

Volume XXXII
Number 2
Spring 2025

Save the Date:
July 10– SCRIP
board meeting,
Greenhouse Park,
3 pm.

Oct. 14-16– PA
Abandoned Mine
Reclamation Con-
ference, Toftrees
Resort, State
College. Register
and details:
[Treat Mine Water](#)
Scholarships are
available and they
are looking for
presentations.

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Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

Bottomlands Conservancy, a Non-Profit Land Trust, is Formed

by Len Lichvar



A still unabated source of AMD into the Stonycreek River located at the Hawk View Oven Run site that the Bottomlands Conservancy will begin to monitor.

Photo by Len Lichvar

The Somerset County Conservancy (SCC) was created in 1994 to take ownership of the Oven Run AMD treatment systems properties on the Stonycreek River. Since then the SCC has evolved and made a determination that their land ownership focus should change. Over a year ago, they informed the Somerset Conservation District that they now wanted to divest the Conservancy of ownership of all of the multiple AMD treatment facility properties they own.

This announcement created some uncertainty of the future of these essential systems. Fortunately, the Somerset County firm of InnoH2O Solutions LLC decided to make a business decision to form a non-profit land trust.

Through several negotiations with the SCC, the newly formed Bottomlands Conservancy agreed to take ownership of all of the Conservancy’s AMD treatment properties. This has now assured continued local control of the land and the systems, as well as the continued oversight and operation and maintenance. Bottomlands is also planning to abate more AMD where possible on the sites, as well as improving the land resources.

In late February 2025, Bottomlands Conservancy officially secured ownership of Oaks Trail (Site D), Hawk View (Site F), and Mountain View (Site B) Oven Run facilities, and the Lamberts Run treatment system, all in the Stonycreek River watershed, as well as the Boswell Passive Treatment System in the Quemahoning Creek watershed, and the Pletcher AMD treatment system and the limestone doser in the Coal Run watershed, a sub watershed of the Casselman River watershed.

In March, SCRIP made a monetary contribution to assist the Bottomlands Conservancy in a year’s worth of water quality and flow data gathering at two unabated AMD discharges on the Hawk View property. When the data gathering is completed, Bottomlands will search for options for reducing the impacts of this direct AMD flow into the Stonycreek River.

BLACKLICK CREEK AMD TREATMENT FACILITY OPERATIONAL!!

by Robb Piper



An open house was held from noon to 3pm on the first day of spring, March 20, at the newly constructed Blacklick Creek Abandoned Mine Drainage Treatment Plant. A walking tour of the facility, now in trial operation, was attended by about forty people including Pennsylvania state officials, the U.S. EPA Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement-Pittsburgh office, two sets of county commissioners, the Blacklick Creek Watershed Association (1993), the Foundation for PA Watersheds, SCRIP (Piper), and the Cambria and Indiana Counties Conservation Districts.

The plant is located next to the Ghost Town Trail on twenty-eight acres of previously reclaimed abandoned mine land. The location is beside the Blacklick Valley Municipal Authority sewage treatment plant. Both plants are on Wehrum Road, just a half mile west of the borough of Vintondale. The total project area of affected mine water and plant site includes Buffington and East Wheatfield Townships, Indiana County and Blacklick Township, Cambria County.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation the project purpose is “*To control and treat three major sources of abandoned mine drainage into the Blacklick Creek watershed and restore approximately 25 miles of the watershed to a viable fishery down to the confluence with Two Lick Creek.*” Blacklick Creek’s PA DEP stream designation will be a “Trout Stocked Fishery.”

Three mine pools with resulting surface discharges will be treated at this new facility. They include the Commercial 16 mine (Red Mill), the Vinton #6 mine and the Wehrum mine. The treatment facility uses active chemical treatment of hydrated lime, polymers and aeration to settle out dissolved metals and lower the acidity of the polluted water. Its capacity is to treat is designed for 5,000 gallons/minute = 7.2 million gallons per day. The sludge generated from the water treatment will be pumped back into a portion of the Wehrum deep mine. Other parts of the project include backfilling the Wehrum Shaft mine opening, and grouting shut the three borehole discharges in the North Branch of Blacklick Creek from the Vinton #6 mine, that still can be seen from the bridge in Vintondale.

The plant was constructed by HRI, Inc. and commenced June 11, 2022. The total cost of the plant to date is \$28,296,279.56. Funding was made available through the Capital Budget Funds and Pennsylvania’s federal Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program that is funded in part by the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization Program. PA DEP Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation-Cambria Office in Ebensburg is the project manager and will run the plant after being turned over to them by HRI sometime towards the end of this summer.

Jerome Hill #1 Mine Blowout

by Len Lichvar

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP) Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (BAMR) will address the recent unexpected short lived, but very large discharge of acidic 2.9 pH AMD laden water from the Jerome Hill #1 mine that enters the South Fork of BensCreek near Thomas Mills in Somerset County.

The DEP will use its emergency funds, which can only be used to address health and safety concerns, to construct piping and other engineered alterations at the site that will prevent the potential for another large blow out which occurred on April 10, 2025. SCRIP board member Joe Gorden was the first to encounter the discharge as he travelled on Jerome Hill Road at about 4:00 PM that day. *continued on page 4*

Oven Run Revival Highlights River Cleanup Efforts

Reprinted editorial from *Tribune Democrat*,
Monday April 28, 2025.

