



**KILLING THE CHESAPEAKE**

# 'It's part of your being': A family's Susquehanna River life from headwaters to the bay



**Frank Bodani, York Daily Record**Published 11:01 PM EST Feb. 2, 2021 | **Updated 11:01 PM EST Feb. 2, 2021**

*This USA Today Network special report explores solutions to deep threats that flow through New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland as the Susquehanna River feeds the Chesapeake Bay — with life and death.*

**T**he river flowed easy, like poured syrup, which made Devin Winand smile as he pulled one kayak after another onto the shore.

A few couples strolled the river's edge as the evening sky blushed to pink.

A lone paddleboarder dropped in a fishing line.

The summer-sweet air barely moved.

Winand had just toured a handful of paddlers around the rocks and historic bridges between the York and Lancaster county banks. Who would have thought the Susquehanna River could be so peaceful and clear a day after Tropical Storm Isaias swept through?

This water is his family's history and its livelihood. Its members are dedicated to promoting and protecting it like few others.

**Ride a board on the Susquehanna River and hear why it's good for body and soul (2:54)**



Devin Winand has spent much of his life working and living next to the Susquehanna River at Long Level, in York County, Pennsylvania.

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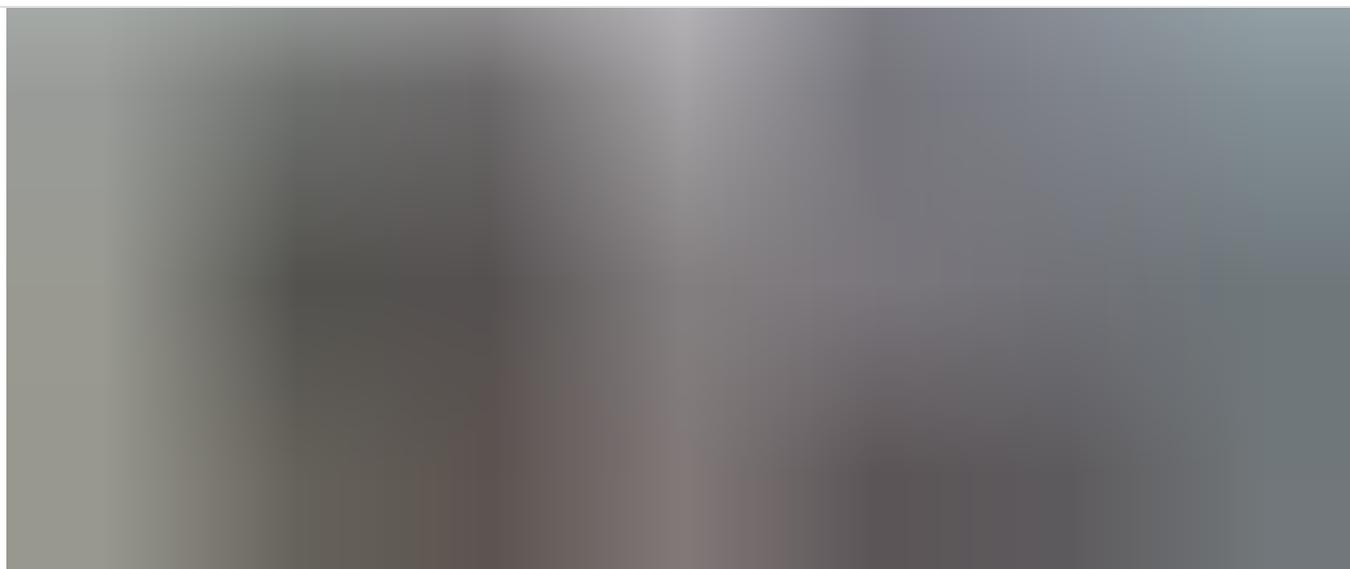


## **Connected to the river from beginning to end**

For five generations, they've vacationed at the river's beginning, on Otsego Lake in Cooperstown, New York.

For nearly 40 years, they've lived along it, in a stone house a few miles south of Wrightsville, Pennsylvania. Just a walk away, Liz and Steve Winand run Shank's Mare Outfitters with their son, providing gear and instruction to anyone wanting to experience the water.





Devin Winand, left, sits on his board next to Josh Hill as they prepare to head back south along the Susquehanna River at Long Level in York County.

PAUL KUEHNEL, YORK DAILY RECORD

They also tour paddlers along the last 60 miles of the Susquehanna to Havre de Grace, Maryland, where it dumps into the Chesapeake Bay.

They are connected to the Susquehanna from beginning to end.

"I think the only way to describe it is I can't be very far away from the water. It's part of your being. It's part of everything you do," Liz Winand said. "The river holds that bond."

"It just kind of becomes who you are," said Devin Winand, 38.

