

# KISKI- CONEMAUGH

RIVER  
OF THE YEAR  
2000



## a River Revival

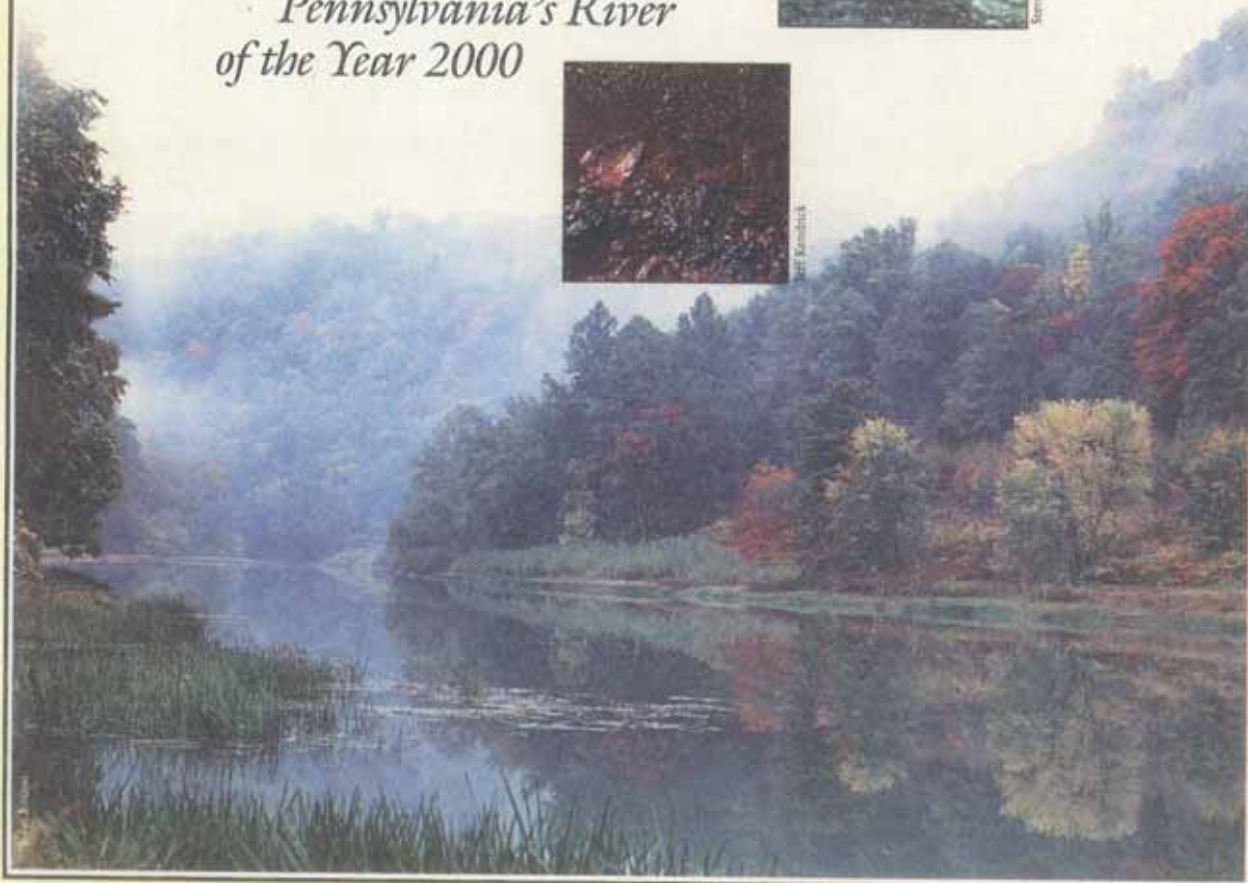
*Pennsylvania's River  
of the Year 2000*



Steve Hollingshead

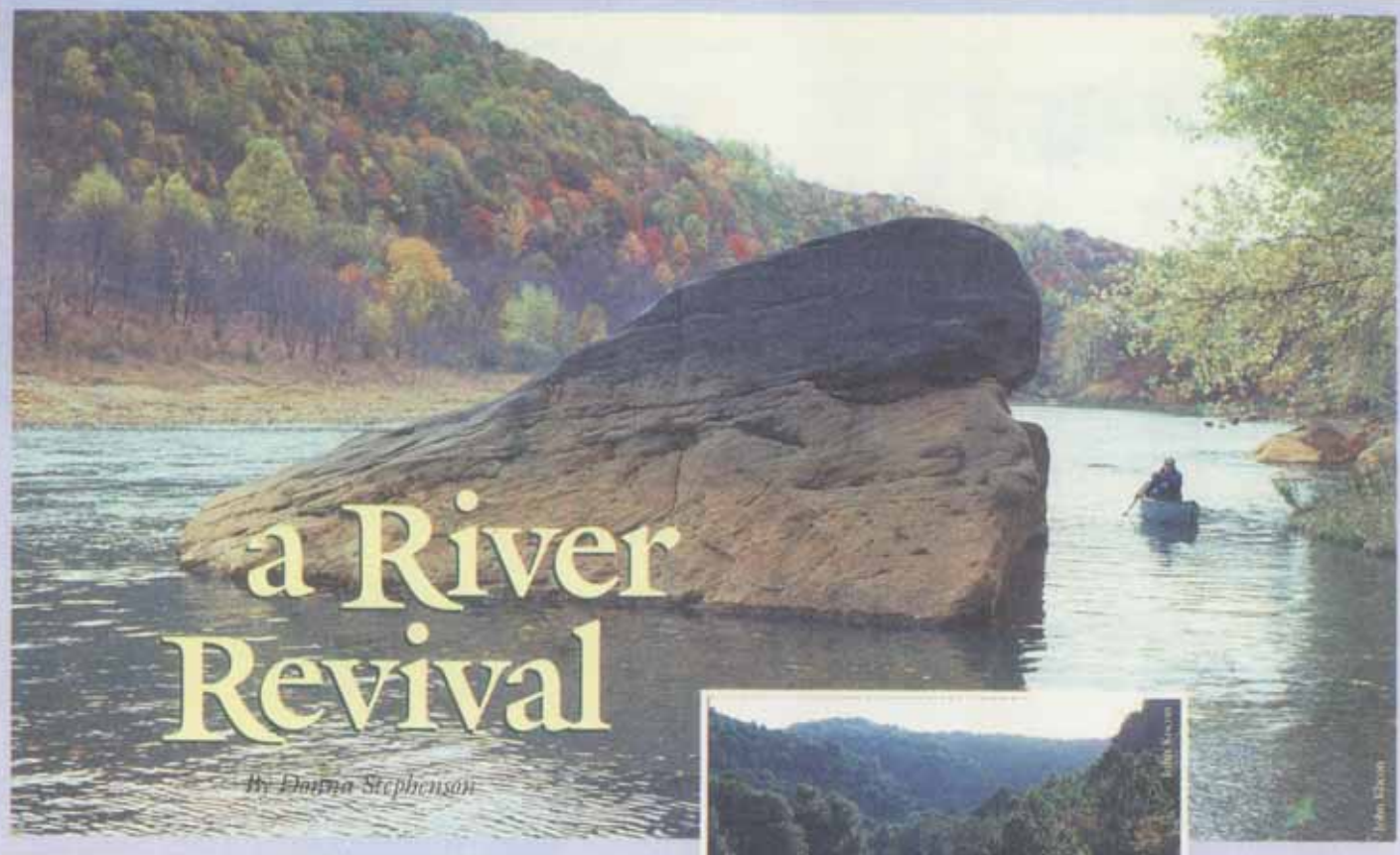


Jeff Kowalski



*(Large photo) The Kiskiminetas upstream from Apollo.  
(Upper right) A kayaker on the headwaters in northern  
Somerset County. (Center) Light turns AMD into art.*

Supplement to The Kiskiminetas, The Dispatch, Leader-Times, Latrobe Bulletin, The Ligonier Echo, The Cresson-Gallitzin Mauliner, The Ebensburg News Leader, The Nanty Glo Journal, The Portage Dispatch, The Star-Courier, The Mountaineer-Herald, Indiana Gazette, The Tribune-Democrat, The New Republic, The Daily American, Valley News Dispatch, Westsylvania



# A River Revival

*By Donna Stephenson*

People, who dream of a cleaner environment, envision a day when the Kiskiminetas and Conemaugh Rivers once again flow clear. A day when fish are abundant. A day when animal and plant life thrive along the banks. A day when people see the rivers as places to spend their leisure time or earn their living.