The heartening revival of Oven Run after decades' worth of pollution was highlighted this week when the Somerset Conservation District sent out its 2024 annual report.

As the report noted, a survey last year "made an astonishing discovery of fish and other aquatic life" in the small stream near Kantner in Shade Township, a tributary of the Stonycreek River.

Oven Run had been devoid of aquatic life for more than a century, due to pollution caused by coal mining before the advent of environmental regulations.

In the 1990s, it became the site of pioneering efforts to clean up the Stonycreek River watershed.

The construction of five "passive treatment system" sites along Oven Run, where acidic water from old mines is treated and neutralized before it reaches the Stonycreek River, made a big contribution to the well-publicized recovery of the latter waterway. But last year's survey showed the surprising impact that work has had on Oven Run itself.

The Somerset Conservation District, with help from Garrett College students and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, found 58 fish – creek chubs, white suckers, northern hogsuckers, longnose dace and blacknose dace – in Oven Run that had migrated upstream from the Stonycreek.

Crayfish and caddisfly larvae were also found during sampling. And the discovery of a young creek chub indicated that that species is reproducing in Oven Run itself, "which is very significant," Somerset Conservation District Manager Len Lichvar told our photographer and outdoors writer John Rucosky shortly after the survey was conducted last September.

As the conservation district said in its new report: "It is clear that the Oven Run (acid mine drainage) treatment projects, which the district played a key role in implementing and maintaining, have not only resurrected the Stonycreek River into a viable, usable waterway, but have had additional water quality benefits that were never anticipated."

But, as always with this thorny issue, those benefits are still at a tipping point.

Lichvar has compared acid mine drainage to certain forms of cancer – you might not be able to cure it, but you can treat the symptoms.

"What really has to be understood," he told *The Tribune-Democrat* in 2020, "is that, although we're treating abandoned mine drainage, we've never eliminated one ounce of it. OK? Not one drop. There's just as much AMD pouring out of abandoned mines today as there was 25, 30, 50, 75 years ago. . . . "The source of abandoned mine drainage is deep underground, in mine pools and boreholes. You can't plug them because they'll just break out somewhere else. You can't make them go away."

That means constant work, and funding for that work, are needed to maintain the treatment systems that have helped clean up local waterways. Without them, streams such as Oven Run could quickly revert to their dead, polluted state.

"Without constant operation and maintenance, and future long-term operation and maintenance, everything that we've already achieved could be lost if that does not continue," Lichvar told Rucosky.

"That's a constant fight we in the conservation community are involved with on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly timeframe."

It's our belief – after observing the major economic and quality-of-life benefits that cleaner waterways have brought to this region – that acid mine drainage treatment systems are as much a part of our public infrastructure as roads and bridges, and that funding to build and maintain them must be as much of a priority.



Mike Maurer, left, and Dave Leiford, both representing SCRIP, discuss water quality improvements in the region with Somerset County High School students at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area at the Quemahoning Reservoir during an education event sponsored by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Joe Gorden, Malcolm Crittenden and Len Lichvar also participated. Over 140 students attended the event.

Photo by Len Lichvar

At the May 15 SCRIP Board of Directors meeting at Greenhouse Park, Len Lichvar, SCRIP Vice Chairman, was presented with a retirement cake. Len started with the Somerset Conservation District in 2005. Happy Retirement, Len!



Jerome # 1 Mine *(cont. from page 2)*

He immediately reported it to the Somerset Conservation District. District Manager Len Lichvar and Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick arrived on the scene an hour later. Len Lichvar was able to convey the situation to PADEP through the DEP 24 hour Hotline, thanks to the assistance of the Somerset County 911 Center.

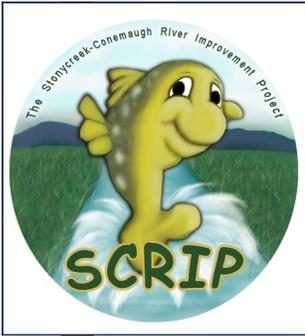
The District has been aware of the discharge for years. Because this section of the South Fork is a designated Class A wild trout water and multiple other projects have been implemented on the stream which have collectively improved the water quality, the District was in the process of preparing a Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) grant application to the PA DEP to pipe the discharge into the nearby Rock Tunnel AMD Treatment system. A pipeline would have to be constructed to convey the water to the system. Because of the now needed DEP emergency project at least a part of that piping will now be in place.

Through the emergency work, it has been determined that the elevation will allow the water to flow to Rock Tunnel, although the topography at the location will present some challenges to do so. Even if the District grant application is approved and moved forward, it will be several years until this source of AMD is finally removed from the waterway.

Another Mine Mishap



A discharge of AMD that blew out last year into the Stonycreek at Route 403 in Hollsopple, blew out again over the first weekend in June. *Photo by Len Lichvar*



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**Place
Stamp
Here**

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.

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- | | |
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People of SCRIP

New and Renewing Members

- Richard Blasic Family
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