

**Volume XXXI  
Number 2  
Spring 2024**

**Save the Date:**

**June 15–** Joey’s Jackets, PFD loaner station, ribbon cutting at Que, at 11 am.

**June 17-21 and July 8-12** (8-11 year olds);

**June 24-28 and July 15-19** (12-14 year olds).

International Conservation Center summer camps in Fairhope. Request for conservation activities. More information <https://www.pittsburghzoo.org/class-icc-camp/>

**July 10–** SCRIP board meeting, Greenhouse Park, at 3 pm.

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# Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

## The Stonycreek River’s Potential Impairments and a Close Call

by Len Lichvar



**The source location along Franklin Street in suburban Johnstown that produced a surge of AMD contaminated water, near and into the Stonycreek River.**

*Photo by Len Lichvar*

The Stonycreek River experienced two unexpected potential water quality impairments recently, along with another close call.

On April 16, 2024, a large, but not long lasting surge of AMD, broke loose along Franklin Street in suburban Johnstown.

The surge inundated the street and adjacent properties with iron-laden water. Some did make it into the river, but later in the day, it completely subsided. The Stonycreek was extremely high, but little to no impact to the river could be detected.

The second episode occurred on April 26, 2024, when something gave way along a steep hillside overlooking the Stonycreek River in Hollsopple.

This event was initially observed and reported by SCRIP board member Malcolm Crittenden when he saw a plume of discolored water in the Stonycreek near Foustwell. He back-tracked the discoloration to its source along State Route 601 in Hollsopple.

Malcolm notified me that evening through text and phone calls. I arrived at the site just before dusk, in time to see an estimated thousand gallon per minute discharge of water entering the Stonycreek River. I was able to use the PA DEP Pollution Hotline and provided the respondent with information and photos.

The next morning, Saturday, my son Logan Lichvar and I met at the site, where through his expertise as the AMD Treatment Manager for InnoH20, he was able to obtain an accurate pH reading on the flow. It turned out to be an alkaline level of 6.9. He also took water samples.

Shortly after, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (PA DEP BAMR) Manager Pat Webb arrived on the scene to investigate. Through Pat’s efforts, other DEP officials were notified, as well as representatives from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (Penn DOT). There was clearly a weakening of the highway above the discharge that seemed to be caused by it.

*(continued on page 2)*



**The outflow of sediment-laden water along a hillside overlooking the Stonycreek River at Hollsopple.**

*Photo by Len Lichvar*

## **Stonycreek Impairment** *(continued from page one)*

Penn DOT officials arrived and later closed that portion of State Route 601 to traffic, out of caution. Dave Thomas, of the PA DEP District Mining Office, also arrived and indicated that he would further investigate the source.

Later in the day, the flow of water dramatically decreased. Also the water sample collected by InnoH2O was confirmed to not contain any iron or aluminum, indicating the flow was primarily laden with sediment. The PA DEP continues to investigate the cause.

In addition, another possible worst case scenario was averted when Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick realized that the construction company replacing a Conemaugh Township Water Authority water line along the South Fork of Bens Creek did not have the Lion Mining AMD treatment system's pipeline on their construction maps.

The Conservation District's Erosion and Sedimentation Technician met with the company to inform them of the missing information, and PA DEP was later able to provide the water line location. Had that high pressure line, comprised of AMD water, been compromised during the excavation process, a disaster of major consequence would have occurred to the South Fork of Bens Creek, as well as downstream into the Stonycreek River.

These are all recent examples of how close we are to losing much of what we have gained. There have been other similar issues in the past. Because of the vigilance of SCRIP, and public professional agencies such as the Somerset Conservation District and PADEP, we have largely avoided disaster – so far.

