

To Whom Does the River Belong?

The lines of the old ballad, “Uncle Sam’s River”

pose a challenge as pressing today

as when it was composed:

The river belongs to the Nation,

The levee, they say, to the State;

The Government runs navigation,

The Commonwealth, though, pays the freight.

Now here is the problem that’s heavy —

Please which is the right and the wrong —

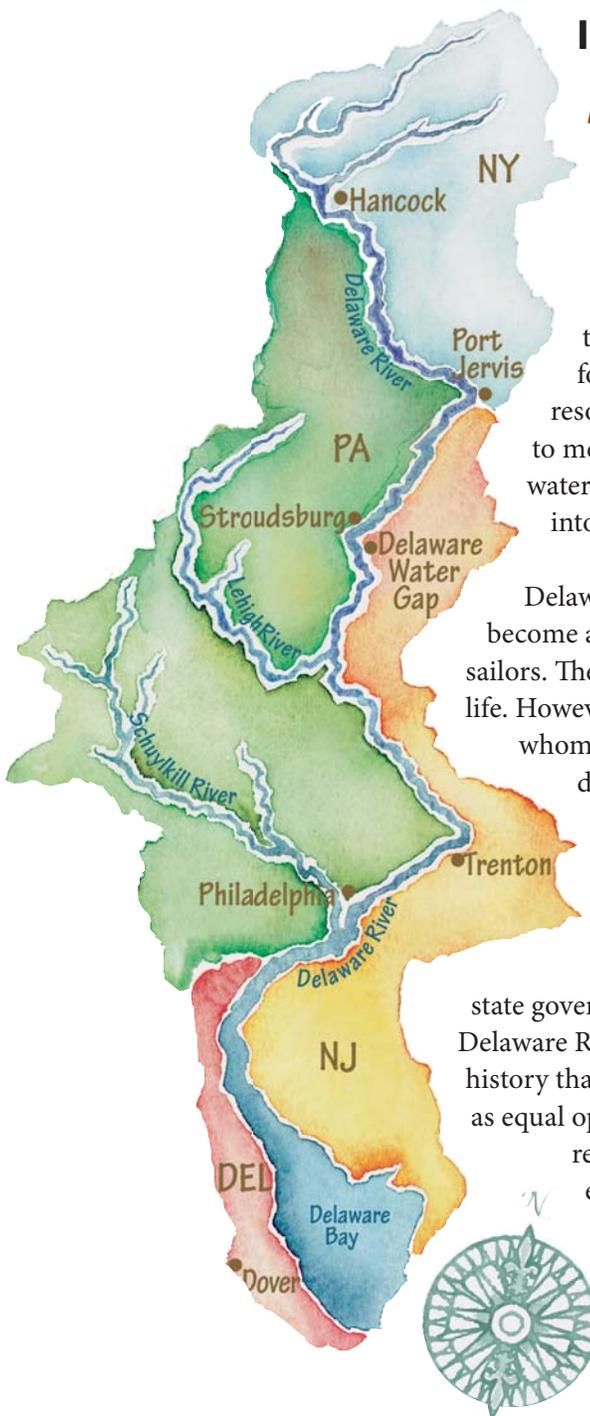
When the water runs over the levee,

To whom does the river belong?



From Douglas Malloch’s

“Uncle Sam’s River”



INTRODUCTION

A Challenge and a Vision

Water flows through every aspect of our lives. We depend on it for transportation, for power, for commerce, for inspiration—indeed, for life itself. Too often this precious resource is taken for granted, or guarded so jealously that its fluid nature is forgotten. Can we meet the challenge of safeguarding our water resources now and for generations to come? This Plan is an attempt to meet that challenge, to take into account the many aspects of our water resource and the many needs it must meet, and to weave them into a unifying vision for the Delaware River Basin.

In 1769, a visiting Englishman commented on the “mess” in the Delaware River off Philadelphia — a mess that by World War II had become a stew of toxins that tarnished ships’ metalwork and sickened sailors. The water lacked enough oxygen to support fish and other aquatic life. However, the words of an old ballad posed a vexing challenge: “To whom does the river belong?” Management efforts were piecemeal, driven by conflicting interests over water diversions, dam construction, and fishing rights. It would take half a century, two Supreme Court decrees, two record droughts and one record flood to bring about a sense of shared ownership of the vital resource that is the Delaware River and its tributaries.

