

**Volume XXXII
Number 1
Winter 2025**

Save the Date:

March 26– [Dark Skies are for the Birds virtual program](#)

March 30–Higgins Run Litter Cleanup –meeting by the old Green Bridge at 9 am

April 8–[Birding Walk](#) at Penguin Court – 8:30 am

April 12– Mountain Laurel Trout Unlimited banquet at The Willow, 650 Airport Road, Johnstown
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Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

Federal Funding Freeze and Staff Cuts Affect Conservation Goals

by Len Lichvar

Note – The following information is my interpretation of recent events and does not represent the position or policy of any organization I am affiliated with, including SCRIP. For the record I am employed and volunteer in the public sector, but I am not and never have been a federal, state or county employee.

The recent federal initiative to pause and/or freeze federal funds, as well as the already implemented and planned reduction in the federal workforce, has created an upheaval as well as serious uncertainty in the natural resource public sector.

As a pre-cursor to all of this, I can verifiably tell you from my over 40 years of volunteer conservation public sector, that funding as well as staffing has never been excessive or overridden with waste, fraud or abuse. The exact opposite is the reality. We have never had sufficient funds, staffing or empowerment at the federal, state, county, non-profit or even volunteer levels. So when reductions of any sort are directed at natural resource conservation agencies, their already existing capacity is reduced even further, and that ripple effect can and will be felt at the local level.

Despite multiple challenges, because of organizations such as SCRIP and the Conservation Districts it has been built on, AMD impairment has been significantly reduced in watersheds such as the Stonycreek and many others.

What is lost to the general public, as well as the current elected decision makers

they elect, is that the positive attributes that the last over 30 years of AMD abatement have provided, would never have occurred without federal funding, technical assistance, and program management. The historic water quality improvements we have benefitted from right here in the Cambria-Somerset Region, are the hallmarks of public sector driven results. The much needed continued advancement of these efforts, as well as the essential operation and maintenance of the current infrastructure required, is also tied directly to public sector investment of funds and professional staff assistance.

On the positive side, although this entire situation is changing by the day, it appears that federal funds such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Funds (BIL) as well and the AML funds for AMD abatement and other previously committed and Congress approved budgeted federal natural resource program money is flowing again. On the negative side, the closing of 3 Office of Surface Mining offices, including Harrisburg, 3 Bureau of Reclamation offices, 45 U. S. Fish and Wildlife offices, 33 National Park offices, 49 Natural Resource Conservation Service offices, unknown number of U.S. Geological Service offices, and the loss of staff and assistance in these key resource Agencies, will further diminish the ability of local public sector groups to achieve their project goals.

(continued on page 4)

NatureWorks at BottleWorks 2025

NATURE WORKS

On Saturday, March 15, over twenty-four conservation and outdoor organizations offered interactive, “hands on” activities and education for children and adults at the annual NatureWorks event

from 10am-2pm at the BottleWorks. Officials counted 322 guests and 59 exhibitors for a total of 381 people in attendance. A great turnout for a beautiful sunny day, when outdoor fun might be more inviting.

Melissa Reckner and Sue Konvolinka, the organizers of the event, heard many positive comments and people appreciated the free tote bag that was distributed to attendees.

Guests had a variety of activities to choose from: practicing a turkey call, identifying animal tracks, viewing live reptiles and amphibians, taking a photo in a kayak, making a beautiful butterfly model to take home, or learning to tie fishing flies. Additional attractions gave attendees a chance to learn about local rivers, rail trails, and mountain bike trails.



SCRIP’s table offered children a chance to make iron oxide chalk recovered from a mine drainage treatment system. A simple mixture of iron oxide, plaster of Paris and water added to a candy mold,

created an interesting piece of chalk, in the form of a sea shell, leaf, or flower, that could be used to write on a slate board, the home driveway or a black sheet of construction paper. Since the chalk needs a couple days to fully dry, this is a “make-one, take-one” activity. Participants make one for someone else and take home a dry one that another person has made.

Guests were also able to view Lydia Mack’s scenic artwork or view a special screening of First Waves’ short videos, that offered a chance to learn about river surfing and/or documentary film making and editing.

The event is courtesy of BottleWorks and Brandywine Conservancy’s Penguin Court and is sponsored by the Allegheny chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Stonycreek Conemaugh River Improvement Project.

The Snyder family of Ligonier made their first trip to the event this year. Their children, Henry (6 yrs. old) and Graham (4 yrs. old) are shown here catching a fish (Fish and Boat Commission), learning about snakes (Cambria Co. Conservation District), and trying out a kayak (Benscreek Canoe Club).



Photos courtesy of Snyder family.

Apply Now to Become a Pennsylvania Master Naturalist!

by Melissa Reckner



Pennsylvania Master Naturalist (PMN) is a state-wide organization that introduces adults to a number of environmental topics from geology and ecology to ornithology and mammalogy during a 12-week training that consists of weekly classes and four Saturday field trips that are led by experts in their fields. After completion of the course, trainees have 11 months to secure 8 hours of Advanced Training and 30 hours of approved community service in order to become certified as a Master Naturalist. In subsequent years, Naturalists have to garner 12 hours of Advanced Training and just 20 hours of service annually to maintain their certification.