That day may not be far away.

It's true that the Kiskiminetas and Conemaugh jointly can lay claim to the dubious title of Pennsylvania's most polluted river basin. But the rivers' image as dead, industrial flumes is starting to change.

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has designated the Kiski-Conemaugh as Pennsylvania's Feature River of the Year 2000. "A River Revival" is the theme of a yearlong celebration.

The two rivers, as local historian Bill Dzombak of Latrobe points out, are really one river with two names. Both the Kiskiminetas – called simply the "Kiski" by locals – and the Conemaugh were named by the first people to settle along their banks: American Indians, who fished the pristine waters and traveled in canoes.

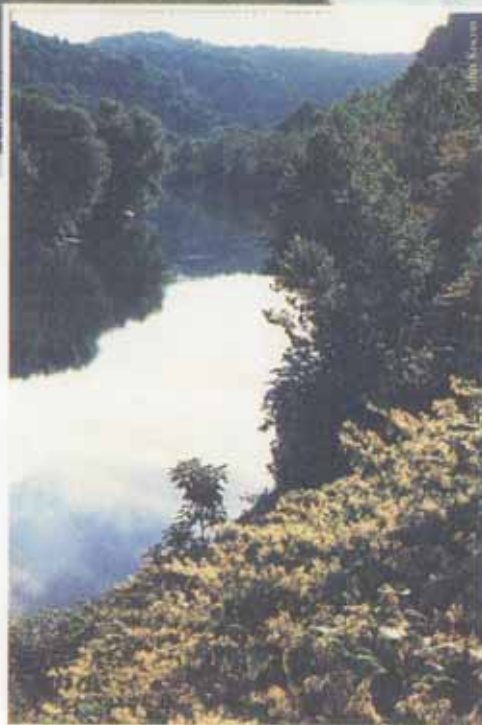
There's some debate about the meaning of

the names. The consensus is that Conemaugh means "otter creek." But translations of "Kiskiminetas" are wide ranging. Some say it means "cut spirit"; others put their money on "make daylight." Local activist Don Stevenson of Apollo favors a third meaning, "plenty of walnuts," for the trees that once lined the banks.

"They say there used to be walnuts floating down the river," says Stevenson.

Primary tributaries for the river originate high on the Allegheny Ridge; from Cresson Summit, where the Little Conemaugh River flows southwest toward the valley, and from the town of Berlin in Somerset County, where the Stonycreek River begins its northwesterly descent. In Johnstown, the Little Conemaugh and Stonycreek merge to become the Conemaugh River.

The Conemaugh flows unhindered through



*Above, a canoeist paddles the Kiski near the mouth of Roaring Run upriver of Apollo along the Armstrong/Westmoreland County Line. Left, a Kiski River pool gleams in the twilight. This location also is near Roaring Run.*

the valley until it meets the first obstacle in its westerly path, Laurel Ridge, where it cuts through at the Conemaugh Gap. Soon after, the Conemaugh comes up against Chestnut Ridge, where it carves a channel called Packsaddle Gap. Leaving the mountains behind, the Conemaugh continues past Blairsville in Indiana County and is joined by Blacklick Creek.

At Saltsburg the Conemaugh meets up with Loyalhanna Creek and becomes the Kiskiminetas River. The Kiski heads northwest along the Armstrong/Westmoreland County

line past Vandergrift and flows into the Allegheny River just above Freeport. From the headwaters of the Stonycreek to the mouth of the Kiski is a stretch of 122 miles.

### River of the Year

**T**he River of the Year celebration encompasses the whole basin, which drains an area comprising 1,887 square miles and supports a population of more than 320,000. Up and down the Kiski-Conemaugh, and along its tributaries, people are celebrating the rebirth of a waterway that has suffered many ills – the worst being a near-fatal poisoning by abandoned-mine drainage (AMD) from coal mines.

Remediation projects are counteracting the poison, restoring water quality and promoting

recreation and business, thanks to the efforts of a coalition of government agencies and nonprofit groups that have teamed up to form the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance.

That commitment to revitalization was a key factor in the Kiski-Conemaugh's selection as River of the Year, says Marian Hrubovcak of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which bestowed the title. Hrubovcak heads DCNR's Conservation Partnerships Division.

"This is the first river ever designated that is severely impacted by acid mine drainage," says Rob McCombie, K-C Alliance director, who observes that the selection of a highly polluted river for River of the Year is unusual.

McCombie believes the Kiski-Conemaugh is receiving this attention because of changes

in local attitudes and the economy of the river basin. Residents are rediscovering the river for recreation and launching a variety of clean-up efforts, while the local economy is shifting away from coal and steel toward tourism.

The River of the Year celebration's main event was a weeklong, state-sponsored River Sojourn from June 3rd to the 9th. The Kiski-Conemaugh also is featured on a poster issued by the state.

"The whole reason behind doing this is to get people involved in the natural resources around them," says McCombie. "We're trying to instill a sense of pride in the waterways."

Hrubovcak adds, "In essence it draws attention to the river and hopefully promotes tourism and enhancement of the economy." The River of the Year program also is intended to raise public awareness that "this is a special river that can provide recreation and is in need of stewardship."

### The Water under the Bridge

**S**tewardship of the river originally was in the hands of American Indians, whose artifacts date back to 1300 AD. Indians who arrived in the Conemaugh Valley around 1720, according to historian Dzombak, originally had settled along the Delaware River – from which came their name – then pushed west to the Allegheny River as European settlers arrived in the New World.

From the Allegheny, some of them moved up the Kiski-Conemaugh valley. On the lower Kiski, they established a village between Vandergrift and Leechburg near the present site of a sewage plant. Others continued upstream to Johnstown and settled at the Point, where the Little Conemaugh and Stonycreek Rivers join.

"The Indians took fish from the river, including sturgeon up to six feet long, and of course canoed the stream to stay in touch with their folks on the Allegheny – at least until that group, too, was driven into Ohio and eventually to Oklahoma," Dzombak writes. "Before the Indians moved into the Conemaugh Valley, Western Pennsylvania

*Continued on next page*

*Above, canoe sojourners launch onto the Kiskiminnetas near Apollo in 1999. This year, sojourners came from three states to experience the Kiski-Conemaugh during the Pennsylvania River of the Year Sojourn. Below, volunteers retrieve discarded tires from the Kiski. Similar stream cleanup efforts are becoming increasingly common all along the Kiski-Conemaugh as people rediscover the river and its attributes.*



## Fort Wallace

In 1778, Fort Wallace, built near the conjunction of McGee's Run and the Conemaugh, had come under the attack of the Shawnee. The fort was a private one, constructed by Richard Wallace to act as a salt storehouse and to offer some measure of protection to the handful of settlers who were then setting up cabins along the banks of the river.

The Europeans, technically, were settling there illegally. By all rights, the surrounding countryside here still belonged to the natives, who justifiably wanted the intruders off their lands. The "defenders" of the fort were Scots-Irish, a fierce, independent and determined people who had come to a new land clearly on a course to become a new nation.

The Scots-Irish had crossed the cold Atlantic, leaving behind what they had known in their

hearts was an endlessly tightening straightjacket of European political and religious domination. The Penns had promised autonomy, free speech and—best yet—freedom of religion. So the newcomers meant to fight for these gifts against any and all odds. A collision was inevitable and unfortunate.

The fighting at Fort Wallace was intense that day. Robust clansmen, cut off from the safety of the stockade, advanced shoulder to shoulder over the arch of a narrow footbridge. Crossing a deep ravine they fired, reloaded, fired again; then confronted their opponents hand to hand, using the butts of their guns as clubs, next knives, then fists - and, at the end, hurling their adversaries into the dark shadows below.

Almost no one today remembers the story of Fort Wallace along the Conemaugh. Yet it remains one of the many small threads which—for better or worse—has been woven permanently into the larger American tapestry.

had been an unoccupied hunting ground for hundreds of years.

"The [Delaware] Indians were here only 20 years or so, and were pretty much gone by 1750. Gone too, by then, were the river otters who used to slide playfully down the muddy banks of the Conemaugh. Trappers quickly killed off the otter population, evidently,

because they are never mentioned by early Europeans who settled in the valley."