In September 1961, President Kennedy and the four Basin state governors signed the Delaware River Basin Compact, creating the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), marking the first time in U.S. history that the federal government and a group of states joined together as equal operating partners in a river basin planning, development, and regulatory agency. Through coordinated resource management efforts, substantial improvements have been made in the quality of our shared waters. By 1981, for example, the DRBC’s pollution abatement efforts resulted in a 76% reduction in the amount of oxygen-demanding wastes being discharged into the Delaware River estuary, the tidal stretch of the river between Trenton and the Delaware Bay.

Today, the Delaware River supports year-round fish populations, offering excellent small mouth bass, striped bass, shad, and trout fisheries, once again sustained by the water’s oxygen. Marinas are being built on the river banks, along with bike trails and parks. The upper reaches of the river have received national recognition for their scenic and recreational value, including excellent water quality. Because conditions and needs are constantly changing, we must continue to identify new problems and work to maintain and improve conditions through planning and cooperative management. Meeting multiple needs will remain a challenge. But we have come a long way towards recognizing common concerns for our common resource. This Plan is intended to guide our efforts.

Introduction

**We let a river shower
its banks with a spirit
that invades the people
living there, and we
protect that river,
knowing that without
its blessings the people
have no source of soul.**

Thomas Moore
*The Re-Enchantment of
Everyday Life*

The Challenge

On September 29, 1999, the Governors of the four Delaware River Basin states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania) signed a resolution challenging the Basin community to develop a unifying vision: a comprehensive Water Resources Plan for the Delaware River Basin.

Water resources planning and management cut across traditional political and programmatic boundaries. Characteristics of the Delaware River Basin that present challenges to the development and implementation of a unified water resource plan are as follows:

Physical Attributes: The river and its tributaries drain 13,539 square miles of varied landscape with distinct topography, soils, hydrology, natural habitat, development patterns, and economic interests.

- ☛ **This challenges the development of a Plan to address a variety of water resource issues through scale-appropriate resolution and implementation actions. Solutions need to be appropriate for local conditions as well as regional needs.**

Political Fragmentation: The Delaware River is the political divide between New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. The land within these four states is further subdivided into 42 counties, and 838 cities, towns, boroughs and townships. The multiplicity of governmental units is further compounded by a division of

REASONS FOR DEVELOPING A BASIN PLAN

- To establish a unifying vision for water resources management in the Basin
- To identify a set of objectives and strategies for achieving goals and desired results
- To better coordinate ongoing efforts to preserve, protect, and enhance the water resources of the Basin and the ecological, social and economic benefits they provide
- To identify additional needs for more effective water resources management
- To articulate roles and responsibilities
- To recognize and account for all water resource uses in decision-making
- To identify and consider the relationship between land use and water resources in decision-making
- To invite all levels of stakeholders into the process of water resources management
- To continue the successes and progress of the last 40 years through the next 30 years

responsibility for water resource-related programs at the federal and state levels and a wide array of private organizations and individuals involved in water resource use, distribution, treatment and protection.

- **Institutionalizing coordination and cooperation among these numerous entities may be the greatest challenge.**

Multiple Pressures on the Resource: In all, nearly 15 million people, or roughly 5% of the U.S. population, rely on the ground and surface water resources of the Basin. New York City relies on the Delaware system for roughly half of its water supply and a lesser amount is exported for use in areas of New Jersey outside the Basin. That water supply source is a basin that covers only four tenths of a percent of the continental U.S. and includes some of the nation's most quickly developing counties. Three quarters of the non-tidal river — about 150 miles — is included in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

- **Sustaining current uses, planning for future populations and economies, and protecting the landscapes critical for water resources depends on knowledge and the ability to educate current and succeeding generations to be resource stewards.**

The Unifying Vision: In response to the Governors' challenge, the DRBC convened the Watershed Advisory Council. Composed of people representing a wide range of stakeholders, this group has forged a unifying vision for the Basin, a goal-based plan to guide policy and action to achieve the following results:

- *Supply* — Managing both the quantity and quality of the Basin's waters for sustainable use
- *Waterways* — Managing the system of waterway corridors to reduce flood losses, improve recreational experiences, and to protect, conserve and restore riparian and aquatic ecosystems
- *Land Management* — Integrating water resource management considerations into land use planning and growth management while recognizing the social and economic needs of communities
- *Cooperation* — Strengthening partnerships for the management of water resources among all levels of government, the private sector, and individuals sharing an interest in sustainable water resources management
- *Stewardship* — Providing opportunities to enhance appreciation and commitment to the protection, improvement and restoration of the Basin's water resources