## **Celebrating Another Year of Trout in the Classroom** by Melissa Reckner

This year, Mountain Laurel Trout Unlimited, in partnership with Brandywine Conservancy / Penguin Court and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, worked with the following six schools in Cambria and Somerset counties on the Trout in the Classroom (TIC) program:

- Blacklick Valley High
- Divine Mercy Catholic Academy – East
- Divine Mercy Catholic Academy – West
- Richland Elementary
- Shade-Central City High
- Shanksville-Stonycreek Elementary.

MLTU has supported TIC in local schools since the inception of TIC in Pennsylvania 18 years ago! TIC allows school students to raise trout from eggs in a classroom aquarium, while learning about the importance of coldwater resources, healthy riparian buffers, and so much more.

Before the end of the school year, students release their surviving trout into a state-approved body of water.

TIC is not meant to be a stocking program, but rather one that regularly engages students in conservation topics to create informed stewards.



**Trout raised by Richland School District students, before their release.**

*Photo by Melissa Reckner*

*(Continued on page 3)*

Schools' release day activities would not be possible without the support of MLTU's partners, who lead hands-on activities to strengthen students' knowledge and make for a memorable field day. MLTU thanks the following groups for their assistance this year.

- Blue Knob State Park (Shade)
- Brandywine Conservancy / Penguin Court (all)
- Cambria County Conservation District (Blacklick)
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Shanksville, Divine Mercy)
- Pennsylvania Master Naturalist (Shade, Blacklick, Divine Mercy)
- Shade Creek Watershed Association (Shade)
- Somerset Conservation District (Shanksville)
- Stonycreek Conemaugh River Improvement Project (Richland)
- Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (all)

MLTU also appreciates the following organizations that allow Release Day activities to take place on their property.

- D&J Golf Haven
- Greater Ferndale Sportsmen's Association
- Pennsylvania Game Commission
- Shade Sportsmen's Club
- Windber Sportsmen's Association

**Additional picture on page 5**



**Richland student releases trout in the stream.**  
*Photo by Melissa Reckner*



**Students playing "How Many Bears Can Live in this Forest," a habitat game from the PA Game Commission's Wild About Bears curriculum.**  
*Photo by Melissa Reckner*

## **The Future of the Stonycreek River IS the Oven Run Trust Fund (ORTF)**

The first abandoned mine drainage treatment systems were constructed in the Stonycreek River watershed in the 1990's, in the Oven Run sub-watershed, resulting in significantly improved water quality. When they reached the end of their effective 20-25 year life expectancy, they began to fail. Over the last several years, the Somerset Conservation District (SCD) completely reconstructed those systems, because failure to do so would have returned them to their degraded state. The SCD established the ORTF to ensure that clean water continues to flow for generations to come.

**Help Support the Somerset Conservation District to Operate and Maintain the Oven Run Treatment Sites, A, D, E, & F.**



**Scan the QR code or send a check to:**

**Oven Run Trust Fund  
c/o Community Foundation for the Alleghenies  
Box 1105  
Somerset, PA 15501**

## Educational Event at the Que

SCRIP board member Dave Leiford discusses abandoned mine drainage treatment with high school students from Somerset County at the two-day Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission sponsored education event at the Quemahoning Reservoir. SCRIP board members Joe Gorden, Malcolm Crittenden, and Len Lichvar, along with Grace Leiford, all participated and assisted.

*Photo by Len Lichvar*



## Fascinating World of Mushrooms

### In Riparian Buffers

Diana Baca, an owner of Oak Haven Farm, a small gourmet mushroom farm located in Blairsville, is developing ecologically sound practices for the mushroom waste. The mushrooms are still viable after she's used them and the spent blocks could be used in abandoned mine drainage, e.coli, manure, or hydrocarbon remediation. She is participating in a riparian buffer project using local fungi at an outdoor school and she is looking for additional riparian buffer projects on which pre & post data could be collected to demonstrate how it works. If you are interested, her email is [mshrmcart@gmail.com](mailto:mshrmcart@gmail.com).

