

### **Water Quality Monitoring “Part of Our DNA”**

The water quality monitoring that ANS conducts is part of the organization’s DNA and a valuable tool that provides Montgomery County and DC residents with a “report card on the balance between development and environmental protection,” said Executive Director Neal Fitzpatrick.

In the early 1990s, two ANS members and environmental activists, Randi Slovic and Ginny Barnes, contacted Fitzpatrick, who was conservation director, and naturalist Stephanie Mason, because the county had ceased monitoring water quality. “They said ANS needed to do something,” Fitzpatrick recalled. “It was an important conversation and an important path for us in advocacy and in water quality monitoring training.”

Working with state and county biologists and fisheries experts, ANS developed a monitoring system that focused on species that live in the streams at least part of their lives, insect larvae as well as snails, crayfish, and aquatic worms, and whose abundance distinguishes healthy streams from degraded ones. ANS submitted its protocol to the Environmental Protection Agency, which administers the Clean Water Act, and it was approved. The county later resumed its own water quality monitoring program.

In the years since its founding and now under the direction of Cathy Wiss, the program has grown to 180 volunteers monitoring in 10 watersheds. The water monitoring program was a key argument for reducing development in the area of the county’s cleanest stream, Ten Mile Creek. “One of the things we took as a lesson for ANS advocacy is how important it is to have a land use plan that protects healthy watersheds,” said Fitzpatrick. In 2014, the Montgomery County Council amended the master plan to limit development in the Ten Mile Creek area and to protect the creek’s sensitive natural resources and buffers. — *Martha Hamilton is a former writer and editor with The Washington Post and graduate of ANS’s Volunteer Master Naturalist Program.*