

Rivers & Streams

Rivers come in lots of different shapes and sizes, but they all have some things in common. **All rivers and streams start at some high point.** The high point can be a mountain, hill or other elevated area.

Water from some source like a spring, snow melt or a lake starts at this high point and begins to flow down to lower points. As the water flows down, it may pick up more water from other small streams, springs or from rain or snow melt.

These streams may slowly join together to form a larger stream or river. Small rivers and streams may join together to become larger rivers. **Eventually all this water from rivers and streams will run into the ocean or an inland body of water like a lake.**

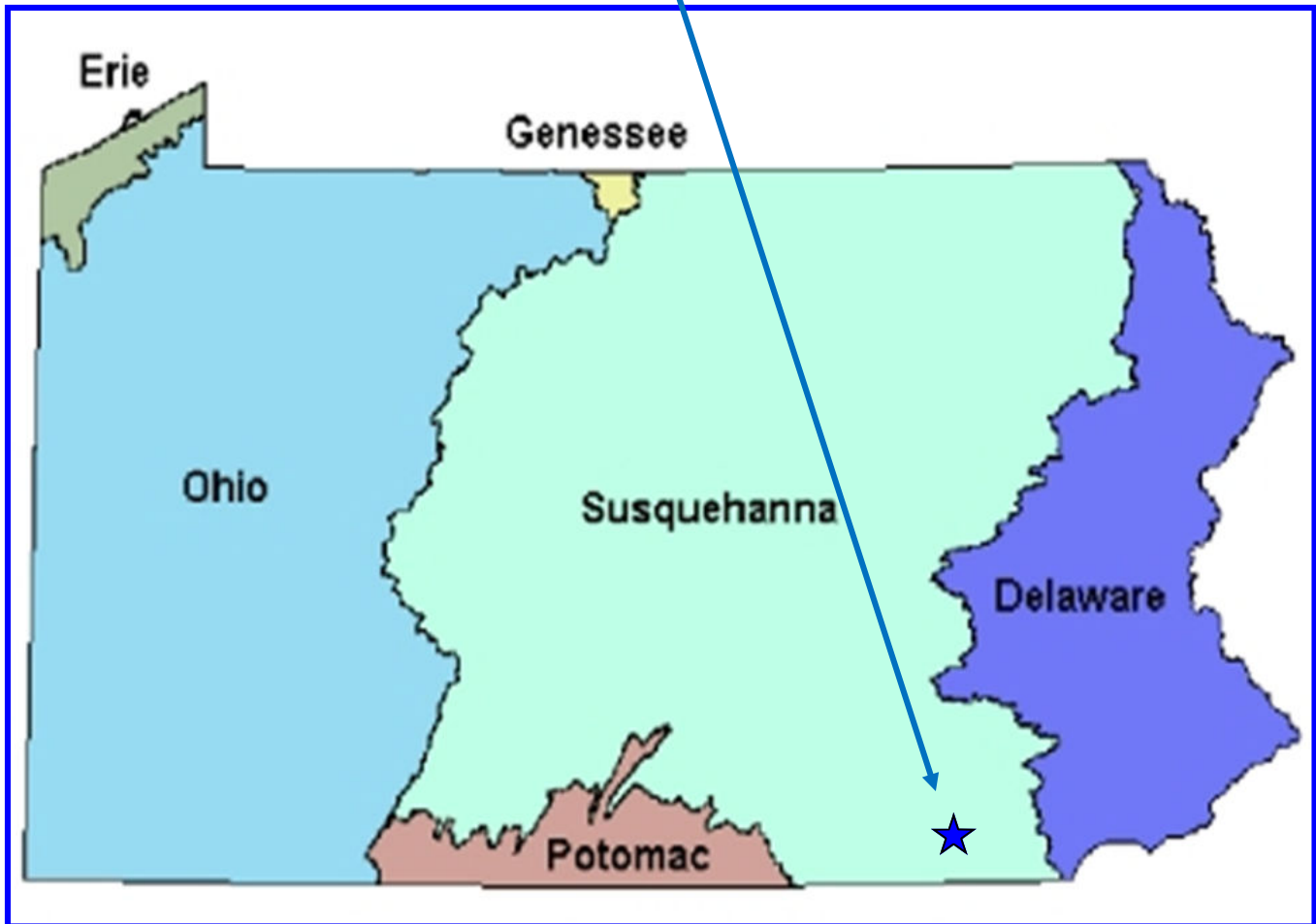
In York County all of our small creeks and streams flow into the Susquehanna River. The Susquehanna River flows south to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and then into the Atlantic Ocean.



From space, rivers and streams look like veins on the Earth's surface. Rivers and streams connect with each other in a system called a **watershed**.

A watershed is the area of land that drains into a lake or river.

Pennsylvania has 6 major watersheds: the Ohio, the Genesee, the Susquehanna, the Delaware, the Erie, and the Potomac. **We live in the Susquehanna watershed.** York is the star on the map below.



Rivers both carve the land and build it up. As rivers flow, they cut into the land. This is called **erosion**. Rivers cut both down into and across the earth. As rivers cut into the earth, they grind up rocks and churn up small rocks and soil.

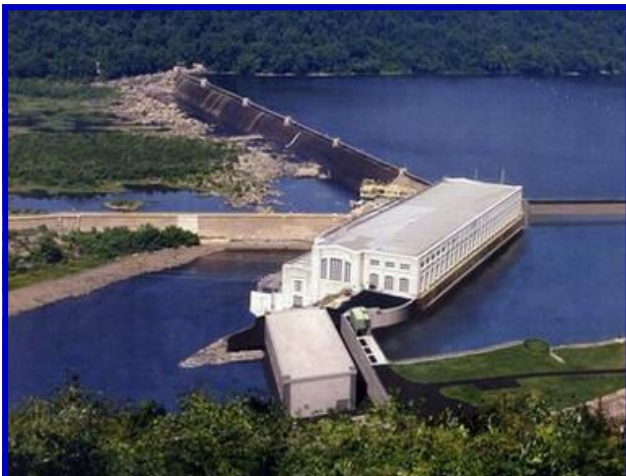
Over time rivers change the land they flow over by carving new paths for themselves. All of the rocks, pebbles and soil that rivers churn up get carried downstream.

As the river flows, it deposits all of the stuff it carries. Large items like rocks get deposited first. Soil is deposited last. Over time the soil that a river deposits can build up and create new land areas!

“Over time rivers change the land they flow over by carving new paths or channels for themselves.”



At the mouth of a river the water slows down and deposits the minerals and sediment it has been carrying. The area where this occurs is called a **River Delta**. Deltas are very rich in nutrients (or food) for plants. Some of the best farmland in Pennsylvania can be found along its river deltas.



Rivers are like roads. They carry water, organisms and important gases and nutrients to many areas downstream. They also help drain rainwater and provide habitats for many species of plants & wildlife. **The power of the moving water** creates travel routes for people and electricity for hydroelectric power plants.