as the "When it Rains It Drains" flyer, which is given out every time a new building permit is issued. The remaining flyers and printed material will be handed out at Community Day and the annual MS4 Public Hearing.

#### **Section 3.1: What Materials will be Distributed**

##### **Overview**

Per DEP requirements, at least one new educational item every year. The Township's goal is to distribute as much information as possible, but will maintain the standard by publishing a variety of resources throughout the five-year plan. As new information comes available, it will be evaluated by Township and then published accordingly.

##### **Print**

A display stand in the lobby of the municipal building will be available to all residents, business owners, and concerned citizens to gather any and all published materials. Furthermore, bookmarks are available at the Library, with MS4 material printed on it, as well as Stormwater Guide for Homeowners will be attached to every building permit that is issued.

Current printed material on the display stand includes the following:

1. Stormwater Matters Flyer on Oil and Automotive Fluids
2. Stormwater Matters Flyer on Pet Waste
3. Stormwater Matters Flyer on Dumping
4. Stormwater Matters Flyer on Littering
5. Stormwater Matters Flyer on Fertilizer Use
6. When It Rains It Drains Pamphlet
7. Protect Our Water Supply and Streams bookmark
8. Rain Barrel Pamphlet
9. Water Harvesting with Rain Barrels
10. Rain Garden Edibles

11. Downspout Disconnections Flyer
12. Soapy Sedan Scummy Streams Connection Flyer
13. "Stormwater 101" article - Sim, Rachel (2019, November/December), Stormwater 101. *Stormwater*, 6.
14. "Give Compost a Chance" article – Sim, Rachel (2020, April), Stormwater 101. *Stormwater*, 13-16.
15. Hold the Stormwater, Please! Tips for Stormwater Management on your Property.
16. Stormwater Smart! Preventing Pollution in Your Neighborhood

## Electronic

A specific page on the website will be dedicated for MS4 information. All print materials will be available digitally at the website as well as longer documents, such as the PRP. Events and Public Meetings related to MS4 will be advertised on the website's home page, online calendar, social media and on the Savvy Citizen notification app. The Township's e-Newsletter, which is digitally sent out at least once a month, also will highlight upcoming MS4 Participation Events, as well as meetings and educational materials.

Current Electronic Material is as Follows:

1. All Printed Material
2. Homeowners Guide to Stormwater Pamphlet
3. Rain Friendly Yard Pamphlet
4. Solution to Pollution Pamphlet
5. Rain Barrel Pamphlet
6. Water Harvesting with Rain Barrels
7. Rain Garden Edibles
8. Guide to What You Can and Can't Flush Down the Drain
9. Stream Maintenance Booklet
10. A link to the online "Stormwater Smart" PADEP video.
11. Downspout Disconnections Flyer
12. Soapy Sedan Scummy Streams Connection Flyer
13. "Stormwater 101" article - Sim, Rachel (2019, November/December), Stormwater 101. *Stormwater*, 6.
14. "Give Compost a Chance" article – Sim, Rachel (2020, April), Stormwater 101. *Stormwater*, 13-16.
15. Hold the Stormwater, Please! Tips for Stormwater Management on your Property.
16. Stormwater Smart! Preventing Pollution in Your Neighborhood

## Section 3.2: How the Message will be Distributed

### Print and Electronic Media

An easy way to get the message and education materials out is through our monthly Township newspaper, the Park News. For the last several years, we have incorporated brief pieces up to whole-page features on topics ranging from illicit discharges, overview of the MS4 program, public participation for MS4-related events, and watershed association profiles. We will continue to use the local newspaper as a Township-wide conduit for standing segments on water resources to including the following:

1. When MS4 Events or meetings are being held
2. How to get involved in MS4 Public Participation Events

3. How to report Illicit Discharges
4. News and updates related to broader water quality issues

Specific examples of this plan in action will be accomplished by:

1. Advertising every Township Supervisor Meeting, where the monthly MS4 Report is given and made available for public questions.
2. Ordinance Reviews and amendments to current Stormwater Policy
3. Public Hearings on MS4-related issues, such as the PRP hearing.

However, utilizing the newspaper is just one piece in the larger scheme of distributing the message to our constituents. Our website ([www.southparktwp.com](http://www.southparktwp.com)) is currently a no-cost resource used to convey a considerable amount of information, current event postings, and links to other valuable websites. The “Stormwater Management and MS4” page on our website is home to good information and learning material for visitors to the site. It is also a good method to advertise MS4-related events, such as stream clean ups. The website will be updated monthly, advertising new upcoming events and will add any new education materials as they become available. The Township’s Facebook page can also be utilized to inform the public of MS4-related activities in the community. The Township’s Savvy Citizen notification app that was launched in 2020, has the capability of sending out event notifications and other alerts to any resident that signs up to this no-cost service. Savvy Citizen can provide the Township an additional opportunity to advertise MS4-related events and meetings.

### **Partnerships and Events**

Allegheny County, as a whole, has dozens of different watershed associations – a testament to the fact that there is considerable community awareness of the watershed concept, and local water quality challenges. Such groups have been responsible for numerous waterway restoration projects, distribution of information at various community events, and obtaining grant funding for water quality efforts. South Park Township will continue to strengthen its partnerships with the Peters Creek Watershed Association supporting and promoting events and educational outreach conducted by these organizations.

### ***Inlet Marking***

Marking storm drain inlets within various neighborhoods and developments with the help of local residents can create more awareness with people of all ages, especially children. This is particularly impactful because it creates a visual reminder to everyone that passes by the drains stamped with a catchy phrase like “Only Rain Down the Storm Drain” or “Don’t Pollute – Flows to Waterways.” This can also be effective in encouraging more eyes to keep watch of what is flowing into our drains and waterways, a critical objective of our Illicit Discharge Detection & Elimination program. Additional assistance from residents could help identify such pollutants early and initiate a prompt cleanup response from the Township or other emergency responders.

## **Section 4: Public Involvement in the Planning and Implementation Processes**

There are other opportunities for the public to be involved in water quality improvement efforts, namely during program planning and implementation stages. As noted in the introductory section of this document, permit requirements of our MS4 call for a comprehensive local Stormwater Management Program (SWMP). Although many elements of the SWMP have been in place for several years now,



there are others that have just recently come under consideration. The Township will make public the periodic progress reports of our SWMP on our website and in print at the Township Office. We have initiated a reporting system beginning with progress made in 2016, and intend to document accomplishments at minimum once per year. Not only does this assist in compiling the required Annual Report to the PA DEP, it can serve as an update to our citizens. The SWMP offers a range of topics to discuss, including public involvement, illicit discharge detection, and stormwater facility inspections. We will maintain regular communication with the Peters Creek Watershed Association and the Allegheny County Conservation District representative. This allows us to be legitimate participants in their events, activities, and communications; all of which are important tools to help us reach our residents and businesses.

## **Conclusion**

South Park Township leadership recognizes the significance of the need to improve water quality, in addition to the financial impacts and regulatory obligations that comes with it. Without each resident, business owner, and school-age child being part of this effort, we will likely have to resort to more costly, structural fixes to clean our waterways and treat the drinking water. Because we have about 13,800 people living in this municipality, we are fortunate to have about 13,800 opportunities to incrementally improve our water resources for current and future generations.