



Opequon Creek Project Team

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STATE OF THE OPEQUON WATERSHED 2007

PREFACE:

This report was prepared in February 2008 by the Opequon Creek Project Team (OCPT). It is intended to inform the residents of Berkeley and Jefferson Counties on the state of the Opequon Creek and its watershed, which is all the land that drains toward the Opequon Creek and the streams that flow into it.

The report is divided into four parts beginning with an Introduction to the Opequon Watershed, followed by sections on the Health of Watershed and Restoration Efforts. The last part of the report outlines what everyone can do to help clean up our watershed.

INTRODUCTION:

The Opequon Creek is the largest body of water in Berkeley County with the exception of the Potomac River along the County's northern border. The Opequon Creek begins near the town of Opequon in Frederick County, Virginia, and flows east and then north, forming the county line between Berkeley and Jefferson in the south, then continuing through the Martinsburg area before emptying into the Potomac River. The Opequon is used by many county residents for recreational fishing and small boating. Its waters are also used by farmers to provide for their livestock. The creek is home to a number of species of fish, birds and other wildlife living along its banks.

The Opequon watershed covers 202 square miles and is 34.1 miles long in West Virginia. In Virginia, the watershed covers 142.06 square miles and is 30.9 miles long. The major tributaries of the Opequon in West Virginia are Mill Creek, Tuscarora Creek, Dry Run, Turkey Run, Middle Creek, Hopewell Run, Hoke Run, and Buzzard Run.

HEALTH OF THE WATERSHED:

The overall health of the Opequon is poor. The Opequon Creek and 13 of its tributaries in WV are rated as "impaired" by the WVDEP. An "impaired" rating means that the water quality does not meet the required clean water standards due to excessive amounts of certain pollutants. These pollutants come from point sources (discharge pipes and waste water treatment plants) and non-point sources (runoffs from

fields, storm water drains, failing septic systems and many other places). These contaminants include nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorous and biological pollutants such as fecal coliform. Ongoing monitoring at a number of sites along the Opequon and many of its tributaries show that excessive levels of these pollutants remain.

The sources of these pollutants are varied. The Opequon and some of its tributaries receive effluent from a number of both public and private permitted waste water treatment plants. 35% of the land in the WV watershed is for agriculture use which contributes to the leaching of excess fertilizer and manure into the water. Rapid urban residential and business construction has contributed to a significant increase in storm water runoff from roofs and paved surfaces. Adding to the problem is the amount of fractured limestone which allows surface pollutants to infiltrate into underground water and into our wells, creeks and runs.

RESTORATION EFFORTS:

The pollution of the Opequon watershed has been decades in the making. It will take many years to reverse course and issue a clean bill of health to our watershed. We have made a start and are beginning to see progress.

Many agricultural producers have implemented practices in their operations that benefit water quality. Berkeley County is currently undertaking a major expansion of its public sewer system, building a new waste water treatment plant and making improvements to existing plants. The Opequon Creek Project Team was formed in 2005 and now serves as a focal point for local residents to learn more about and participate in the restoration of the watershed.

More good news is that the Opequon watershed is getting priority one official attention. The WVDEP has been working for many years now to determine where the problems are and what needs to be done. Some of the pollution sources are obvious but many are not. If we don't know exactly where the problems are then solving them is impossible.

WVDEP has recently completed a detailed report on the maximum levels of pollutants the watershed can sustain and still meet all the standards of the Clean Water Act. This report will be the foundation on which many future restoration projects are based. It is the first requirement in order for federal funds to be obtained to help fix the non-point problems.

WVDEP is now completing the plan to address the pollution sources in Mill Creek. Every foot of Mill Creek was walked by OCPT volunteers to document the condition of the creek. Specific projects will be proposed for funding. Once Mill Creek is well underway, OCPT and WVDEP will continue to assess other tributaries in the watershed and monitor the results of completed projects. It will take time but it will be done.

WHAT WE CAN ALL DO TO HELP RESTORE THE WATERSHED:

Everyone can help bring the Opequon watershed back to health. While WVDEP, the West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA) and Division of Natural Resources (DNR) are all valued resources, it's up to the people of Berkeley and Jefferson Counties to be responsible for managing our watershed for the enjoyment of all of us.

Here are some basics that everyone can do to protect and help restore the creek:

1. Never throw trash or dump anything into the water.
2. Don't leave trash in the flood plain along the creek.
3. Report trash dumping or pollution sources to DEP for action.
4. Maintain your septic system with regular inspection and pumping.
5. Let your local commissioners and state legislators know that you are concerned about the state of the Opequon watershed.
6. Get involved with a local volunteer watershed group like the Opequon Creek Project Team and join in helping with projects such as planting tree buffers, cleanups and water monitoring.

To learn more about what you can do and what resources are available to help you, check out the following websites:

www.opequoncreek.org
www.wvca.us

www.wvdep.org
www.wvdnr.gov