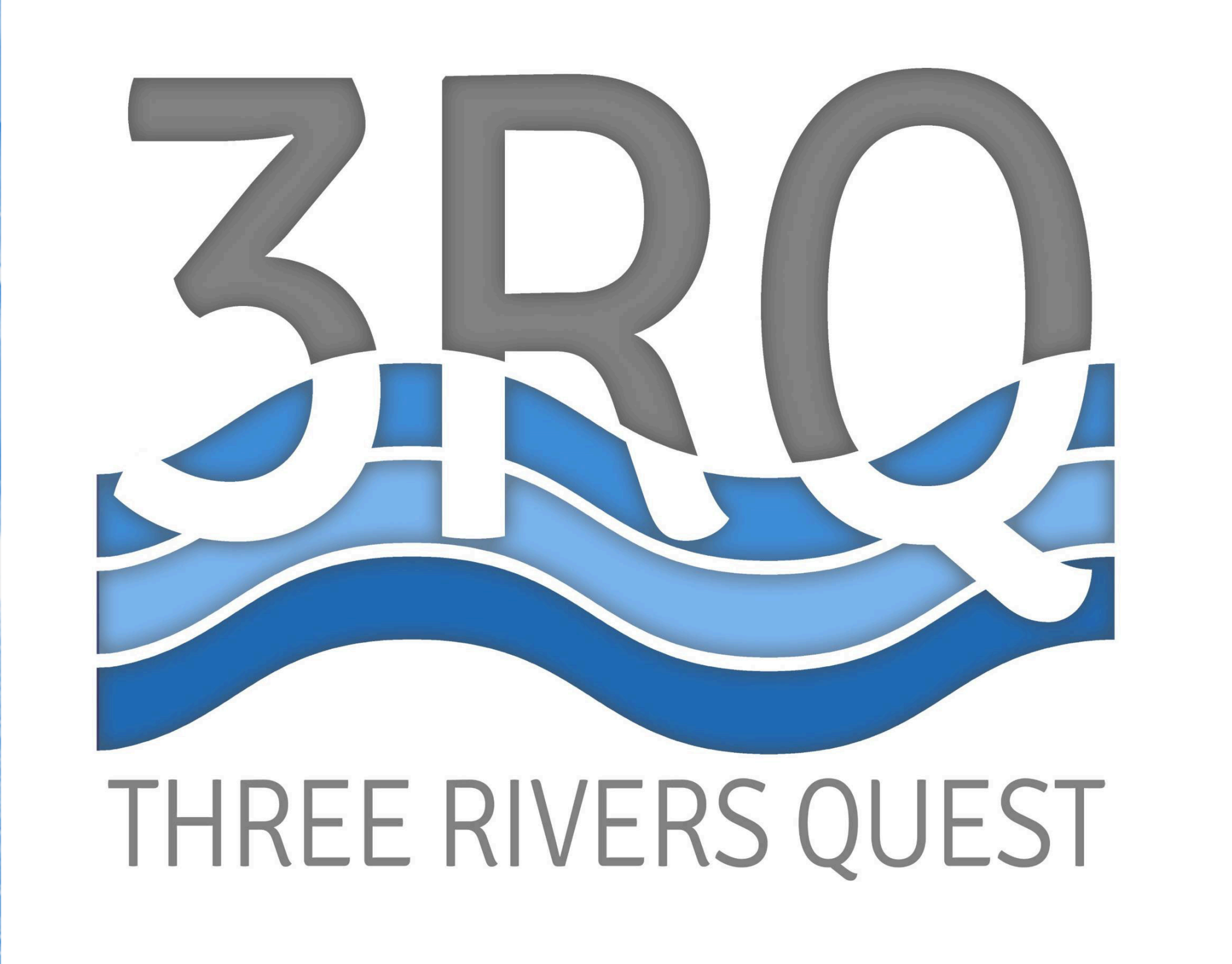


Common Waters



2024: Year in Review

Common Waters Year 1

3RQ Expands its Impact with Common Waters

Three Rivers QUEST (3RQ) brings together academic researchers, citizen scientists, and conservation groups to collect, analyze, and monitor important water quality data within the rivers and headwaters that drain into the Ohio River. **Common Waters** was developed in 2024 as a new initiative of the 3RQ program to accomplish greater collaboration between WVU students and real-world environmental research. Through the program, students have the opportunity to connect with local watershed groups to complete STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) projects, benefitting both the students and the communities they serve.



Common Waters Year 1

Leveraging Support

Watershed groups often have specific problems that need to be solved through research or technical assistance, but don't have the personnel or expertise to tackle them. At the same time, students often complete research projects as course or degree requirements with little to no real-world impact. While students apply a significant amount of time toward these projects, the result of their research often doesn't leave the classroom.

Common Waters aims to connect WVU students in STEAM programs to watershed groups, resulting in a win-win for both sides. The program offers funding for student supplies and travel, serves as a connector and liaison, and creates opportunities for students to share their work with the community.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

- Educated over **95 WVU undergraduate students** about watershed groups and opportunities to engage in their work.
- Supported a **WVU Purpose2Action** student, who worked to launch the Common Waters initiative and engage additional students.



