

Statement to Delaware County Council on the Broomall's Dam Project
By Friends of Glen Providence Park
July 9, 2019 Agenda Meeting

Thank you to County Council and to Marc Manfre for allowing us this opportunity to explain further why, as outlined in our May 9 email to Marc, we believe the Broomall's Dam project would have a very adverse effect on Glen Providence Park. Please allow these comments to supplement, and in some cases expand on, the points made in that May 9 email.

We would like to first give some background on the park and our involvement in it. In 1935, [George and Eleanor Butler donated the majority of the land for Glen Providence to Delaware County](#) for a Bird Sanctuary & Arboretum, and the deed stipulates that the land be "kept in as natural a condition as possible." Glen Providence was the first Delaware County Park, and its success inspired the expansion of the County park system. Its structures were built in the 1930's by the Works Progress Administration, and in 2002, the park was determined to be [eligible for the National Register of Historic Places](#).

[Friends of Glen Providence Park](#) is an all-volunteer non-profit organization founded in 2011, with a mission to preserve and enhance the natural and historical resource of Delaware County's oldest park. Over the past eight years, we have worked extensively with County Parks & Recreation, and we are grateful for their collaboration and support of our activities. We have worked on numerous volunteer projects to directly support and improve wildlife habitat, conducted citizen Science projects documenting more than 200 plant and wildlife species, done [historical research](#) revealing how valued Glen Providence Park has been by the community since its inception, and offered free and family-friendly monthly events since September 2011.

Through the course these eight years, and thousands of volunteer hours, we have learned a lot about Glen Providence Park, its plants and wildlife, and the people who love it. We have talked to hundreds of County residents who value Glen Providence Park as a refuge where they can walk their dog, explore with their kids, birdwatch, or just relax and destress.

The thing that set all of this in motion, the reason the Friends of Glen Providence Park formed as an organization, was in direct response to seeing that the planned design for a new dam - which was [first made public in June 2011](#) - would bury part of this historical County park under earthfill.

This is because the original dam, built for Judge Broomall around 1883 for commercial ice harvesting, would not meet modern engineering standards. The old dam was steep, with a single 30' waterfall dropping from Broomall's Lake on one side of 3rd Street into Broomall's Run in Glen Providence Park on the other. The new earthen dam is required to have a much more gradual slope, so [the dam itself extends much farther into Glen Providence Park](#), with current wetlands, trees, and stream - all valuable wildlife habitat - buried under earthfill.

As we learned from the engineer's 2011 Erosion and Sediment Pollution Control Plan, the area of earth disturbance will be 1.11 acres. Over half an acre of the park would be buried under earthfill for the new, larger dam, and numerous mature trees will be cut down.

This is all the more difficult to accept because the dam is unnecessary, since a dam is not required

to reconnect Media and Upper Providence. With the national trend to remove dams to restore wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and eliminate the dangers of catastrophic dam breaches, and with the great successes of dam removal in Delaware County along Darby Creek and elsewhere, we are sad to see an unnecessary dam being constructed in a park where it will cause so much physical and ecological damage.

The current dam was [partially removed by the DEP in the summer of 2017](#) due its deteriorating condition and the [lack of compliance with the DEP's numerous requests - at least 5 in writing](#) - that Broomall's Lake be kept drawn down to its lowest possible water level for safety. When the partial removal was announced, we worked with community members on the May 2017 proposal we made to County Council for a footbridge to connect Media and Upper Providence. We appreciated your serious consideration of our proposal, and understood that the cost was not justified for a temporary bridge. But the possibility of a permanent bridge connecting Media and Upper Providence remains, and it could be done after complete dam removal and stream restoration, which would minimize damage to the park, and restore some of the habitat that has been lost.

We know it has been a complicated legal situation and project, but we don't think the loss of public park land, and the irreversible physical and environmental damage that would occur to the park, its wetlands, and wildlife habitat was ever adequately considered or addressed in the original project or while entering the Stipulation Agreement in May 2011. We do not think the three parties to the Stipulation realized just how different this new, earthen dam would be from the one it replaced, and how much of the park would be destroyed.

[The 1.1 acre that would be destroyed](#) is a serene part of Glen Providence Park, which includes the Third Street entrance, several trails, wetlands, a stretch of Broomall's Run, native flowers, the remnant of a historical footbridge, [natural springs that were once a source of drinking water](#) for the park, mature trees, and abundant wildlife. School classes regularly use the Third Street entrance on their way to do nature studies in the park. *Photos of the area, and the plants and wildlife within it, can be seen on our website from the [1.1 Acre Photojournal project](#) we conducted in 2013.*

We are particularly concerned by the loss of wetlands. Wetlands serve many important roles, from providing habitat for vulnerable species to improving water quality. With the increasing number of severe weather events, wetlands are now more important than ever in buffering the large quantities of stormwater runoff and mitigating flooding. It is important to keep wetlands intact and undamaged.

We are also concerned about the unnecessary loss of mature trees. According to our [tree-mapping survey](#), which was based on the diagrams provided by the project engineers, the construction area includes over 70 trees of 18 species, including American Sycamores, three varieties of Oaks, Sassafras, Ironwood, the Pennsylvania-rare Umbrella Magnolia, and massive Tuliptrees. Those trees are valuable not only to wildlife, but also for filtering stormwater, removing carbon dioxide, and improving air quality. It would be generations before trees match the size and benefit to humans and wildlife of the current trees in that 1.1 acre.

Finally, the new dam would require closely mowed grass at all times, with nothing else allowed to

be planted that could provide any benefit to pollinators or wildlife, or to soften the dam's stark and imposing presence. With the past issues of ownership and stewardship of Broomall's Dam, including ignoring the DEP's orders to keep the lake drawn down, we are also concerned that a new dam would eventually be a public safety hazard due to neglect all over again.

Our organization has volunteered thousands of hours on our annual planting days, park cleanups, invasive plant removal, summer concerts, nature walks, historical research, and citizen science. But no amount of volunteer hours will be able to undo the damage or restore the wildlife habitat in the 1.1 acre construction area, or to improve the appearance of the new dam. An area that is now a welcoming and calming natural entrance to the park will look like a highway exit berm, without any benefit to the wildlife that the park itself was originally donated to shelter.

We have worked with Delaware County Parks & Recreation not just for today, but for future generations to benefit from this natural resource.

In light of the irreversible damage that would occur to Glen Providence Park, we ask that Delaware County not sign any statement indicating that the reconstruction of Broomall's Dam would have no adverse effect on Glen Providence Park. We would welcome the opportunity to give a presentation, have a dedicated meeting, or to meet on site to further discuss our concerns.

Please review the links and photos we have added, and let us know if you have questions. We would be happy to provide further links and photographs for your review.

Additional links:

Citizen Science projects:

- [127 bird species](#) on eBird
- [58 tree species](#), many entered on [PhillyTreeMap](#) (now part of opentreemap.org)
- [19 species](#) on the PA Amphibian & Reptile Survey, including two sensitive turtle species (not publicly disclosed)

The current Third Street document repository on the Media Borough website:

<https://www.mediaborough.com/publicworks/third-street-damn-information>

Historical photos:



Ice House at Broomall's Dam
c. 1895-1900
Media Historic Archives Commission

*Broomall's Lake was originally created around 1883 for commercial ice harvesting.
This is the ice house used to store the ice in the 1890's.*



3rd Street entrance to the Glen Providence Bird Sanctuary & Arboretum in the 1930's, by G.J. Ulshafer