



Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project Make Use of Our Rivers

Treatment Plant Helps to Give a New Look to the Point

Volume XX
Number 3
Summer 2013

Save the Date:

Sept. 13– SCRIP board meeting, Greenhouse Park, 9am

Sept. 19– Ohio River Watershed Cruise, Pittsburgh

Oct. 12- CVC's West Penn Trail Triathlon
(See article on page 2)

Oct. 18– SCRIP board meeting, Gander Mountain, 9 am

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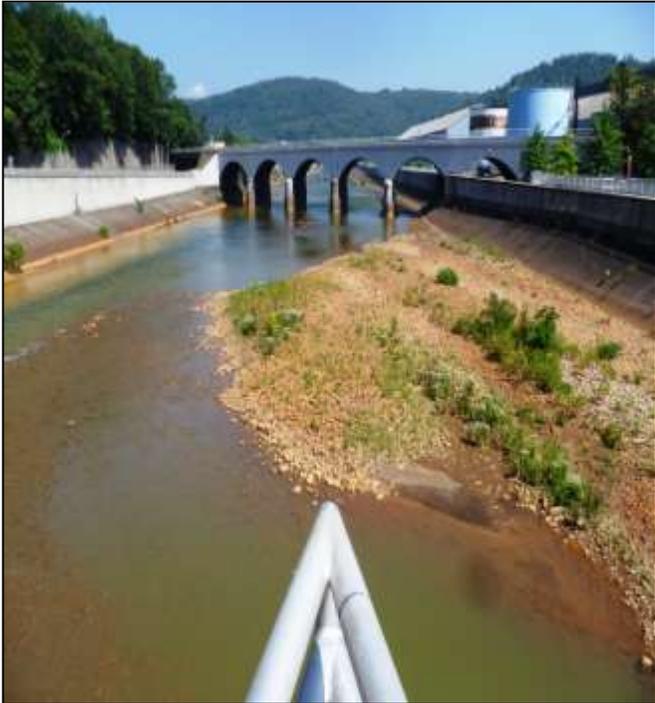
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The Point in Johnstown

The confluence of the Stonycreek (left) and Little Conemaugh Rivers to form the Conemaugh River.



*Photo by L. Lichvar
2010*



*Photo by M. Reckner
Aug. 21, 2013*

Little Conemaugh River at Mineral Point before the treatment plant went online.



The Rosebud treatment plant in St. Michael went online in early August releasing 10,000 GPM of treated water into the Little Conemaugh River and helping to give the Conemaugh River, into which it flows, a much better appearance as shown by the pictures above taken at The Point in 2010 and August 21, 2013.
(Continued on page 2)



Little Conemaugh at Mineral Point after Rosebud active treatment plant in St. Michael went online.

Both before and after pictures are courtesy of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Rosebud Treatment Plant
(continued from page one)

The treatment plant at St. Michael is located upstream from Mineral Point where the second set of pictures was taken showing a marked difference before and after the plant went online.

Seeing these pictures was a cause for joy among those who have been working tirelessly to restore our watershed. The Little Conemaugh River with its history of industrial pollution and many discharge points has been an especially difficult one to restore.

We realize that things could change with fluctuating stream conditions and many other discharges need to be addressed but this is a great step forward. Congratulations to all those who made this happen!

West Penn Triathlon Set for October 12 by Melissa Reckner



The Conemaugh Valley Conservancy is organizing the West Penn Trail Triathlon, which will take place Saturday, October 12 in Saltsburg. This triathlon will incorporate features and attributes of the Conemaugh River Corridor and the West Penn Trail system! Instead of a swimming section, there will be a boat leg for participants to use a kayak or canoe to accompany the running and biking. Teams of up to three may register. There are a number of age brackets, so you can compete with your peers. All profits will be used for the betterment of our trail network. For more details and to sign up visit the CVC website: www.conemaughvalleyconservancy.org; click Recreation at the top; and then click West Penn Trail Triathlon on the left side.

Donation Made to SCRIP

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ligonier Valley, through its Beulah Rosen Committee, made a donation to SCRIP's Community Fund for the Alleghenies account. The committee was named in honor of Beulah who had a passion for social justice and the environment and bequeathed a substantial sum to the fellowship. The committee was established to continue the legacy of Beulah and other benefactors by donating to worthy organizations.

