



# ENVIRONMENTAL *News*

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A Semi-Annual Publication of the Environmental Advisory Board

## **NATURE WALK** *Scheduled at Deep Creek Nature*

The Environmental Advisory Board (EAB) is having a special meeting at Deep Creek Nature Center on Sep 16th at 6:30 pm. We will meet at the picnic table in the park. All residents are welcome to this special meeting. We will be showcasing the park's unique natural features to those who participate in a nature walk. We may observe wildlife along the way and learn about the cool plants growing there. The EAB has been coordinating volunteers and cooperating with the Township maintenance department to have a walking trail that meanders through the deciduous and coniferous forests, naturalized meadows, and the borders of the wetlands. After the walk we will convene our regular meeting at the picnic table. This will be a good time for everyone to participate and to see some of what we do.

The EAB is an all volunteer group of residents that reports to the Board of Supervisors. The mission of the EAB is to identify various environmental concerns impacting New Hanover Township, which include, but are not limited to water, air, land, noise and light pollution. Based on community needs and input, the EAB evaluates waste disposal and recycling programs, promotes the preservation of natural resources and educates the community regarding environmental matters. We also review all development plans and provide input to the Board of Supervisors regarding potential negative environmental impacts. By way of public education, the EAB publishes a semiannual newsletter which is mailed with The Harbinger. Additionally, the EAB participates in the annual Fall Frolic at the Community Park.

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## **GLOBAL** *Warming?*



The Earth is about one degree warmer than in was 100 years ago. That's really the extent of the sound data on global warming.

As for all the predictions about how much warmer it will get, how high the sea level will rise, etc. and so forth, those are merely speculation. Furthermore, since we know that the Earth has been warmer and cooler in the past long before humans were numerous enough to have any effect, we cannot even say for sure that the present rise in temperature is a result on man-made activity. It might seem so. There is certainly a "consensus" of knowledgeable people that say it is so. Nevertheless, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere remains minuscule, about 380 parts per million. Actually, the largest factor in creating the greenhouse effect is water vapor.

Cleaning-up pollution, planting trees, burning less fossil fuels are worthy objectives whether the Earth is getting warmer or not. However, dire predictions and hasty responses may only serve to cloud the real issue—sustainability. As the Earth's human population grows and people in third world countries seek a modern standard of living, the demand on the Earth's resources will continue grow. The ensuing stress on our environment will become even more problematic.

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## **FLUORESCENTS** *and Mercury*

In the last issue of ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS there was an article on the advantages of switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs (commonly referred to as CFLs) for general household lighting needs. In recent years many millions of these bulbs have been purchased by consumers (Home Depot sold 75 million CFLs in 2007). Because fluorescents contain a small amount of mercury, the toxic effects of which are well documented, it is imperative that they be disposed of properly. While these bulbs last for a very long time, at some point they will burn out. It has now become very convenient to recycle CFLs so that the mercury doesn't wind up in the waste stream, and eventually our waterways and drinking water. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has been proactive both in informing the public of the potential hazards of improper disposal and attempting to make recycling of CFLs easier. There are now a number of conveniently located major retailers that will accept CFLs for recycling including Home Depot, True Value and Ikea. For additional information visit [www.depweb.state.pa.us](http://www.depweb.state.pa.us), keyword: Household Hazardous Waste.



## THE Freedom Lawn

According to a recent New Yorker article there are presently an astonishing 50,000 square miles of lawn in the United States and that figure is growing at the rate of 600 square miles a year! Although often said to be "nonproductive," the spread of turf allows an annual harvest of forty billion dollars for a complex of seed and chemical industries.

The lawn is so much a part of the American landscape that it's hard to see that it is a twentieth century invention. Of the dozen main grasses to be found in grass seed, none are native to America: among the most common, Kentucky blue grass comes from Europe and Bermuda grass from Africa. In earlier times the front yard of native grasses was kept under control by grazing animals like sheep, or locally, it would be scythed a few times in the summer.

But with the invention of the lawn mower and the spread of suburbs the fact that everyone could keep a lawn became everyone ought to keep a lawn to everyone must keep a lawn. In fact, Abraham Levitt, creator of Levittown, required by covenant that all home owners mow their lawns once a week between April 15 and November 15. At the same time a group called the Lawn Institute declared, "Some feel that a person who keeps his lawn perfectly clipped is a person who can be trusted." And soon innumerable "weed laws" became as ubiquitous as the weeds.

With the invention of herbicides in the 1940s more control became possible. The New Yorker article goes on to note:

"One of the most popular herbicides was---and continues to be---2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, or 2,4,D, as it is commonly known, a major ingredient in Agent Orange. Regrettably, 2,4,D killed not only dandelions but also plants that were beneficial to lawns, like nitrogen fixing clover. To cover up this loss, any plant



that the chemical eradicated was redefined as an enemy. 'Once considered the ultimate in fine turf, a clover lawn is looked upon today by most authorities as not much better than a weed patch.' is how one guidebook explained the change."

Of course, these chemically produced lawns were now more susceptible to a variety of pests, so the answer was to apply more chemicals.

"...the first pesticide popularly spread on lawns was lead arsenate, which tended to leave behind both lead and arsenic contamination. Next in line was DDT and chlorodane. Once they were shown to be toxic, pesticides like diazinon and chlorpyrifos---both of which affect the nervous system--- took their place. [These] too were eventually revealed to be hazardous. The insecticide carbaryl, which is marketed under the trade name Sevin, is still broadly applied to lawns. A likely human carcinogen, it has been shown to cause developmental damage in lab animals, and is highly toxic to among many other organisms---tadpoles, salamanders, and honeybees."

Additionally, often mixed in with the "turf building" pellets or brew will be a chemical fertilizer, a good part of which ultimately ends up in streams and waterways where it creates an algae bloom.

Recently a variety of anti-lawn movements have advocated everything from edible plantings to moss lawns, wild flower meadows, and finally "wild lawns" (just don't mow it and leave anything grow).

A more sensible solution (and one this author uses) is the concept of the Freedom Lawn. A freedom lawn is started in the traditional way, but then its hands (and chemicals) off. Grass seed and any thing else that happens to seed itself is allowed to take root. After that it is just mowed and never watered. If brown spots appear they will soon be filled in with what may be called weeds or "low growing broad-leaved plants." A little shift in thinking and dandelions can be a lovely little plant, a sunny flower, an edible leaf, a delightful seed puff ball. Harmless little things; why pay good money for someone to come with a chemical truck to spray poison on them? The best payoff of a freedom lawn is the lack of required care: no watering, no expensive chemicals, no poisoning of the environment. It's a win, win, win.

## Swamp Creek Declared a **MOST IMPORTANT AND THREATENED WATERSHED**

The Montgomery County Planning Commission has recently completed a draft Natural Areas Inventory that defines the thirteen most important and threatened landscapes in the County. Swamp Creek was included as one of nine landscapes that comprise the greater Perkiomen Creek watershed. In addition to large amounts of forest cover, these areas include unique geologic areas, important bird breeding areas, wetlands, floodplains and other important features that help mitigate stormwater impacts.

The pace of development throughout the County as well as a general lack of awareness about how our natural areas support our lives has

lead to many of these areas being lost forever or seriously altered. The County's Natural Areas Inventory is provided to help communities determine their natural resource protection strategies.

Here in New Hanover Township, the Board of Supervisors and Township administration, as well as the Planning Commission, the Open Space Committee, the Parks and Recreation Committee, the Environmental Advisory Board and others are working together to help protect the natural resources of our community. You too can help by volunteering with one of these groups.

