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The Allegheny Alligator is Pennsylvania's Official State Amphibian!

By Bella Petitta, Allegheny College Student

On Tuesday, April 16, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted 191-6 on a bill that would name the eastern hellbender the first official Pennsylvania state amphibian. The bill was passed through the state Senate in February 2019 (with only one vote against), and was signed into law by Governor Tom Wolf on Tuesday, April 23.

High school students from the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Student Leadership Council, drafted and lobbied for this bill starting in 2016. These hellbender defenders made a real difference!

This designation isn't just for snooty loving Creekers; it is a reminder of the importance of keeping our waterways free of pollutants. The eastern hellbender is the largest amphibian in North America and is listed as "near threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. They need water free of pollution, high in oxygen, and free of sediment that can fill the space they need under large rocks.

The hellbender and its habitat are currently protected in Pennsylvania through the requirement of a scientific collector's permit to even search for them (this process can disturb and harass the hellbenders as well as destroy their habitat). It is illegal to possess a hellbender. This official designation is a step toward awareness and protection of the eastern hellbender and Pennsylvania streams' water quality.



Above: Eastern hellbender from French Creek observed by students during Creek Camp in 2018 under direction of a herpetologist.

What would the Lorax do?

Install low-flow faucets for your house to conserve water! It not only saves freshwater ecosystems but saves money too!
-Colby, East Allegheny

Create a compost bin to reduce waste and make fertilizer from compost! - Lara, Riverview High School

Push for legislation promoting conservation (bottom up pressure)—Cheryl, North Hills High School

Use metal straws rather than plastic, and use less.
- Joanna, Fort LeBoeuf Middle School

Plant and conserve Riparian areas and Buffer Zones—Ethan, Shady Side Academy

Use less water. Take shorter showers—Kylie, Maplewood Jr/Sr High School

Carpool to events to reduce carbon emissions—Haley, Cochran Jr/Sr High School

Plant a flower garden to increase available habitat for pollinators (bees)
-Grace, Conneaut Lake Middle School



Student Research Symposium at Allegheny College

By Gretchen Barbera, Allegheny College Student

On Friday April 5, Allegheny had the pleasure of hosting the 24th annual Creek Connections symposium! Elementary, middle, and high schools with a total of 317 students present attended the symposium. Through the course of the year, participants created their own science projects and were challenged to present their research to the rest of the students. Oral presentations were given by a variety of middle and high schools, each focusing on one specific research project that was conducted. Presentation titles ranged from “Fish Parasites,” “Crayfish Genetics,” “How Does Climate Change Affect Maple Syrup Production,” and “Are Your Recyclables Truly Recyclable?” The keynote speaker for the day was Allegheny’s own Professor Beth Choate, who gave the students a talk about her research on different species of bees and their specializations within ecosystems.

Also in attendance were 27 different local environmental groups that came to display projects and information of their own. Some of these groups included French Creek Valley

Conservancy, Erie National Wildlife Refuge, Crawford County Conservation District, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and many more. Many of these environmental groups brought presentations of their own, using their skills to inform students about their research and passions.

The students got the chance to take part in focus groups that concentrated on real-life science projects inside and outside the classrooms of Allegheny. Professors, students, and local environmental organizations hosted activities that looked at frog ecology, fluvial hydrogeomorphology, underwater robots, forest tree measurements, and more. There were a total of 18 different focus groups that held activities teaching students about the environment and the value of western Pennsylvanian ecosystems.

Altogether, the Allegheny symposium was a success! We were delighted by the efforts we saw in the display boards and projects and are excited to see what students come up with next year! We hope that you join us next year for the 25th annual Creek Connections Symposium!



Student Research Symposium at YMCA Camp Kon-O-Kwee

By Madi Sherman, Allegheny College Student

On Friday, April 12, Creekers, environmental groups, and students all joined together to participate in our annual environmental research symposium at YMCA Camp Kon-O-Kwee. Along with the poster presentations from every school, there were oral presentations, as well as an informative presentation from keynote speaker Alisha Trexler from Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. Sixteen school groups attended, and every student participated in a fun, educational activity that taught them about creeks, nature,

and the environment in some way. Chompers, the Allegheny College mascot, made an appearance and was able to meet (for the very first time!) the hellbender mascot of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation! Also in attendance were several live reptiles and amphibians, which were really fun and interesting to interact with. Overall the symposium was a great experience for all who were there. Even the impending rainstorm held off until the end to ensure a beautiful day for all the students during their activities.



Above: Creekers at the Allegheny College Student Research Symposium. Back row left to right: Robin Forsha, Wendy Kedzierski, Kala Mahen, Madi Sherman, Laura Branby. Front row left to right: Gretchen Barbera, Bri O'Neil-Hankle, James Stupar, Bella Petitta.

Connect with

CREEK CONNECTIONS

Allegheny College
520 North Main Street
Meadville, PA 16335

Phone: 814.332.5351

Email: creek@allegheny.edu

Web: creekconnections.allegheny.edu



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