The Indians were displaced by settlers who moved west from Fort Bedford to Somerset and Cambria Counties in the mid- to late-1700s. Those who came to Johnstown established their own village at the Point, called "Conemaugh Old Town."

The river became a transportation corridor in the 1800s because of the east-west path it carved through dense forest and mountain ridges. It was navigable only on a limited basis, though; often being either too shallow or too high and swift, depending on the time of year and weather conditions.

The builders of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal used the Kiski-Conemaugh as a route for the Philadelphia-to-Pittsburgh system but dug the canal next to the river for the most part, entering it in the deeper channels. To link the canal between Hollidaysburg and Johnstown, a unique rail-car pulley system called the Allegheny Portage Railroad was constructed to transport goods and passengers over the Allegheny Front.

"Even the canal wasn't dependable because of droughts in summer and freezing in winter," Stevenson notes.

The river's uncertain flow led to the construction of dams to feed the canal system. One of those dams, eventually purchased by a group of wealthy Pittsburgh industrialists organized as the South Fork Fishing & Hunting Club, would gain infamy in 1889 when the dam failed and sent a wall of water crashing down the Little Conemaugh to Johnstown, destroying everything in its path.

*Right, the spillway of the old South Fork Dam was a popular gathering spot for the gentry of the South Fork Fishing & Hunting Club. The spillway, while scenic, was inadequate. Its deficiencies were a contributing factor to the dam's failure and the resulting 1889 Johnstown Flood. Below, the clubhouse of the South Fork club as it appeared then. Minus the annex on the far end, the clubhouse still stands today.*

Louis S. Clark/Used by permission of Virginia Anthony Soule



After operating for several decades, the canal system yielded to the Pennsylvania Railroad, which also followed the course of the rivers. And just as the canal system dominated the first half of the 19th Century, railroads were the transportation of choice in the second half.

Reliable transportation spawned industrial growth in previously isolated areas. With year-round access to markets now assured, the Kiski-Conemaugh valley saw the rise of the iron industry and later steel making. Railroads were also a big customer for the steel industry, which made rails for westward expansion.



Coal mining during the hand-loading era. Today, abandoned and flooded deep mines void dissolved metals and acid into many of the waterways in the river basin.

An industry that fueled the Industrial Revolution was also taking advantage of the valley's natural resources. Coal mining peaked in the late-19th and early-20th Centuries. In that era, western Pennsylvania coalfields, according to one estimate, produced about one-fourth of the nation's coal.

Not only was the region rich in coal, but the topography of the Kiski-Conemaugh Valley provided easy access. "Black gold" was extracted from drift mines cut into the valley's walls. Shafts were dug and thousands of miles of underground tunnels were built to remove the mineral from deep mines.

While coal mining's boom period ended with World War II, the legacy of unregulated coal mining remains to this day.

### The River Killer

That legacy is abandoned-mine drainage or AMD, a highly toxic discharge that made the Kiski-Conemaugh one of the state's most polluted river basins. While AMD has been identified as the river's single-biggest pollutant, there are others.

What's happened to the Kiski-Conemaugh can be compared to what happens to a human body after decades of neglect and abuse.

## Main Line Canal

During the late 1820s and early 1830s, canals were perceived to be an ideal way to solve Pennsylvania's overland shipping and transportation shortcomings. Because they needed a ready source of water to remain full, the canals followed the rivers. And because it ran generally east to west, the Conemaugh was an obvious early choice to use as a part of the route of what was to be called the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal.

The need to work engineering marvels abounded along the entire length of the Main Line, but one of the most interesting was seven miles upstream from Saltsburg at a place where the river made a great, omega-shaped loop.

Engineers realized that tunneling through the narrowest part of the neck of the ridge above the river would cut some three miles off the overall trip, saving considerable amounts of canal travel time. Tunneling began in 1828.

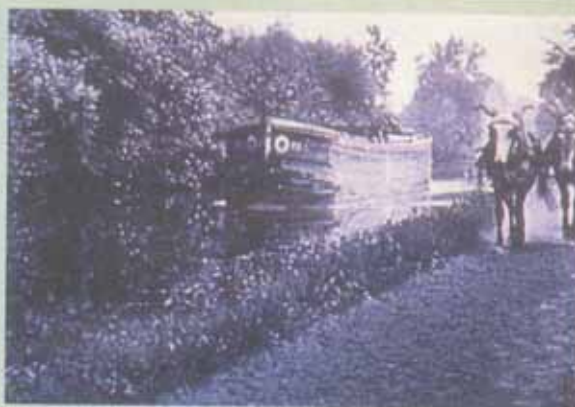
In all, the tunnel eventually ran 817 feet through the mountain. Then an aqueduct was built at the western portal to carry the canal over the river to a point downstream better suited for the reunification of the river and canal.

When it was completed in June of 1829, the length of the tunnel and aqueduct together was over 1,300 feet. At the time, it was the third and longest tunnel that had ever been constructed in the United States.

In 1837, an Englishwoman named Harriet Martineau kept a journal of her journey upstream from Pittsburgh, and of the Conemaugh tunnel wrote:

*"After having left the Kiskiminetas behind us, we crossed the Conemaugh by an aqueduct, which continued its course through a long dark tunnel, piercing the heart of the mountain. The reflection of the blue light behind us on the straight line of water in this cavern made a beautiful picture."*  
Dickens' Passage

During the peak years of use, from about 1830 until 1850, the western division of the Main Line Canal along the Kiski-Conemaugh basin was host to thousands of travelers; some famous, others obscure, and one of them this writer's great-grandfather, who went through in 1832, heading for adventure in the west as a boy of 13. It is frustrating that he left no account of that passage other than having made it.



Contemporary accounts by more discursive travelers must serve. At least in this there is some satisfaction that one of them was none other than Charles Dickens.

Dickens made the canal trip down from Johnstown to the Packsaddle Gap and beyond in 1842, while on a six-month tour of America. He was then 30, and his narrative and descriptive powers as a writer were at their peak. Of this journey Dickens wrote:

*"Sometimes at night, the way wound through some lonely gorge, like a mountain pass in Scotland, shining and coldly glittering in the light of the moon, and so closed in by high steep hills all round, that there seemed to be no egress save through the narrower path by which we had come, until one rugged hill-side seemed to open, and shutting the moonlight as we passed into its gloomy throat, wrapped our new course in shade and darkness."*

*"There was much in this mode of travelling which I heartily enjoyed at the time, and look back upon with great pleasure. Even the running up, bare-necked, at five o'clock in the morning, from the tainted cabin to the dirty deck; scooping up the icy water; plunging one's head into it, and drawing it out, all fresh and glowing with the cold; was a good thing."*

*"The fast, brisk walk upon the towing-path, between that time and breakfast, when every vein and artery seemed to tingle with health; the exquisite beauty of the opening day, when light came gleaming off from everything; the lazy motion of the boat, when one lay idly on the deck, looking through, rather than at, the deep blue sky; the gliding on at night, soundlessly past frowning hills, sullen with dark trees, and sometimes angry in one red burning spot high up, where unseen men lay crouching round a fire; the shining out of the bright stars undisturbed by noise of wheels or steam, or any other sound than the limpid rippling of the water as the boat went on: all these were pure delights."*

— R.C. Hamilton

Mistreatment left the river basin's arteries clogged by industrial, agricultural and raw sewage deposits, and its blood poisoned by metal-laden acidic water from the mines.

Not surprisingly, cleaning up the river basin is a job of mammoth proportions – and a challenge that has been taken on by some brave public agencies and private organizations. The latter group includes a handful of mostly volunteer watershed groups: the

Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project, Conemaugh Valley Conservancy, Blacklick Creek Watershed Association, Loyalhanna Watershed Association and Roaring Run Watershed Association.

They've come together under the umbrella of the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance, which also includes four other organizations: Cambria County Conserva-

*Continued on next page*

tion and Recreation Authority, Southern Alleghenies Conservancy, Somerset County Conservancy and the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation.

Working together and separately, all of these organizations are bringing the Kiski-Conemaugh back to life.

## River Revival

One of the success stories is Somerset County's Oven Run remediation project, which treats mine drainage flowing into the Stonycreek. Oven Run's location in the upper end of the Kiski-Conemaugh basin is particularly significant because the farther upstream a project is, the more water it affects downstream.

