Borough of Narberth Open Space Management Plan for Indian Creek
By
Carl Dupoldt

More than four-fifths of the land in the Borough of Narberth (268 out of 320 acres) drains to the East Indian Creek watershed. Indian Creek is part of the Cobbs Creek–Darby Creek watershed, which drains into the Delaware River. The East branch of the Indian Creek headwaters are in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County which completely surrounds the Borough of Narberth. The west branch of Indian Creek arises in Penn Wynne in Lower Merion Township. The two branches flow across City Line Avenue near Friends Central School and Lankenau Medical Center. They combine in Morris Park, Philadelphia near Haverford Avenue before flowing into Cobbs Creek right behind SEPTA's 69th Street Station.

The east branch of Indian Creek is unusual for streams just upstream from Philadelphia in that, for most of its length it has not been placed in underground pipes called culverts or concrete channels. Only short segments of the creek have been "culverted" in the Borough of Narberth. However, through most Narberth it has been channelized (straightened). It is possible to restore sections of the Creek to their natural state thereby regaining more of the original beauty of Indian Creek and its ecosystem roles. "An Open Space Master Plan for Narberth Borough" provides a great deal of information on the creek and the plan at: http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/3353

In Narberth, the main culverted section of the Creek runs beneath the Narberth Park/Playground. Here the creek provides a textbook example of how a culverted creek is prevented from doing its job for the surrounding landscape. The segments of the creek that are not culverted (so-called "day-lit segments" because they are open to the sunlight) are almost all channelized. Water flows quickly through those straightened/channelized sections because they overly straight and receive inflows from all the impervious lands that surround. In both the channelized and the natural sections the Creek its banks maintained lawn right to the edge of the Creek's bank. The lack of dense natural vegetation along its banks and riparian zone allows water to run quickly from the land into the creeks causing it to rise quickly and flood. Maintaining lawn up to the edge of the Creek also allows lawn fertilizer and chemicals to flow unabated into the Creek. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the water table in Narberth is naturally high, only about 1 to 6 feet below the land surface. These situation works in conjunction with the loss of communication between the soils (because they are covered with paving and buildings) and Indian Creek allowing runoff from rain and snow melt to flow very quickly into the Creek causing flooding. Twice in 2004 parts of Montgomery County including Narberth were declared federal disaster areas due to flooding from storms.

The Philadelphia Water Department and our colleagues at the Lower Merion Conservancy monitor Indian Creek's water quality and promote its restoration. The Open Space Master Plan for the Borough of Narberth contains many ideas for how Indian Creek could be restored so that it can resume its natural role of containing stormwater and providing habitat for wildlife, as well as providing recreational opportunities and aesthetic experiences for humans.

More information about Indian Creek and the open space master plan can be found at this link.

http://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/3353

Derron LaBrake of DCVA and Patrick Gardner formerly of the Lower Merion Conservancy collecting Macroinvertebrate samples to monitor water quality in the East Branch of Indian Creek behind the Saunders House on City Line Ave.