

Spanning the Gap

Scenic River Protection Continues New standards among nation's highest

The Delaware is the eastern seaboard's only major free-flowing river. The water quality in the upper reaches is excellent, contributing to outstanding recreational and fishery resources. To preserve and enhance this water quality, the Delaware River Basin Commission (an interstate federal planning and regulatory agency) recently adopted standards that are among the country's highest. Park visitors will continue to enjoy unspoiled river recreational experiences far into the future.

How did all this come about? Over the past ten years, scientists and managers from the National Park Service and the Delaware River Basin Commission have inventoried water quality and adjacent land use to establish baseline conditions, identify and evaluate potential water quality threats, and develop a protection strategy for the river. On December 9, 1992, the Commission adopted new policies and standards. These regulations establish a new *Special Protection Waters* classification which allows for no measurable change in existing water quality. The regulations discourage, but do not ban, direct wastewater discharges to the river, and require that non-discharge and other natural treatment systems be used wherever feasible. Regulations to protect the river from non-point source pollution are being revised and refined and will go to public hearings in mid-1993.

The Scenic Rivers water quality protection strategy is precedent-setting, both for the high level of cooperation achieved among several governmental

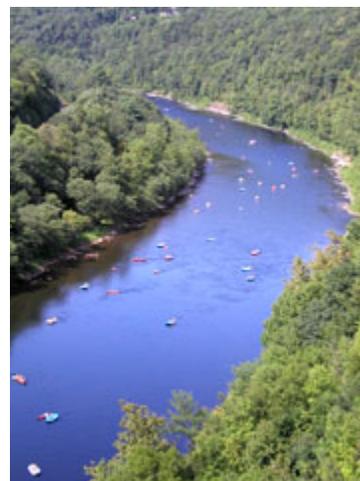


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Canoeing and camping on the Upper Delaware River. (Photo courtesy of James L. Bauer.).



Canoe/tube/kayak traffic on the Upper Delaware River at Hawk's Nest NY on a holiday week-end in summer. (Photo courtesy of James L. Bauer.).

agencies and for the balance struck between the protection of nationally significant waters and an allowance for continued economic growth and development in region.

Update

In December of 1992, the Delaware River Basin Commission (an interstate-federal planning and regulatory agency) adopted new *Special Protection Waters* regulations to protect exceptional basin waters from any measurable change. Water quality standards for currently designated reaches (including the Middle Delaware and Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational Rivers and the eight intervening river miles) are among the country's highest.

The Special Protection Waters strategy for controlling point source pollution (e.g., discharges from wastewater treatment plants) includes discouraging direct wastewater discharges to the river, and requiring that non-discharge and other natural treatment systems be used wherever possible. Some natural treatment options are spray irrigation and artificial wetlands. The regulations also require that all new or expanding wastewater treatment plants in the Special Protection Waters region use advanced treatment and employ safeguards to ensure that they always meet discharge requirements. Control of non-point source pollutants is also crucial to long-range water quality protection. Potential impacts range from storm-water runoff and construction-related erosion and sedimentation to failing on-lot septic systems. New non-point regulations are now being considered, and went to hearings on June 16, 1993 (Newcastle, Delaware) and June 22, 1993 (Matamoras, Pennsylvania). The proposed regulations present a strategy that coordinates existing programs with expanded, watershed-based planning activities.

Delaware Water Gap is presently doing a number of things to protect water quality under the new Special Protection Waters regulations. We have been



Raymondskill Creek. (Photo courtesy of James L. Bauer.).



A paddling lesson at the Water Gap, Kittatinny Point NJ.



The Delaware River from Mt.Minsi.

cooperating with the Commission for 10 years on monitoring water quality in the Scenic Rivers region; this program is now being redesigned and expanded to assist with implementation of the new regulations. The park's computerized Geographic Information System is being used for watershed planning and modeling of tributary watersheds. Park operations are also guided by water quality protection concerns. Planning and design work for new development uses Best Management Practices both for construction and for post-construction storm-water control, and the park is evaluating wetlands treatment systems for wastewater disposal at a proposed new visitor center in New Jersey. The recreation area's agricultural leasing program requires Best Management Practices as part of permit conditions to control agricultural non-point pollution.

The new Special Protection Waters program provides an effective strategy for managing point and non-point source pollutants, and for merging existing programs with new and more comprehensive approaches. It is an innovative program that sets national precedents by balancing the potential for future growth and development with real protection for the area's exceptional water quality.



The Delaware River near Arrow Island as it exits Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area on its way to the Atlantic Ocean. (PA Route 611 is on the right, New Jersey on the left.)