With water as acidic as vinegar, Oven Run killed the Stonycreek for seven miles, from where Oven Run entered the river south of Hooversville to the Stonycreek's confluence with Shade Creek north of Hollsopple.

The \$5 million Oven Run project comprises six passive treatment (wetland) sites, five of which are either in operation or expected to be completed this year. A sixth site is in the preliminary stages, according to Len Lichvar, executive director of the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy and chairman of the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP). Southern Alleghenies is a private, nonprofit corporation involved in resource conservation in a six-county area and SCRIP is an unincorporated action group.

Perhaps the most-visited Oven Run site is along PA Route 403 just south of Hooversville. Traditionally known as "Site D" but recently renamed "Oak Trail," this mine-drainage abatement project includes an interpretive trail that owes its existence to the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited, a cold-water conservation organization, which acquired the funding and provided the manpower to build the trail.

The water flows under PA 403 from a hillside across the road, coming out as a yellowish red stream. The yellow indicates the presence of sulfur in the water and the red indicates iron. Metals in the mines are dissolved in the acidic water underground. When the water emerges, it is oxygenated and the metals start to drop out. The metals stain the channel carved by the water as it moves down the hillside toward the Stonycreek.

The discharge at Site D flows into a holding pond where more metals drop out, then



moves through pipes to a second pond, where layers of limestone and compost at the bottom make the acidic water more alkaline.

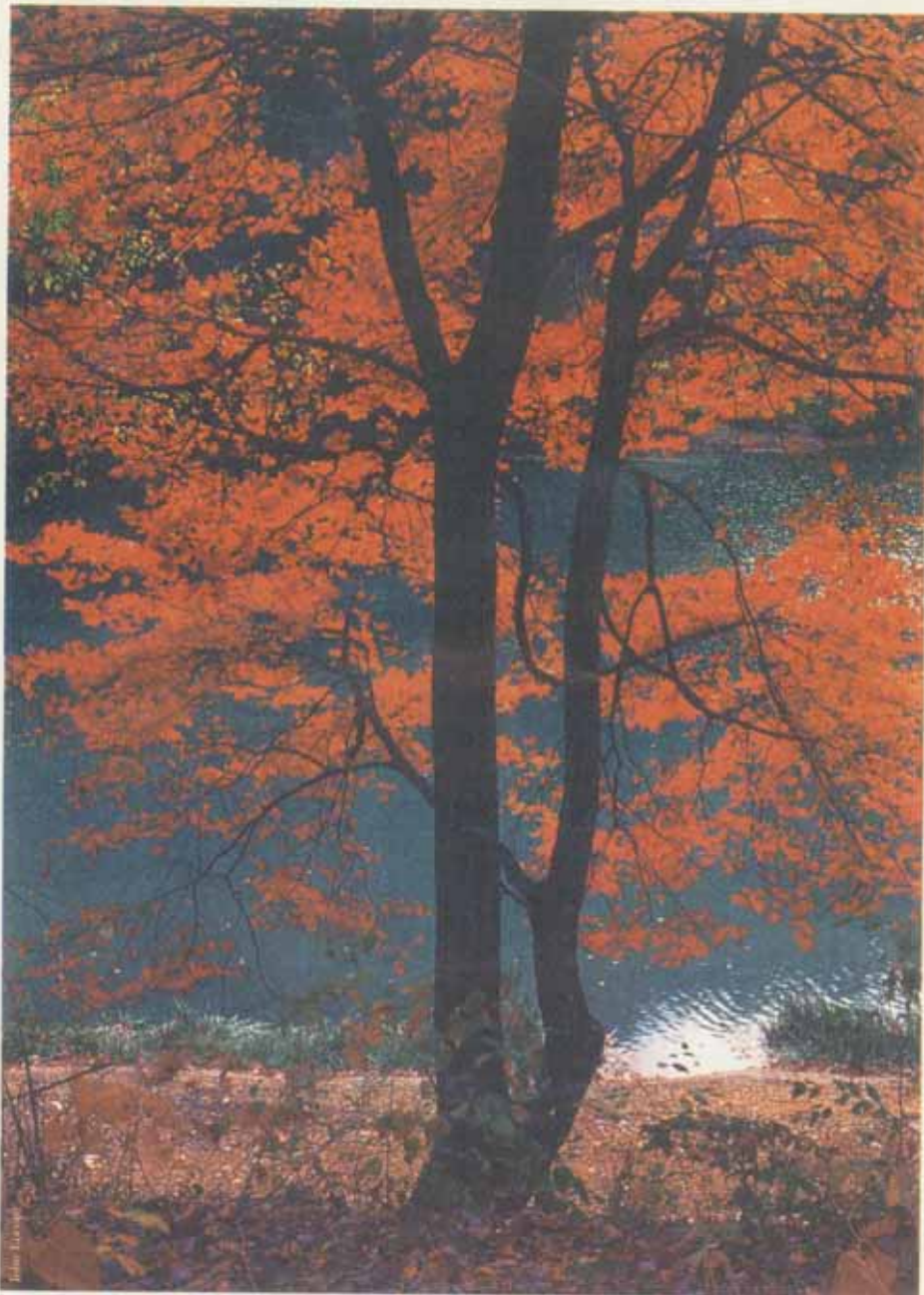
The water then flows into a second set of wetlands that basically duplicate the first set. Further settling and neutralization occurs before the water reaches a final, finishing pond – this one designed to show how the treated water now supports life. The Trout Unlimited chapter and the Jenner Community Sportsmen's Club have stocked the finishing pond with trout – which thrive there.

Acidity and alkalinity are measured in pH levels, with a reading of 7 being neutral. The lower the pH, the more acidic the water. At Site D, the untreated water has a pH level of 3.5. When it finally comes out in the

*Top, the orange residue called "yellow boy" is caused by iron sulfide, which drops out of acidic water when it comes in contact with oxygen. Below, settling ponds at Oven Run Sites B & C, where acidity is neutralized and metals drop out before reaching the Stonycreek.*

Stonycreek, the pH measures in the 6.5-to-7.2 range, "which is much more hospitable to the existence of aquatic life," notes Lichvar.

Revitalization work within the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin began in earnest over the past decade or so, thanks to a combination of emerging technology and growing interest in reducing the impact of AMD. That's when nearly all the area watershed groups formed. The notable exception is the Loyahanna Watershed Association which, at just one year shy of 30, is one of the oldest in the state.



## Stonycreek and Little Conemaugh

**S**CRIP has identified 250 sources of AMD within the Kiski-Conemaugh watershed, discharging from one gallon to 4,500 gallons per minute (gpm). Discharges have left much of the Little Conemaugh devoid of fish. And although trout thrive in the upper reaches of the Stonycreek, that's not the case downstream from US Route 30 where only pockets of trout and a few acid-tolerant species survive.

Dave Sewak, a "circuit rider" for the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation and the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and an outdoorsman, has fished area streams for years. He recalls catching trout in Bens Creek, a Stonycreek tributary, with his grandfather but adds that for bass fishing they had to go elsewhere. As he drives along PA Route 601 toward the US 30 intersection at Ferrelton, he points out Quemahoning Creek, which is becoming a marginal trout fishery.

The culprit here was not acid but metals, which smothered aquatic life and left the water unfit to drink. Nearby is the old Jenners mine complex, which operated in the early 1900s.

Today a retention pond adjacent to a sealed shaft and former mine building is part of a passive treatment system, which provides a backup water supply for Jenners and Jenner Township. Because of the Jenners discharge, the two municipalities must buy water from neighboring Jennerstown and so they have a vested interest in the continuing cleanup.

The same is true for Hooversville, which gets its water from the Stonycreek. Folks who live there must foot the bill for expensive chemical treatment, a situation that is being improved by the Oven Run project.

Several projects are helping to restore life to the Little Conemaugh. One of them is a passive wetland treatment system on Bear Rock Run near Lilly, Washington Township, where the site is located, assisted the Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority with the project. The 2.5-acre site treats discharge from an abandoned clay mine.

Another target for treatment is Sulfur Creek in Adams Township, where a borehole spews AMD at a rate of up to 1,700 gpm. The highly acidic water, whose pH level is below 3.4, is packed with iron, manganese and aluminum. Initially the discharge is being treated on a small scale using limestone trenches and ponds and will be enlarged if that

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## A River Basin Alliance

**T**he groups popped up independently, but their efforts are now being coordinated through the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance. Through funding acquired by the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy, a founding partner, the alliance created a river basin conservation plan that spells out what needs to be done to revitalize the Kiski-Conemaugh.

