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Mayfly larvae vary in size from one-quarter inch to over an inch long.

What Tiny Animals Can Tell Us About Our Watershed

By Andrea Higgins

On the surface, it's easy to see why people say you can't step in the same stream twice — creek water is always moving, always changing, always different.

But there's more to it than that. An entire ever-changing world, full of life, exists beneath the surface of creeks.

Trout flit and hover and gape. Leaves and debris fall to the surface, swirl, and sink. Algae and other tiny plants sway in the current. Pebbles, sand, and grit pattern the creek bed.

And then there are the small water-dwellers that make their home here, animals and the larval stage of insects: snails, crayfish, clams and worms, larvae of beetles, dragonfly and stonefly, mayfly and caddisfly.

Collectively, these critters are called aquatic "macroinvertebrates" — the 50-cent word for creatures that don't have a backbone and are large enough to see with the naked eye.

Most live attached to submerged rocks, logs, and vegetation. Most are tiny. Yet they play a huge role in the health of every creek, including Mill Creek, which runs through the heart of Mountainhome, Pa.

They are the base of the food chain, a main food source for fish, birds, reptiles, frogs and other amphibians. Just as important, macroinvertebrates shred and break down plant material that grows in or falls into the water — making it available as another food source to larger creatures.

And they tell us a lot about the health of the creek where they live.

Certain kinds of macroinvertebrates can't live in polluted waters. So scientists studying creek health spend a lot of time turning over creek rocks in early spring. If they don't find caddisfly, stonefly or mayfly larva, chances are there's a problem.

People who fish for trout know and study these tiny creatures and try to "match the hatch" when choosing lures that will best attract a fish. There's a reason trout lures are called "flies"!

For an elegant, easy-to-use chart and information on these fascinating creatures, go to www.macroinvertebrates.org. And if you like pattering around in the water, a hands-on, in-creek event is being planned by Pocono Heritage Land Trust to help you uncover, identify and learn about macroinvertebrates. A local naturalist will lead the program, which is in partnership with the Sierra Club and Brodhead Watershed Association. For information, stay tuned to www.phlt.org, or call 570-424-1514.

The Greening Mountainhome project is a Green Communities project funded by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, with support from The William Penn Foundation and the Weiler Family Foundation. Find out more about Brodhead Watershed Association's work to keep Mill Creek clean and Mountainhome green — go to www.brodheadwatershed.org and click "Projects."

124 COVID-19 Relief Small Business Grants Approved

By Becky Bartlet

EASTON - Northampton County Council approved \$1,835,220 in small business grants funded with money from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 during their July 1st meeting. The 124 businesses had applied previously for grants from CARES Act funding and were on an 'overflow' list. All applications were reviewed by a committee that included three members of County Council.

"Many businesses continue to struggle with staffing and the hesitancy of some of their customers to return," says Lamont McClure. "These grants are crucial to our small business community as the economic hurt caused by the pandemic continues."

Recipients include restaurants, hair salons, dance studios and dentists. To qualify for a grant, a business must be located in Northampton County and have fewer than 100 employees. The funds can be used for rent, payroll and other operating expenses. The maximum grant amount is \$15,000 per business. Northampton County has funded 901 of these grants so far and will reopen the application process again soon.

Council approved allocation of \$15 million from the American Rescue Plan for small business assistance grants in June