Ads Accepted for
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SAVE THE DATE: Harvest Fest is October 5th!

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Paddle the Que Event Takes Place on July 31 by Len Lichvar, SCRIP Chairman



Photo by Len Lichvar

For the second year the SCRIP sponsored "Paddle the Que"

educational program was a success. This year 62 participants of all ages took advantage of the instruction provided by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's educational staff to learn how to safely paddle and operate canoes and kayaks.

Participants were able to try out their new skills on the flat water of the Quemahoning Reservoir. The program took place on the evening of July 31 at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area through the cooperation of the Cambria-Somerset Authority.

A thank you to the SCRIP Board members who attended and assisted as well as to Karlice Makuchan who handled all the registrations. Also SCRIP appreciates the support of the Benscreek Canoe Club members who assisted with on the water safety as well as the Somerset Daily American and the Johnstown Tribune Democrat for their cooperation in promoting the event.

Fish Habitat Structures Placed at the Que by Len Lichvar

The long term Somerset Conservation District's Quemahoning Reservoir Fish Habitat Improvement Project continued with a structure building and placement at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area. This latest project saw the addition of 20 short vertical plank structures added to the dozens of similar habitat structures that have been placed in the reservoir since the District originated the project in 2006.

The structures are professionally designed and the construction process is coordinated by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Habitat Management Division Lake Section. Volunteers from the District, Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the Somerset County Sportsmen's League along with other local sportsmen provided the labor and the Cambria-Somerset Authority (CSA) provided their equipment for use.



Earl and Michele Waddell guide "Big" Ken Dranzik as he loads a fish habitat structure onto a PA Fish and Boat Commission boat for transport to its intended location in the Quemahoning Reservoir.

Photo by Len Lichvar

The angling opportunities at the reservoir have gradually been on the upswing thanks in large part to the improving water quality coming into the reservoir by way of abandoned mine drainage (AMD) treatment systems in the Quemahoning Creek watershed designed, administered and funded by public sector agencies such as the District and many others.

The habitat structures have built upon that opportunity by providing a safe haven for young small fish to escape predatory larger fish as well

as to increase locations for aquatic insects to thrive and provide additional habitat for fish of all age classes.

The PFBC continues to monitor the impacts of the structures. Local anglers have also been doing their own appraisals as well. Brian Wingard, of Holsopple, who has fished the reservoir for decades for many species relates that, "The addition of the habitat structures are making a difference. For example, I know from my catch rates that the smallmouth bass population in the reservoir is certainly expanding which is something that was not happening prior to the habitat project." (continued on page 5)

Study of North Fork Watershed, Somerset's Smallest But Perhaps

Most Unique Watershed, is Underway by Len Lichvar

Shustrick claims, "The North Fork watershed is a real life example of how man's needs and uses can coexist with nature without either detracting from the other."

The Somerset Conservation District is currently embarking on an analysis and study of one of Somerset County's smallest, but perhaps most unique watersheds. The District received a Coldwater Heritage grant to create a Coldwater Conservation Plan for the North Fork of Bens Creek watershed located along the western slope of the Laurel Ridge in northern Somerset County.

The North Fork and its even smaller tributaries have been mostly unencumbered by man's negative impacts unlike the downstream waters that the North Fork is a tributary of, such as the main stem of Bens Creek and the Stonycreek River.

According to Greg Shustrick, Watershed Specialist for the District, "The North Fork is one of our near natural waters. All the smaller tributaries are designated as Exceptional Value by the PA Department of Environmental Protection and the tributaries as well as the North Fork contain a highly diverse macroinvertebrate community as well as populations of wild trout."

Unlike other waterways in the region that have fluctuating water quality and fish and insect life, the North Fork has maintained its high level of all of these water quality indicators over a long period of time.

The North Fork's sister stream, the South Fork of Bens Creek, starts out very much the same with good populations of aquatic insects and wild trout. However, the downstream reaches of the South Fork have had its bouts with intrusions

such as abandoned mine drainage (AMD) pollution. So far the North Fork has escaped these impediments.