**I can't be very far away from the water. It's part of your being. It's part of everything you do.**

He has worked the shop with his parents for the past 13 years but has been around it since he was

downstream.

They look across to the Conejohela Flats, spits of mud and brush that make up one of the best migratory shore bird spots in the state.

They look north to the marinas and their fishing, sailing and pontoon boats.

The Winands know this area as well as anyone.

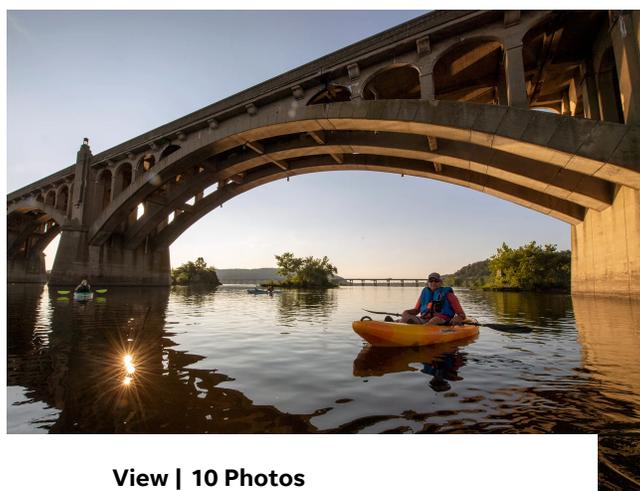
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## A family on a mission

They have tutored more than 23,000 students through their river field day trips over the past four decades. They lead "studies" on the streams that feed the river while helping kids learn to paddle.

Devin Winand typically leads about 100 groups on the water each summer, between tours, lessons and classes.



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### Photos: Paddling on the Susquehanna

Shank's Mare Outfitters organizes tour of the Susquehanna from Wrightsville and offers a paddling class at Long Level

canceled the summer of 2020, customers still wiped out their inventory of kayaks and gear.

Their mission is to promote using the river safely and prudently. Despite the water often appearing clearer and even cleaner now than in past decades, high-water events still churn river sediment into a chocolate-colored flow, in part, because of farm and construction run-off.

"And that can be controlled by education," Liz Winand said.

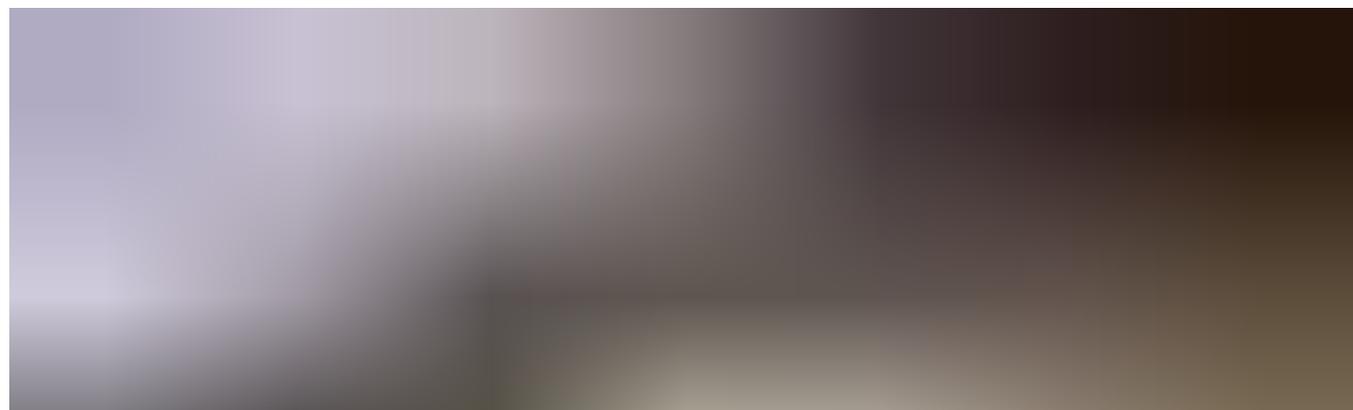
"I think that perception is changing," she said. "Forty years ago, people were saying being a 'river rat' is a negative. To now, it's, 'You're really lucky to live and work here.' "