In addition to alliance members, numerous other individuals and local, state and federal government agencies are involved including U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha, D-12th.

*Nature is reversing the ravages of 20th Century industry with help from organizations within the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin and many volunteers. This maple tree can be found along the Kiski near the Roaring Run Trail.*

"Congressman Murtha has been instrumental in promoting the rivers the last couple of years," says the alliance's Rob McCombie.

An impressive amount of money has been spent or committed to restoring the Kiski-Conemaugh. Brad Clemenson, Murtha's communications director, has compiled a funding list that totals more than \$13 million. Clemenson adds that the funding list is by no means complete.

Still, much remains to be done.

# KISKI-CONEMAUGH RIVER BASIN

*Pennsylvania's River of the Year 2000*



## SUBBASINS:



Blacklick Watershed



Conemaugh Main  
Stem Watershed



Little Conemaugh  
Watershed



Loyalhanna Watershed



Kiskiminetas Main  
Stem Watershed



Stonycreek Watershed

## SITES:

- ① Conemaugh River Lake/Dam
- ② Packsaddle Gap
- ③ Conemaugh Gap
- ④ Livermore Cemetery
- ⑤ Fort Wallace
- ⑥ 1889 Johnstown Flood National Memorial
- ⑦ Trux Discharge
- ⑧ Monastery Run Discharge
- ⑨ Quemahoning Creek Discharge
- ⑩ Oven Run Discharge
- ⑪ Central City Discharge
- ⑫ St. Michael Discharge
- ⑬ Sulfur Creek Discharge
- ⑭ Bear Rock Run Discharge
- ⑮ Webster Discharge
- ⑯ Lower Yellow Creek Discharge
- ⑰ Two Lick Creek Discharge



5 0 5 10 Miles



Environmental Information Services-Windber, PA

## Conemaugh River Dam

It is a lake that exists only when the flow of the river is withheld at Conemaugh Dam to prevent flooding downstream. Yet normally, this is a landscape of strange, almost unearthly beauty, almost as if one had come across a small parting of a small Red Sea.

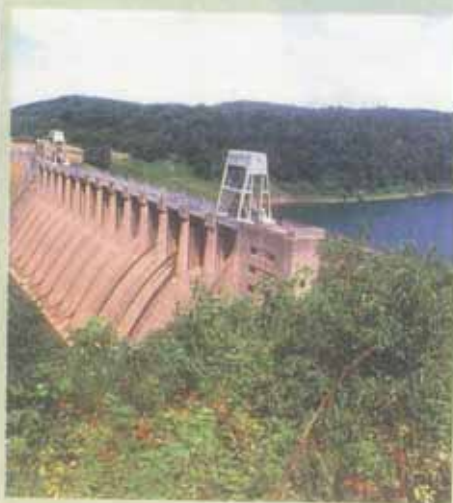
There are marshlands and mudflats here, ribbons and braids of watery channels and subchannels working their ways through level expanses in concert with the slow flow of the Conemaugh through its true, anciently established riverbed.

There are no living structures here, for nothing permanent can be built upon the floor of a lake which comes and goes according to the Earth's rhythms. Four old stone bridges remain, which once carried the railroad before the dam was built. But they were abandoned, and the rail bed raised in the 1950s, to conform to the rim of a lake which is only sometimes there.

This flood plain is, in its essence, a modern treasure. Mere minutes from the coursing traffic of U.S. Route 22, there is great calm, profound isolation. Only the sounds of the lapping river water and the high winds—crows and hawks—can be heard. Here, too, is evidence that the river system has begun to live again: a glimpse of herons, miles distant, taking long, slow wing strokes across a full quarter of the compass against the distant hills.

To see the Conemaugh River Lake bed, in its silence, is to begin to comprehend great measures of time.

—R.C. Hamilton



# A River Revival *continued from page 7*

effort succeeds. It is the area's first project involving large borehole discharges.

Another project under development involves what's acknowledged as the single worst source of pollution in the Little Conemaugh basin: the St. Michael mine shaft. The discharge, which has rendered the river's South Fork lifeless, would be diverted and treated as part of a hydroelectric system proposed by Monroeville developer Paul C. Rizzo Associates. The pump storage system would generate electricity during peak demand.

### The Main Stem

**T**he Conemaugh Valley Conservancy, in addition to its roles as facilitator and fund-raiser, is making strides in developing the recreation potential of the river basin. The group has led efforts to establish the Kiski-Conemaugh Greenway, defined in a feasibility study as a "corridor of land that conserves natural, recreational and historical resources."

Originally conceived in a 1994 Army Corps of Engineers study as the Conemaugh River Greenway, the concept was extended upstream to the start of the Little Conemaugh and downstream to the mouth of the Kiski. The 89-mile corridor would be part of the Pittsburgh-to-Harrisburg Greenway, which has been designated by the White House as Pennsylvania's Millennium Legacy Trail.

The conservancy is also developing trails in the basin. This summer, construction is expected to begin on a trail at Conemaugh River Dam downstream from Blairsville. The 3.3-mile trail follows an abandoned rail bed.

"It crosses four historic Pennsylvania Railroad stone arch bridges, so it will be a real scenic trail," says the CVC's Mike Quinn.

Another trail in the works will extend seven miles on the Conemaugh River and Loyalhanna Creek in the Saltsburg area, following an old rail corridor donated to CVC by Consolidation Coal Company.

Although recreation will continue to be a focus, Quinn sees diversification in the conservancy's future.

"CVC will probably be playing a more direct role in water-conservation projects in addition to the recreation stuff," he says.

For example, the conservancy acquired state funds for a feasibility study to convert five

private reservoirs, including the huge Quemahoning Dam in Somerset County, to public use. Those reservoirs, managed by a Bethlehem Steel Corporation subsidiary called Manufacturers Water Company, will be purchased by Cambria and Somerset Counties and operated by the newly created Cambria-Somerset Authority.

Lichvar is clearly excited about the reservoirs' potential for both public recreation and water conservation.

"The acquisition of Manufacturers Water Company is the greatest conservation effort ever enacted in the history of this region," he says, "and I think this will be proven out in years to come.

"This whole initiative has opened eyes across the state about public-private partnerships and what can happen."

### Blacklick

**S**uch public-private partnerships include mining companies such as Britt Energies, Inc. of Indiana, which is removing coal refuse as part of a five-phase restoration of Lower Yellow Creek, a project sponsored by the Blacklick Creek Watershed Association.

Like Lichvar, Dr. Bob Eppley, who heads Blacklick's technical committee, credits advances in technology for the surge in water-restoration efforts.

"This technology is really blooming," says Eppley, an environmental scientist. "Many things are happening."

Among those many things are six active projects and at least a half-dozen proposals in the Blacklick Creek watershed's 420 sq. miles, where 80 sources of AMD have been identified.

The massive Yellow Creek project alone is both costly and time-consuming. Phase One carries a \$242,000 price tag, and the remaining stages are expected to cost \$2 million. All involve a mere three miles of stream—but a severely polluted three miles.

Yellow Creek, from the PA Route 954 bridge south of Indiana to where it is joined by Two Lick Creek, is choked with acid mine drainage from abandoned deep mines, coal refuse piles and poorly reclaimed strip mines. After years of planning and another year or so of construction, Phase One is done. A passive, vertical flow system now is operating.

Phase Two is among six projects for which the Blacklick group has sought financing under



Heavy equipment moves stone during the construction phase of a vertical flow system along the lower Yellow Creek on state game lands near Indiana.

Governor Tom Ridge's Growing Greener initiative, which will dole out \$650 million over five years for environmental protection and improvements. Funding of \$787,000 has been awarded for projects at Two Lick Creek near Clymer and Two Lick Creek Reservoir. Edison Mission Energy, the owner of the Homer City Generating Station, currently is donating \$13,000 a month to continue treating two discharges at the reservoir.

"Both discharges, if untreated, would be sufficient to destroy the reservoir," Eppley says, estimating it would take only three to six months to kill off the fish population.



An AmeriCorps worker gets water samples from Blacklick Creek near Vintondale. AMD here arises in artesian fashion right in the streambed.