### Eating Plastic

Diana shared that certain strains of blue oysters "eat" black plastic bags. This plastic eating phenomenon was documented by students from Yale University on a study trip to Ecuador where they discovered that *Pestalotiopsis microspore* could survive solely on plastic. This particular mushroom can consume polyurethane, the main ingredient in plastic, and turn it into organic matter. A more common species, oyster mushrooms, also have this ability.

### Fungi Mutarium

Katharina Unger, an Austrian researcher, created a [prototype](#) of an at-home oyster mushroom recycling system. Pieces of plastic are placed in capsules containing oyster mushrooms. The fungi grow on the capsules where they can be harvested for consumption.



**Planting along a riparian buffer of a tributary of Cherry Run at an outdoor school, on March 16, in Center Township. The fungi is mixed with straw, wood chips, branches, fluff from cattails, and other native seed.**

## Congratulations to the Somerset Conservation District

“Growing up in Cambria City, I always dreamed of a time when the Conemaugh River would be clean and pristine for recreational purposes. Finally, a few short years ago, this dream became a reality.” So began a recent *Tribune Democrat* Readers’ Forum letter. The writer, Janet Lord of Jerome, said, “Everyone in this area owes a debt of gratitude to Len Lichvar, district manager, and Greg Shustrick, watershed specialist for the Somerset Conservation District.” She also attributed the “host of conservation experts and community groups...for the beauty of the streams and rivers in Somerset and Cambria counties.” As a result “fishing in Cambria City” as well as “businesses and clubs —such as Coal Tubin’- now thrive, while canoe clubs and kayakers from around the country enjoy the clean, clear water of the rivers in our area.” Thanks, Janet! We appreciate the recognition.



**Divine Mercy student releases trout into the stream.**

*Photo by Melissa Reckner*

### Join or renew\* SCRIP today!

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Do you wish to volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_

**To renew or become a Member, please complete Parts 1 and 2 below.**

**Part 1. Check your desired membership level.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$6)	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual (\$15)	<input type="checkbox"/> Family (\$20)
<input type="checkbox"/> Club/Small Business (\$50)	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron (\$50)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining (\$100)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor (\$500)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1000)	

**Part 2. Select Option A OR Option B:**

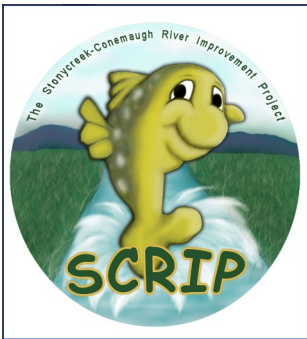
**A. I am fine receiving an electronic version of the newsletter for the cost listed above for my membership level. My email address is:** \_\_\_\_\_

*(Please mail your check in this amount to the address below.)*

**B. I would like to receive a mailed copy of the newsletter. Add \$5 to membership cost listed above.**

*(Please mail the membership fee plus \$5 mailing fee to the address below.)* Total Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Make your check payable to **SCRIP**, or for a tax-deductible contribution, make the check to **Southern Alleghenies Conservancy/ SCRIP**. \* *If you are not sure of your membership status contact SCRIP’s secretary at [info@scripPA.org](mailto:info@scripPA.org).* Send donations to: **SCRIP, P.O. Box 164, Windber, PA 15963**



**SCRIP**  
**P.O. Box 164**  
**Windber, PA**  
**15963**

**Place  
 Stamp  
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**[www.scrippa.org](http://www.scrippa.org)**

**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.**

**Board of Directors**

- |                                      |                    |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Adam Cotchen<br><i>Chairman</i>      | Malcolm Crittenden |
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|                                      | Jeff Sarver        |

**People of SCRIP**

- New and Renewing Members**
- Richard & Vicky Blasic
  - Cambria Co. Conservation District
  - Mary Heinlein—NEW
  - Matt Hughes
  - Mike & Beth Kern
  - John Rucosky
  - Summit Land Consulting, LLC
  - Jeffery Tomko
  - Traditional Angler of PA