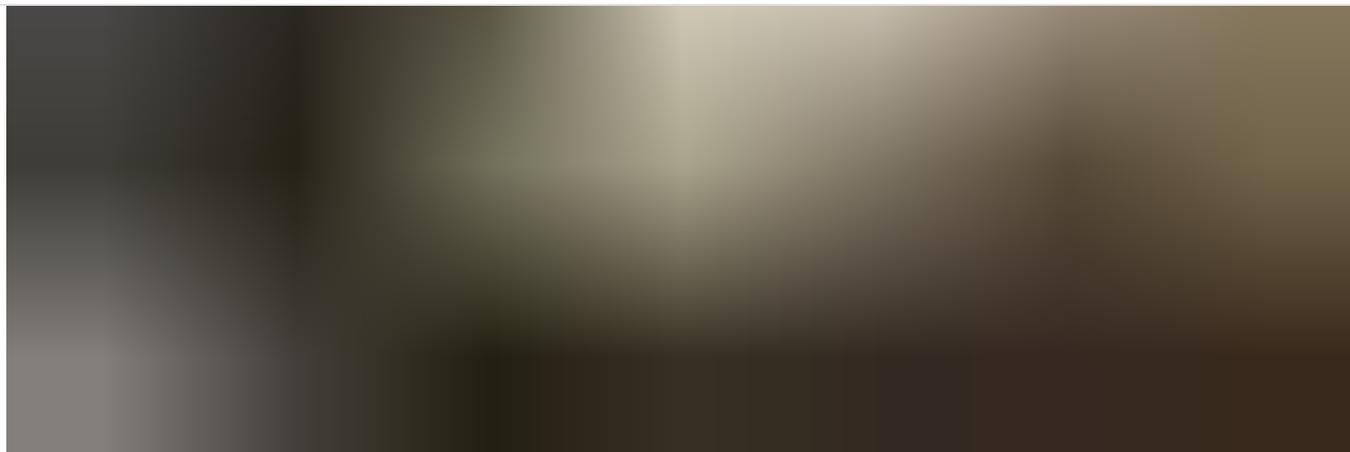
She spoke reverently about the opportunity "to introduce someone new to the magic of it."

**Forty years ago, people were saying being a 'river rat' is a negative. To now, it's, 'You're really lucky to live and work here.'**

The Winands' reach and impact continues to grow here.

Shawn McEachern, 59, has known the family for 40 years since buying his first kayak paddle and spray skirt from Shank's Mare. Aaron Dixon, 25, got to know them only in the past few years after growing up to fear the river.





A paddler crosses under Veterans Memorial Bridge between Wrightsville and Columbia during a paddling tour organized by Shank's Mare Outfitters on August 8, 2020.

PAUL KUEHNEL, YORK DAILY RECORD

They both guide tours for Shank's Mare.

"They probably love the area more than they love themselves," Dixon said of the Winands.

"Their entire life is dedicated to this, and I've always looked up to them," McEachern said. "They're all about getting out and enjoying nature for what it is.

"Right here, there's a lifetime of exploring ..."

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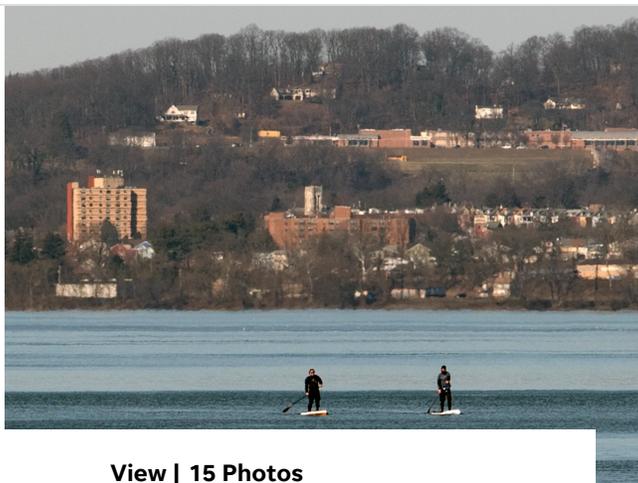


## **The magic of the river**

It's sometimes a difficult balance in the Wrightsville area, one of the more high-traffic river spots on warm weekends.

People crowd this nearly three-mile stretch for boating, sailing, jet skiing, fishing and paddling. The shoreline is busy with picnicking, disc golf, hiking and even youth baseball.

And yet on a blue-sky, 65-degree February day, Devin Winand and co-worker Josh Hill

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## Susquehanna River: Long Level recreation for the mind and soul

Devin Winand and Josh Hill talk about the Susquehanna River at Long Level. Winand and his family have long lived and worked on the Susquehanna River.

On a summer afternoon, one of their Shank's Mare classes quickly paddled into their own world, too. They practiced beginner kayaking maneuvers on a secluded, shady spot where the Fishing Creek empties into the river.

They were surrounded by thick, steep woods leading to waterfalls and the Mason-Dixon hiking trail.

A pocked, dead-end road and a one-lane bridge stood overhead.

Two fishermen threw in their lines from a river sandbar.

No one else was around.

The magic of it.

"There's something that draws people to these waters," said Devin Winand, who came back here to stay after the U.S. Army took him all over the world.

"Having the opportunity to grow up (here), it just kind of becomes who you are. It's always been there for me."

**PA's polluted Susquehanna River is poisoning the bay. What can be done**

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## **The team behind this investigation**

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