The Blacklick group is a partner, along with the Cambria County Conservation and Recreation Authority and the US Army Corps of Engineers, in another critical cleanup currently in the design and funding stages. At peak flow, acid mine drainage is pouring into the South Branch of Blacklick Creek at a rate of 800 gpm, according to Eppley. It's coming from a large mine discharge known as the Webster Discharge, and a series of coal refuse or boney piles known as the Lorain and Bethlehem Piles in Nanty Glo.

"From Nanty Glo downstream, the South Branch is virtually without life," Eppley says. "The only pockets of life are where freshwater tribs [tributaries] come down from the hillside."

Nanty Glo, besides being the site of a major pollution source, is also the eastern terminus of the Ghost Town Trail, which stretches 12 miles to Dilltown in Indiana County. Projects are extending the trail in three directions.

The Ghost Town Trail takes its name from several coal towns where mines operated in the early 1900s. Site markers along the trail indicate where the towns once stood.

A remainder of a related industry, iron making, is one of the trail's attractions. Eliza Furnace at Vintondale, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is regarded as one of the best-preserved hot-blast furnaces in Pennsylvania. Built in the mid-19th Century, it operated for only three years.



The Ghost Town Trail was developed on an abandoned railroad right-of-way between Dilltown and Nanty Glo along Blacklick Creek. Efforts currently are underway to expand the trail on both ends and along its Rexis Branch.

## AMD&ART

Finding beauty in the beast is the mission of a private, nonprofit corporation known as AMD&ART.

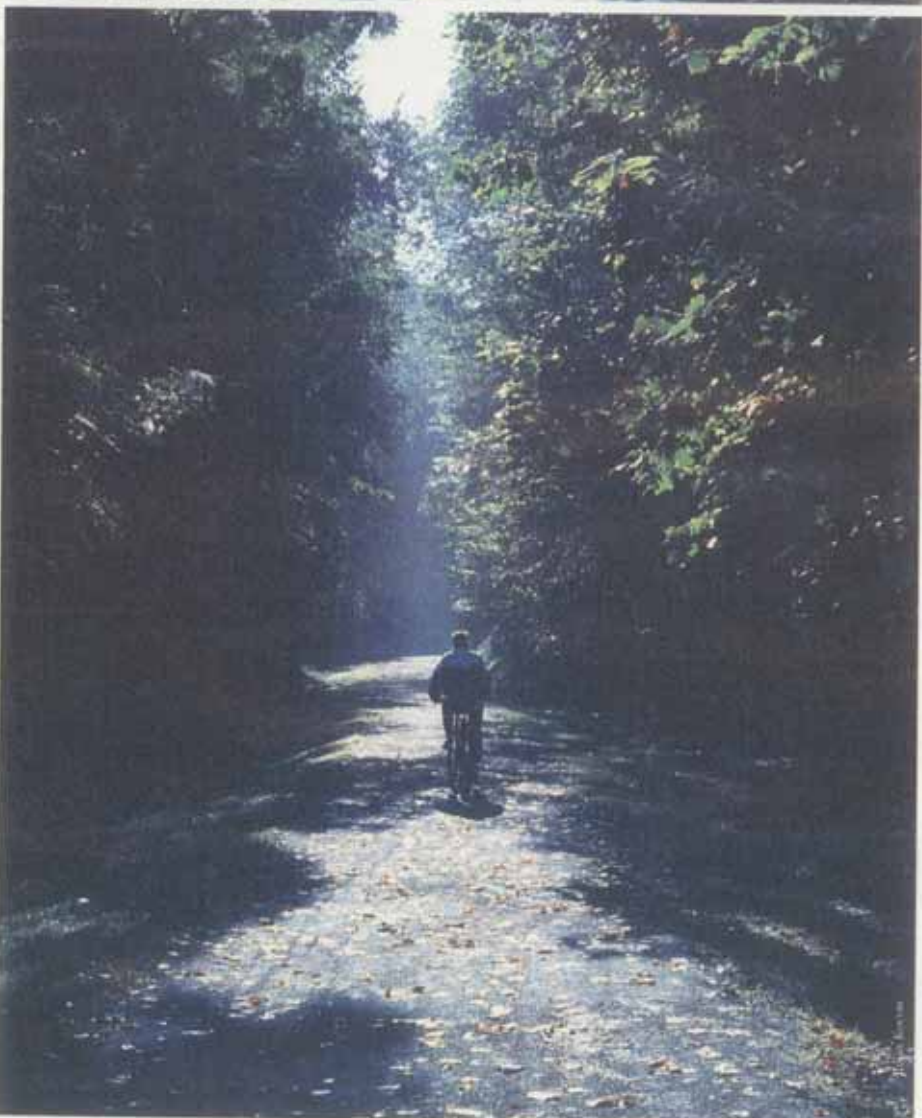
This group of AmeriCorps workers, students and volunteers under the guidance of T Allan Comp, is tackling three of the region's ugliest and most-toxic AMD sites. In addition to removing the pollutants from the river basin, the group's goals include coming up with innovative, attractive treatment systems that will draw visitors, and developing coalitions and techniques that can be duplicated elsewhere.

In Vintondale, AMD&ART is taking a 35-acre site, that once held a coal-mining operation, and turning it into a park that features the treatment system plus recreational amenities. Wildlife habitats will be created and the site's historical stories will be told.

Also involved in the Vintondale project are federal, state and municipal agencies; foundations; conservancies; and arts groups.

AMD&ART teams also are involved in projects to reclaim the Hughes Bore Hole near Lilly and the Central City Brownfields — two of the worst AMD sites within the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin.

*Continued on next page*



## Loyalhanna

Two other trails are among the projects of the Loyalhanna Watershed Association, based in Ligonier.

The longest is the Pittsburgh, Westmoreland & Somerset – or PW&S – Trail, which loops 32 miles through Forbes State Forest.

The trail has existed for some time, but it's now being brought up to mountain bike and safety standards, according to Tom Grote, the Loyalhanna association's executive director. Trail improvements include putting down a limestone-chip surface, installing drainage ditches and erecting signs on all loops indicating the degree of difficulty for mountain bikers. The trail is also used for hiking.

A much shorter, Loyalhanna Nature Trail extends for a mile along Loyalhanna Creek and US Route 30 west of town. The interpretive trail is being upgraded with the help of some local Eagle Scouts. The work includes refurbishing a swinging bridge, that dates to the 1880s, and planting native trees and shrubs.

Like its sister organizations, the Loyalhanna group is also involved in AMD remediation efforts. Grote's pet project involves students at Latrobe Area High School, where he taught environmental science for 33 years.

Grote and other teachers started the Capstone Class, a student group now doing preliminary work on cleaning up Baggeley-Hostetter Run. The students have completed a study and are working with the state Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation's Ebensburg office to develop a treatment plan.

The Loyalhanna Watershed Association also is a key partner in the cleanup of Monastery Run near St. Vincent College and the remediation of three AMD sites in downtown Latrobe. And the group is working with the Powdermill Nature Reserve to treat discharge from the Friedline Mine before it enters Laurel Run.

"We've done a lot of AMD work," Grote says, "and we've still got a lot going on."

## Roaring Run

That's also the case with the Roaring Run Watershed Association at the lower end of the Kiski-Conemaugh basin, where industry partners are pitching in on some of the projects.

Roaring Run association president Don Stevenson says Venango County-based U.S. Generating Company is extracting usable fuel from a coal refuse pile at the old Brownstown coal mining area. The site is then neutralized

*The Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin offers many getaway opportunities for people with a variety of interests. Top, a fisherman works the waters of the lower Loyalhanna below the dam in northern Westmoreland County. Below, a bicyclist enjoys the beauty and solitude of the Roaring Run Trail in southern Armstrong County.*

with limestone, clay is added, then grass and trees are planted.

Another partner, Rosebud Coal Company of Kittanning, is helping to alleviate problems at the Martin Mine portal. Stevenson says a pump station will divert the discharge from Roaring Run, but it will still be going into the Kiski. The problem is under study by the Department of Environmental Protection and other agencies.

Acid mine drainage is even affecting the watershed group's chief recreational asset, the Roaring Run Trail, which extends for 3.5 miles along the Kiski upstream from Apollo. The pollution coming from the Trux Discharge – one of the largest AMD sites in the river basin – flows directly across the trail corridor.

