

Common Waters

2025: Year in Review



Allegheny
Monongahela
Ohio

 **WEST VIRGINIA**
WATER RESEARCH INSTITUTE 

Common Waters

Year 2



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.



2025 Events



Common Waters Symposium

Two symposiums, one in the spring semester and one in the fall semester, were held for Common Waters students to present their projects. 15 students were able to participate and presented their work to invitees, which included professors, WVU staff and students, and local non-profit environmental organizations.



Sampling with WVU Courses

In April, Common Waters led two Freshwater Ecology lab sections at the Point Marion Boat Launch, along the Monongahela River. Approximately 60 students participated across the two lab days, each gaining hands-on experience collecting water samples and working with water quality field data. Students gained a deeper understanding of how water quality parameters compare between acid mine drainage contaminated and non-contaminated waters and learned how they can be involved in protecting our water resources.



2025 Mon River Sweep

In collaboration with Ascend WV, we hosted the second annual Mon River Sweep along the Caperton Rail Trail and engaged approximately 70 volunteers from WVU, partner organizations, and the Morgantown community. Volunteers walked the rail trail for five hours and removed over 6,000 pounds of trash from the Monongahela River and its banks—over five times the amount collected in 2024. Volunteers also collected trash via kayak with assistance from Three Rivers Waterkeeper's patrol boat.



2025 Projects

View all 14 of the 2025 student projects at
<https://commonwaters.wvu.edu/projects/2025>

AMD Mycoremediation

Jay Clark, a senior majoring in Wildlife and Fisheries Resources, participated in research investigating the potential use of *Pleurotus ostreatus* to improve water quality in waterways impacted by acid mine drainage (AMD). Partnering with Buckhannon River Watershed Association, Jay examined several substrates and simulated AMD to compare the effectiveness of *Pleurotus ostreatus* in sequestering metals from AMD and its effect on pH and conductivity levels.



Coliforms in the West Fork

Alissa Scott and Alyssa Sheets partnered with Guardians of the West Fork to assess nutrients and fecal coliform levels within the West Fork watershed. During the semester, they collected field data consisting of water quality parameters as well as samples for nitrate, phosphorus, and fecal coliform analysis. This data will help Guardians of the West Fork identify hot spots for nutrient and coliform pollution and better inform the community about current water quality issues within the West Fork and its tributaries. This study will continue next semester to better characterize water quality issues in the West Fork watershed.



Catfish Creek StoryMap

Kara Meadows, an Environmental, Soil and Water Sciences major, partnered with the Washington County Watershed Alliance to help develop next-generation creek crossing signs. This project focused on creating a StoryMap with information about Catfish Creek, complete with drone video, photos, and maps. This StoryMap is accessible through QR codes displayed on creek crossing signs installed along Catfish Creek. The StoryMap provides information on Indigenous history, commercial history, geographic and geological context, and environmental restoration efforts related to Catfish Creek. See StoryMap here: <https://arcg.is/0Lqu4O2>



Contextualization of the Mon River

The Spring 2025 Multi-Disciplinary Studies capstone course (MDS-489) participated in a project with the Headwaters to the Ohio Network. This project integrated past and present uses of the Monongahela River to create a more comprehensive understanding of the river. Students delved into the history of the Monongahela and the towns it flows through, while also gathering fecal coliform and E. coli data at various recreational areas along the river. Although these students come from various disciplines, they worked together to contextualize the Monongahela River, providing a foundation for this project to continue growing from.

Other highlights

Routine Bacteriological Sampling

This year, Common Waters purchased IDEXX equipment to support bacteriological research, specifically for coliforms. This has made it possible to routinely monitor for total coliforms and E.coli at 8 different sites in and around the greater Morgantown area during the water recreation season (May-October). All results are posted on SwimGuide.org so the community can be aware of potential water hazards and make informed decisions about when to participate in water-related activities.

Providing connections through Common Waters

In 2025, Common Waters coordinated 14 projects for 16 WVU students across seven departments, including both research and outreach-type projects. Six watershed organizations from three states partnered with Common Waters and were able to utilize the project deliverables to further their mission. Several students have made meaningful connections with the organization they worked with, which provided them opportunities for student jobs and extended research experience to satisfy academic requirements.

Future Plans for Common Waters

The second year of Common Waters focused on expanding the program's reach across various WVU departments, courses, and clubs to diversify project topics. Next year, Common Waters will continue to grow and plans to work more closely with students in the humanities, particularly in art and history. Additionally, Common Waters aims to partner with new watershed organizations and potentially other environmental nonprofit organizations.

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