

You Can Name a Stream

This brochure is an introduction to stream naming for individuals, schools, environmental groups and community associations. This brochure was developed by the [Chester-Ridley-Crum Watersheds Association \(CRC\)](#) and is reproduced with their permission.

"Does it matter if a stream, especially a small one, is unnamed? It still flows, delivers drinking water, and provides recreational opportunities. Why should it be named?"

The short answer is: When small streams are unnamed, they are often not included on municipal maps. And when streams are unnamed and unmapped, they will go unprotected.

With 56,000 of Pennsylvania's 64,000 streams unnamed, there's work to be done. This is an invitation for you to consider a stream-naming project in your community.

If you have an interest in the environment or in building community spirit, stream naming can be a rewarding and enjoyable activity. Whether a teacher, scout leader or member of a community service group, you can contribute. Consider making stream naming the centerpiece of a community pride day, a historical celebration, a school event, or a scout merit badge project.

The procedure for naming streams has changed little since 1890, when the federal government standardized the process. Once a name has been accepted and appears on municipal maps, it becomes an essential tool to guide municipalities in zoning, planning, and land use decisions.

Facts you should know:

- Most of Pennsylvania's 64,000 streams are unnamed.
- The smaller streams in a river system account for the largest number of stream miles.
- The health of the smaller streams is essential to the health of the creeks and rivers.
- Some of the smaller streams are not on the maps of the local planners and decision makers.
- Decisions affecting land use and development around the streams are made by your local officials.
- Unnamed streams can be named.

For the forms and guidelines to officially name a stream, contact:

Executive Secretary
U.S. Board on Geographic Names
523 National Center
Reston, VA 20192
phone: 703-648-4544

website: <http://mapping.usgs.gov/www/gnis>

How to find unnamed streams

Check these maps:

- US Geological Survey topographic maps: These may be purchased either from a local map dealer or from the US Geological Survey. To find addresses of map dealers in Pennsylvania, use the following link:
http://mapping.usgs.gov/esic/map_dealers/pa.html
To order directly from the USGS, write to:
USGS Information Services
Box 25286, Denver, CO 80225
http://mapping.usgs.gov/esic/to_order.html
- Historical maps: Check with your municipality (township, borough, city) and/or county. Check with appropriate local historical societies.
- Federal Emergency Management Maps: Your municipal office should have the FEMA maps for your municipality. You can order FEMA Flood Maps for a small fee from:
Map Service Center
P.O. Box 1038
Jessup, MD 20794-1038
Phone: 1.800.358.9616
<http://www.fema.gov/nfip/readmap.htm>
- Check the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's stream directory. The stream directory is a numerical system for locating all the streams in Pennsylvania. The directory has each stream's number and assigned name, if there is one. Copies of the stream directory may be ordered by calling the DEP's Division of Water Use Planning at 717.772.4048.
- Check the US Geological Survey's Geographic Names Information System (GNIS). Each named stream is listed in GNIS regardless of whether size or scale dictates its inclusion on a new map. The link for the USGS's GNIS is:
<http://geonames.usgs.gov/gnisform.html>.

Inform/Involve your Municipality

You may choose to work with your municipal government at any time during the stream naming process. It is helpful to ask each municipality that the stream passes through to adopt a resolution recommending the name prior to your making application to the US Board on Geographic Names. If you choose not to go to your municipality, it will be contacted for its opinion as part of the approval process.

Follow these Guidelines

- **DO** consider names already in common usage for the stream.
- **DO** use imaginative, distinctive names, suggested by local history, folklore, topography, natural life.
- **DO** use simple names (it's best to limit your name to two words—including "Creek," "Run," etc).
- **DON'T** name a stream to honor a living or a recently deceased person.
- **DON'T** choose a name if it is already used for a stream in your county or in a nearby adjacent county.

Let your research guide your choice of names

Each stream may have one or several distinguishing features of historical, physical, or biological nature that will help suggest a name. Your research will also tell you whether the primary and smaller streams in your area are called branches, creeks, or runs.

Submitting your proposed names.

Fill out the form from the US Board on Geographic Names and include your municipal resolution. Send a copy of the section(s) of the US Geological Survey maps that show the stream(s). A map based on the USGS maps is acceptable. Clearly indicate the stream receiving the new name and write the proposed name on the map. Send the completed application form, map(s), and municipal resolution to the US Board on Geographic Names for review and final decision. (US Board review may be expedited if the request includes evidence of general local support, such as letters from interested agencies, petitions from local residents, newspaper articles, or letters to the editor favoring the name.)

Proposed names go through an approval process

After the US Board on Geographic Names reviews your name application, it will place your proposed name(s) on its docket. The Board will also forward a copy of your application to the state geographic names authority, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, for its recommendation. The PHMC will review the name(s) with the representatives of five state agencies constituting its Advisory Committee on Geographic Names. After this review, the PHMC will send its recommendation(s) to the US Board on Geographic Names for final consideration. If approved by the Board, the name will become official.

What happens to an approved name?

You will receive a notice of approval. The new stream name will now be considered official for federal, state, and local use. Names of major streams will be placed on the USGS maps when they are reprinted; because of the maps' scale and space constraints, not all of the smaller streams can be named on these maps. However, you should follow through with your municipality and your county planning department to ensure that the new names do appear on their local maps. As GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping becomes available for your county, the new names should be included on the appropriate GIS maps.

How two townships are naming their streams

Township One was approached by a local historical society member to name a stream on his property. The Township then requested that the society research and name all local unnamed streams. The society subsequently presented to the township council its research, maps, and choice of names which then were formally endorsed by the council.

Township Two was approached by a member of the local watershed association who had already researched the Township's unnamed streams. The Township decided to involve its residents in the naming process. A display of the maps and photographs of the streams was featured at the Township's Take Pride Day at which time citizens were invited to submit names for the streams. Those residents not attending the Take Pride Day were informed of the stream-naming project by an informational article in the Township's newsletter which invited them to send their suggestions to the Township office. The Township then appointed

a stream-naming committee, with representatives from each ward. The naming committee included a member from the Township's Environmental and Historical Committees and a member of the local watershed association. The stream names chosen by the naming committee were approved by a resolution of the Township's commissioners