"In fact, the trail right there is the same color as the hillside because of acid," observes Stevenson, describing that color as reddish orange. He adds that another Growing Greener grant will advance that project.

Here, too, signs of rebirth are evident. Aquatic life is returning to the Kiski.

Stevenson says there were no traces of fish in the river for nearly 90 years, from the last record of fish in 1890. Now there is an annual fishing derby in the Kiski near Apollo.

Dale Morgan, president of the Apollo Area Historical Society, has waited most of his 74 years to see fish in the Kiski. Then about three or four years ago, the fish started returning in appreciable numbers.

"It started out with carp in the river and now there's bass and walleye and perch, since they started cleaning up mine drainage," says Morgan. "And there's beaver in the river as close as a half mile from Apollo.

"I always said I'd never see fish in that river in my lifetime and now I'm eating my words."

A revival in the Kiski-Conemaugh? People like Dale Morgan are beginning to believe. ●

#### For more information:

AMD&ART, c/o The BottleWorks, 411 Third Ave.,  
Johnstown PA 15906; (814) 539-5357. amdart@gte.net.

Blacklick Creek Watershed Association, 540 Oakland Ave.,  
Homer City PA 15748. bcwa@att.net.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy, PO Box 907, Johnstown PA  
15907-0907; (814) 536-6615. jkai@twd.net.

Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance, PO Box 115,  
Windber PA 15963; (814) 467-6816. mccombie@surfbop.net.

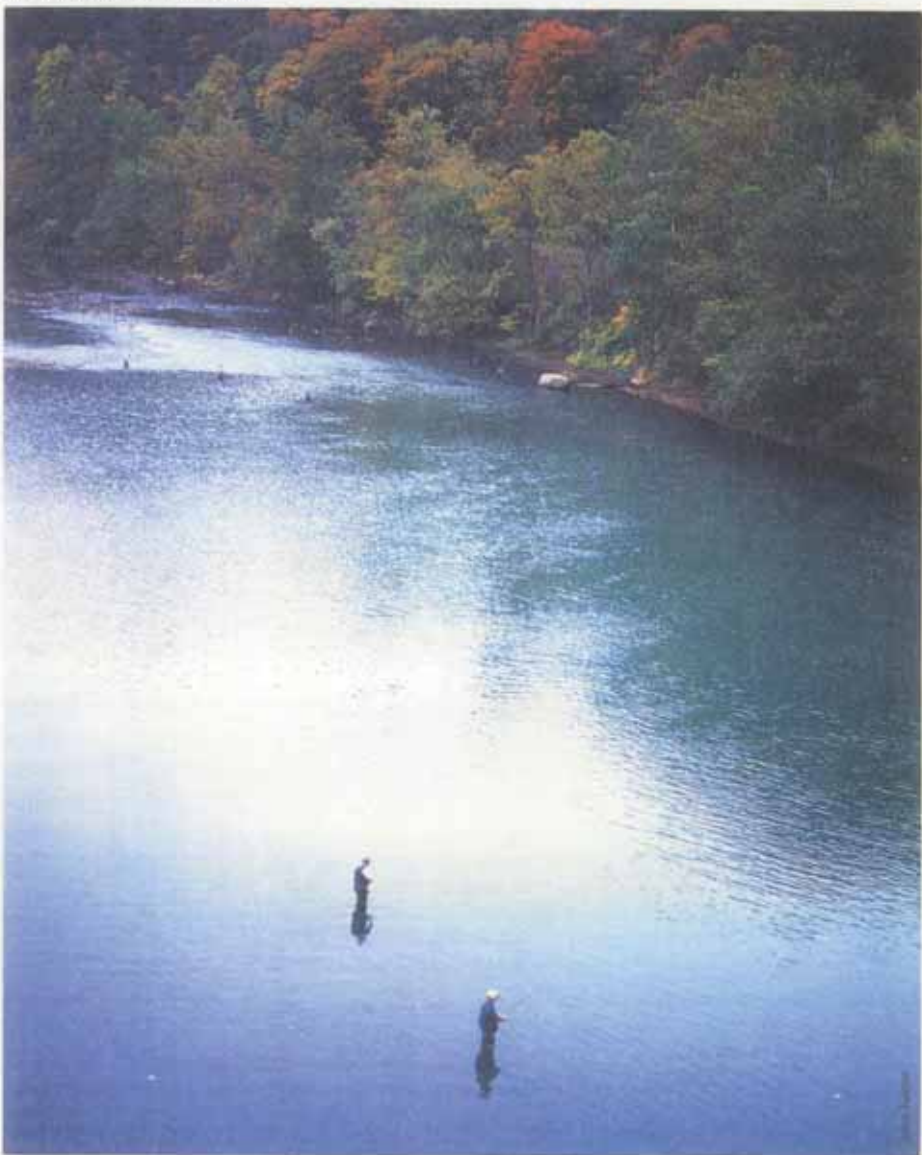
Loyalhanna Watershed Association, PO Box 561, Ligonier PA  
15658-0561; (724) 238-7560. tgrote@tcsinternet.net.

Roaring Run Watershed Association, PO Box 333, Apollo PA  
15613; (724) 478-3366; www.roaringrun.org.

Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project,  
PO Box 153, Johnstown PA 15907-0153; sac@nh.net.



*Above, the cascading waters of Roaring Run have inspired a trail, a park and efforts to eliminate a major source of AMD, the Trux Discharge. Below, Kiskiminettas fishermen are finding increasing success with a variety of species including bass, walleye and perch.*



# River of the Year Festivals and Events

## JULY

- 9 **ANNUAL TALK: KISKI RIVER INDIANS**  
Roaring Run Pavilion, Apollo, (724) 478-3366
- 9 **HOODLEBUG SUMMERFEST**  
Homer City, (724) 479-9759
- 10 **PATH OF THE FLOOD HIKE**  
Johnstown Flood National Memorial to Johnstown, (814) 495-4643
- 15-16 **RAIL AND RIVER FESTIVAL**  
Schenley, (724) 295-5577
- 16 **VANDERGRIFT'S 4TH ANNUAL HOME AND GARDEN TOUR**  
Vandergrift, (724) 567-5293
- 17-22 **APOLLO MOON LANDING CELEBRATION**  
Apollo, (724) 478-2200
- 23-30 **LEECHBURG SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**  
Leechburg, (724) 842-8511
- 22-23 **NEW GROWTH ARTS FESTIVAL**  
Downtown Indiana, (724) 465-2787
- 23-30 **LEECHBURG SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**  
Leechburg, (724) 842-8511
- 29-30 **BLACKLICK TOWNSHIP SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**  
Belsano and Twin Rocks, Cambria County, (814) 749-0093

## AUGUST

- 1-6 **TOUR DE' TOONA**  
Blair and Cambria Counties, (814) 943-4183
- 2-6 **KEYSTONE STATE GAMES**  
Johnstown, Cambria County, (800) 237-8590
- 4-5 **KEYSTONE STATE GAMES FUNFEST**  
Downtown Johnstown, (800) 237-8590