- Led 30 student volunteers to remove **over a half-ton of trash** from the Monongahela River and its banks.
- Fostered projects with students across **diverse backgrounds**, including Environmental Soil and Water Science, Environmental Engineering, Fine Arts, and Political Science.



STUDENT PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Explore these student project outputs at commonwaters.wvu.edu/projects.

Stained Waterways Art Exhibit

WVU graduate Fine Arts students Asha Cabaca and Lindsay McCarty created an art installation entitled *Stained Waterways* as their final project in their Art and Environment course. The display visualized the effect of acid mine drainage on the local river systems in Morgantown. By dyeing and saturating found white fabric with silt and sediment from the Monongahela River and Robinson Run, the students created a visual representation of the impact these pollutants have on the natural ecosystem.



BRWA 2023 Highlights Outreach Posters

Haley Paul, a WVU undergraduate student majoring in Political Science and International Studies, developed two outreach posters for the Buckhannon River Watershed Association (BRWA) utilizing information from the organization's 2023 Newsletter. She also printed and hung the posters at WVU to educate students on acid mine drainage and spread awareness of BRWA's work.

Chartiers Creek Erosion Study StoryMap

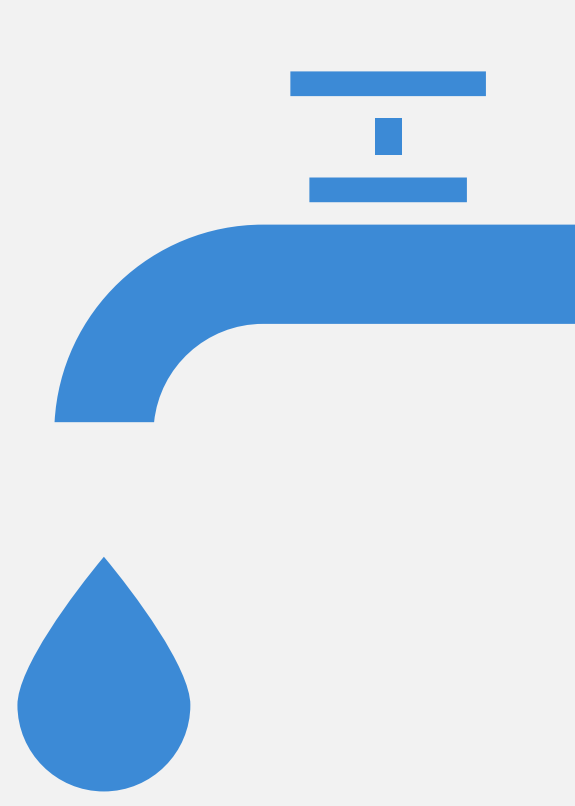
WVU undergraduate student Sarah Nelson developed an interactive StoryMap to engage the public in an erosion project with the Upper Chartiers Creek Watershed Association (UCCWA). The study quantified the erosion of a stream bank along a public park and ball field. The watershed association hopes the project will bring awareness and help convince funders to invest in the restoration of the stream bank. Sarah will co-present the StoryMap with UCCWA during 3RQ's January Roundtable event.



Ohio River Targeted Monitoring StoryMap

Hannah Bentley, a WVU undergraduate student majoring in Environmental Soil and Water Science, synthesized findings from a collaborative research project of high public interest. The resultant StoryMap includes information from water sampling, fish surveys, and plastic pellet monitoring surrounding the region's first ethylene cracker plant. This project was done in collaboration with Three Rivers Waterkeeper, Mountain Watershed Association, and several universities.

LOOKING AHEAD



Collaboration with MDS 489

In the Spring of 2025, Common Waters will be working with students enrolled in the Multidisciplinary Studies capstone course (MDS 489). Students will be partnered with watershed groups, providing them with the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world challenges. The course will allow students to participate in traditional scientific research projects, as well as explore more creative and/or technical projects. The goal of this collaboration is to help students foster a deeper understanding of environmental issues while being involved with their local ecosystems and communities within the watershed. Student projects will be presented at a symposium at the end of the semester as a chance to share their work with community partners and the university.

New Technology for Student Research

Common Waters supports students' research, including research topics that require some technical assistance. Common Waters will be purchasing an IDEXX for students to use, which will support research topics relating to fecal coliform and *E. coli* in rivers and streams.

Engaging with the Community

Common Waters currently has its own website which can be found at commonwaters.wvu.edu. This website displays resources for watershed groups to be involved with Common Waters, lists opportunities for students, and exhibits student projects. Common Waters will be featured in [River Runs Through This](#), the monthly newsletter sent to partners and community members within the watershed. Additionally, WVWRI will be utilizing [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to engage with clubs and organizations within the WVU community. In doing so, WVWRI hopes to garner interest in future projects from potential participants in the Common Waters.

To ensure the success of Common Waters, the first year of the program was focused on planning and relationship-building with watershed groups and students. One university course will participate in the first semester of Common Waters projects as an assessment of student capacity to meet the needs of watershed groups. The goal for the future of Common Waters is to increase the number of students/classes engaged in the program to assist more watershed groups and offer more opportunities for students' course work to have real-world impacts.