PMN is a fantastic way to learn more about your local ecosystems and the interconnectedness of species, including human's impact on the world around us. Participants gain a greater understanding and deeper interest in the natural world alongside others with similar passions and are encouraged to complete their service locally benefiting organizations with trained volunteers. Master Naturalists may serve on boards or committees of conservation organizations, organize litter cleanups, lead educational workshops, collect water quality data, complete community science projects, create newsletters and marketing materials for related events, and much more.

The Cambria County Conservation District will be hosting its second PMN training this fall, while Penguin Court will be hosting its sixth in Westmoreland County. You do not have to be a resident of the county in order to participate, particularly since surrounding counties do not yet offer the training. Find the training site and schedule that works best for you by **scanning the QR code above**. Then, apply to the program by April 25th to receive the early-bird discounted rate. Scholarships are available and space is limited, so don't delay in submitting your application.

Learn more about PMN at <http://www.pamasternaturalist.org>. For questions about the Cambria County training, contact Jackie Ritko at ritko@co.cambria.pa.us or, for the Westmoreland County training, contact Melissa Reckner at mreckner@brandywine.org.



The Pennsylvania Master Naturalist Program combines classroom and field work. *Photos by Melissa Reckner*

Federal Funds *(continued from page one)*

Despite the current concerns, the potential for much greater reduction or total elimination of federal funding and programs, is even more disconcerting. Although a continuing resolution has been passed by Congress to keep the federal government operating, at some point a new federal budget must be crafted. Every resource program and agency existence must be appropriated and obligated in the federal budget. If money is not appropriated, those programs and/or agencies will no longer exist. There will be no need to pause or reduce something that does not exist.

The clear current attempt to demonize the public sector, federal and all others for that matter, is simply an attempt to lay the groundwork for elimination, not just reductions. As someone who has dedicated a professional and volunteer career in the public sector, I take personal exception to that unjustified characterization.

Attempts to eliminate waste, excessive funding, fraud and other abuses, in both the private and public sectors, is certainly something most of us can all agree as a worthy cause. However, inaccurately impacting sectors where little to none of those issues exist, is not justifiable collateral damage, and that is also something most of us should agree on.

Additional information on this topic is here: [Federal Natural Resource Agency Impacts](#)

Save the Date

(cont. from page one)

April 19-Picking Up Paint Creek Litter Cleanup, 8:30 am meeting along Berwick Road.

May 4- Clear Shade Creek Litter Cleanup, 8:30/9 am meeting along Crum Road.

May 6 & 7- Que Days observance, Quemahoning Family Recreation Area, 9am-2:30 pm. Volunteers needed for high school students on fish stocking, building and installing habitat. Len Lichvar is the contact.

May 10- Youth fishing event, Shade Creek Watershed Association. Volunteers needed. Jeff Sarver is the contact.

May 15 -SCRIP board meeting, Greenhouse Park, 3 pm.



Native Plant Sale

Brandywine Conservancy’s Penguin Court preserve in Laughlintown will host its annual native plant sale this spring.

Online orders will be accepted throughout the month of April, and plant pickups will be scheduled for May 2 & 3 at Penguin Court.

Over 100 species of native perennials, shrubs and trees as well as some herbs and vegetable plants will be available for purchase.

The sale website will be accessible April 1

at <http://www.brandywine.org/conservancy/events>.

The Allegheny Front– Abandoned Mine Cleanup

Reid Frazer is a reporter for “The Allegheny Front.” In this story, he visits Reed Johnson, a man who has been trying for decades to get the state to clean up waste piles on his property, that are not only a danger to those walking in the area, but contribute to acidic waters (pH of 3) on Little Anderson Creek, a stream that runs through his property.

With the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, his property was to be one of the first abandoned mine cleanups in the state, using these funds. Then came the Executive Order, signed on January 20, 2025, that blocked any spending from the infrastructure law. This story was first broadcast on February 28, so updates may occur at any time.

[Abandoned Mine Cleanup Podcast](#)



Brad Clemenson has been involved in outdoor recreation for a long time and is responsible for many of the amenities we enjoy today. Join host, Mike Cook and Brad as they discuss what he is working on now.

[Brad Clemenson podcast](#)

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.

_____ Student (\$6)	_____ Individual (\$15)	_____ Family (\$20)
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_____ Sponsor (\$500)	_____ Lifetime (\$1000)	

Part 2. Select Option A OR Option B:

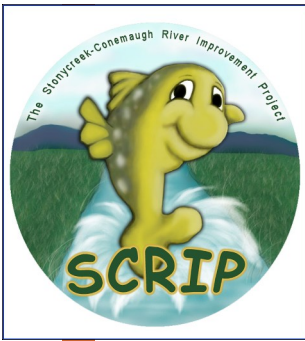
_____ A. I am fine receiving an electronic version of the newsletter for the cost listed above for my membership level. My email address is: _____

(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.* Send donations to: **SCRIP, P.O. Box 164, Windber, PA 15963**



SCRIP
P.O. Box 164
Windber, PA
15963

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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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