A primary reason the North Fork watershed is less impaired is that about three quarters of the watershed is owned by the Greater Johnstown Water Authority (GJWA) and the remainder is either PA Game Commission State Game Lands or part of Laurel Ridge State Park.

With that in mind the District is working on the project in cooperation with the GJWA, Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and state agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the PA Fish and Boat Commission.

The project will include analysis of not only the current status of the watershed, but potential threats such as water use and consumption, thermal impacts, nutrient loading as well as natural gas extraction in the coming years.

Although downstream waters such as the Stonycreek River have received much attention, improvement and acclaim in recent years, the best water quality in the region is found in the headwater streams such as the North Fork. As Shustrick points out, "The North Fork provides us a measure as to how far our downstream resources have to still improve to reach their true potential."

(continued on page 5)

Stress Response Research on Remediation Ponds

by Irene M. Wolf, PhD

Acid mine drainage (AMD) is the outflow of acidified water from abandoned mines which may also contain other contaminants like arsenic and iron. In Pennsylvania, passive remediation systems have been implemented in efforts to clean up the contaminated waters before flowing into nearby rivers and streams. Several students from the lab of Irene M. Wolf, PhD at Saint Francis University's Department of Biology have been researching effectiveness on AMD remediation. To measure this, students have examined the health of cattails found at the Bear Rock Run remediation site in Lilly, PA. Initial observations showed the cattails in direct contact with acid mine drainage were dramatically shorter in contrast to the cattails found in the lower remediated ponds. Next we investigated the levels of a specific stress protein called heat shock protein 70 (HSP70). Heat shock proteins are found in all plants and animals. The abundance of these proteins increases as an organism is exposed to a stressor, like heat or chemicals. These proteins help the organism react to the stress event. We proposed the smaller cattails with direct exposure to AMD would have higher levels of heat shock protein 70. Interestingly, we discovered the exact opposite. Cattails found in the cleaner ponds had higher levels of heat shock protein. Past research has shown organisms produce a base level of heat shock proteins. We believe the plants in the cleaner ponds are producing the normal level of heat shock proteins and that something, possibly iron, is inhibiting the plants in the contaminated ponds from producing HSP70. Furthermore, we believe the lack of HSP70 is effecting the height of these plants. Obviously, much more research needs to be conducted to elucidate this conundrum; however, we can conclude this acid mine drainage remediation site is still working and preventing harmful waters from contaminating our streams and rivers.

Dr. Irene M. Wolf is an Assistant Professor in the Biology Department of St. Francis University.

“
“We proposed the smaller cattails with direct exposure to AMD would have higher levels of heat shock protein 70. Interestingly, we discovered the exact opposite.”

North Fork Watershed (cont. from page 4)

Another very unique characteristic of this only 12 square mile watershed is what is contained within it. There are game lands, a state park, four historic 19th Century cemeteries, a golf course and country club, a water reservoir, historical structures and Johnstown's oldest and still active sportsmen's club all within the watershed boundaries.

As Shustrick claims, “The North Fork watershed is a real life example of how man's needs and uses can coexist with nature without either detracting from the other.”

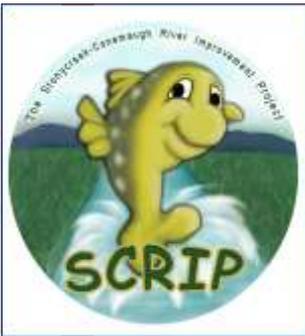
Reprinted from *Somerset Daily American*

Que Fish Habitat Improvement Structures (cont. from page 3)

Conservation District Manager Len Lichvar and PFBC Habitat Management staff surveyed the lake and designed a new management plan that will continue the project for the next four years.

The professional expertise of the PFBC coupled with the continued support from the local sportsmen volunteers as well as the continued sponsorship of the District and cooperation from the CSA should all combine to continue the increasing public recreational as well as its resultant economic opportunities of the Quemahoning Reservoir on into the future.

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SCRIP is the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project, a coalition of grass-roots groups and local resource agencies working to restore and promote the Upper Conemaugh watershed.

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* If you are not sure of your membership status contact SCRIP's secretary at mreckner@kcstreamteam.org or 814-444-2669.

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