## 5 WOMEN TRAVELING THE PA FRONTIER

Presenter: R. Anderson;  
Allegheny Portage RR NHS  
Cresson, (814) 886-6100

## 11-13 ROADSTER FACTORY SUMMER PARTY 2000

Armagh and Indiana,  
(800) 234-1104

## 12 CELTIC INSPIRED AMERICAN MUSIC

Performer: Heartstrings;  
Allegheny Portage RR NHS  
Cresson, (814) 886-6100

## 18-20 DIAMOND DAYS CELEBRATION

Blairsville, (724) 459-8707

## 19 WILDLIFE PROGRAM

Presenter: S. Harshaw;  
Allegheny Portage RR NHS  
Cresson, (814) 886-6100

## 20 CAMBRIA COUNTY AG TOUR

Summerhill and Mineral Point  
area, (800) 237-8590

## 26 THE SILENT GREEN INVASION

Presenter: B. Eick; Allegheny  
Portage RR NHS Cresson,  
(814) 886-6100

## 27-SEPTEMBER 2 INDIANA COUNTY FAIR

Indiana, (724) 463-8641

## SEPTEMBER

### 1-3 JOHNSTOWN FOLK FEST

Chestnut Street, Johnstown,  
(814) 539-1889

### 2-3 30TH ANNUAL LOG HOUSE ARTS FESTIVAL

Community Arts Center of  
Cambria County, Johnstown,  
(814) 255-6515

### 2-4 FOREST HILLS FESTIVAL

Berwind Wayside Festival Park,  
St. Michael, (814) 495-5410

### 3-9 CAMBRIA COUNTY FAIR

Ebensburg, (814) 472-7491

### 4 SLOVENIAN WEDDING CELEBRATION

Bottle Works Ethnic Arts Center,  
Johnstown, (814) 536-5399

## 9 OKTOBERFEST

Bottle Works Ethnic Arts Center,  
Johnstown, (814) 536-5399

## 9-10 TOUR DE STRONG-LAND BICYCLE RACE AND FESTIVAL

Apollo and Leechburg,  
(714) 845-5426

## 16 BRETHREN HERITAGE FESTIVAL

Camp Harmony, Hooversville,  
(814) 479-7058

## 16-17 NEW GERMANY ARTS & CRAFTS FESTIVAL

New Germany Grove,  
(814) 472-7824

## OCTOBER

### 7 EBENSBURG POTATOFEST

Downtown Ebensburg,  
(814) 472-8400 x242

## 7 CRESSON AREA HERITAGE DAYS

Downtown Cresson,  
(814) 886-8100

## 7 ANNUAL LOG CABIN DAY

Drake Log Cabin, Apollo,  
(724) 478-3037

## 7-8 GALLITZIN TUNNELS FEST

Tunnels Park, Gallitzin,  
(814) 886-8871

## 14 OAK LEAF FESTIVAL

Downtown Indiana,  
(800) 937-2487

## NOVEMBER

### 3 JOHNSTOWN BICENTENNIAL - FOUNDERS DAY

Downtown Johnstown,  
(814) 539-1889

## Charter Communications contributes to the community

Charter Communications is proud to be part of the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy's River of the Year 2000 celebration.

Charter Communications also contributes to the well-being of the community by supporting projects that benefit everyone. From national charities dedicated to curing diseases to the local Little League team and veterans' groups, we contribute financial and human resources to a wide range of initiatives throughout the year.

Charter Communications also supports education by providing more than 540 hours per month of quality, commercial-free educational programming to schools throughout our service area. Through our Scholars Program, we award \$5,000 in grants to local college-bound high school seniors annually.

Charter Communications will continue our commitment to support the needs of the community.



# Heritage-tourism developer pours efforts into Westsylvania waterways

Once, waterways were the primary way through Westsylvania.

Back in the 1780s, when frontiersmen wanted to establish a new state to be known as "Westsylvania" in the lands west of the Alleghenies, travelers followed river valleys through this rugged region. In the 1830s the Mainline Canal transformed the Conemaugh and Kiskiminetas Rivers into a transportation system—a route so efficient that the Pennsylvania Railroad followed the same course in the 1850s.

the region stopped looking upon its water supplies as a recreational resource.

Today, as the tourism industry within Westsylvania continues to grow, the Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation (AHDC) is working to resurrect our waterways—and improve the overall quality of life within the region.

Through organizations such as the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance, AHDC is working with coalitions of volunteer-based organizations and providing assistance where needed to obtain public grants and conduct river basin-wide planning efforts. In turn, such planning efforts are rejoining communities with their natural and cultural resources.

Resources are being developed along the waterways—most notably, trails and river access. Because railroads followed river valleys, heritage developers now are finding abandoned railroad rights-of-way to be ready-made trail corridors.

AHDC planners also are in the forefront of greenway planning and development. Greenways are linear open spaces connecting natural and cultural resources into a heritage network. Much of the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin lies within the Harrisburg-to-Pittsburgh Greenway, which was declared a Millennium Legacy Trail by the White House earlier this year.

Environmental Information Services (EIS) was formed to provide technical assistance to

communities, planning groups and businesses. EIS utilizes a state-of-the-art Geographic Information System to analyze and present the vast amount of data that has been gathered on the Kiski-Conemaugh Basin. The map of pages 8 and 9 is a sample of the work of EIS.

Both EIS and AHDC are helping communities throughout the basin to celebrate the Kiski-Conemaugh as "River of the Year 2000" by assisting with the annual Pennsylvania Canoe Sojourn, promoting River of the Year activities and events, and creating this informational tabloid.

The Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation's overall mission is to promote economic development and an enhanced quality of life through the effective use of natural and cultural heritage resources. By improving the quality and usefulness of the region's waterways, AHDC can accomplish both facets of its mission.

Once again, waterways are showing the way to Westsylvanians.

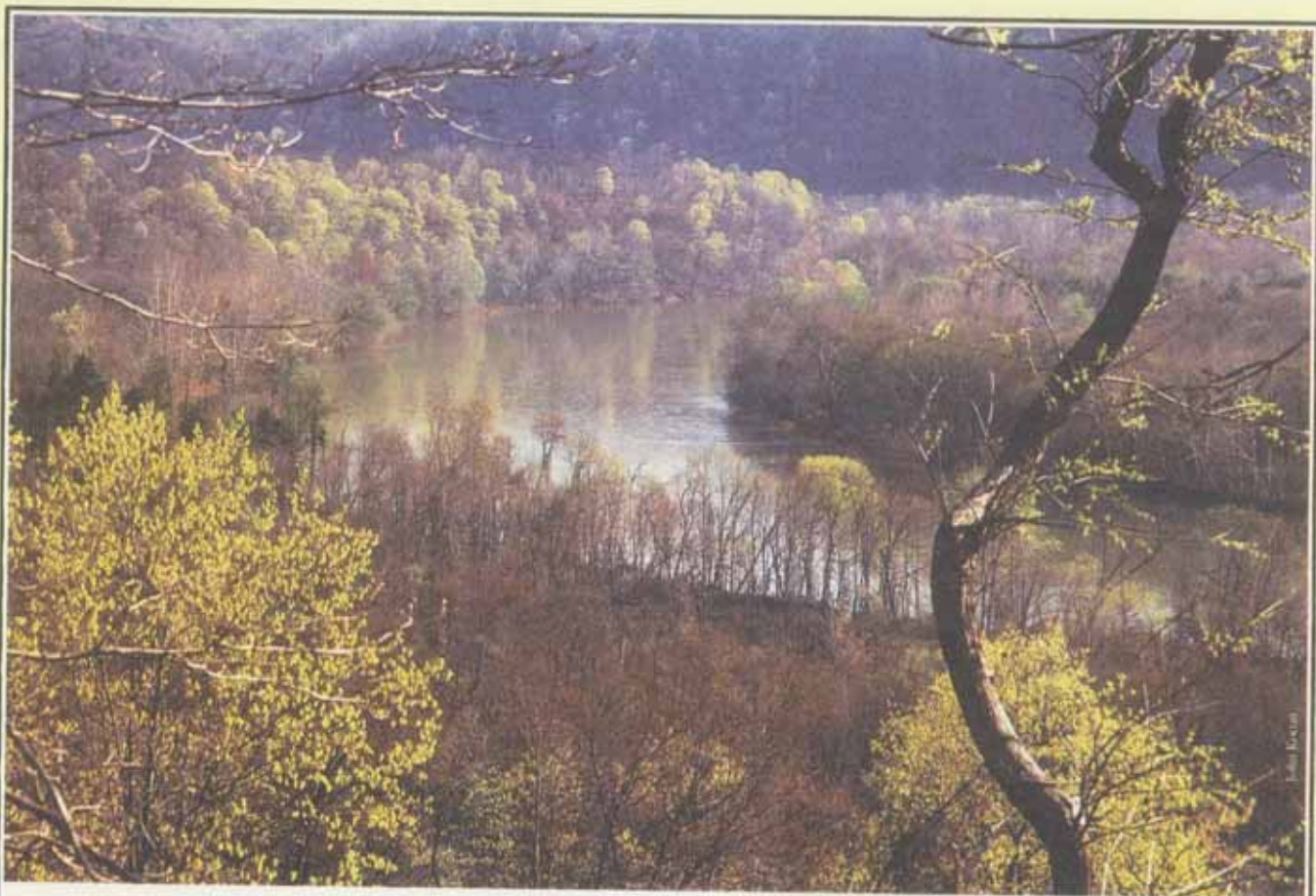
*For more information on ways that we are promoting watershed stewardship and recreational use, and on conservation mapping and analysis, call Dave Sewak at (814) 696-9380 or Rob McCombie at (814) 467-6816.*

*Both EIS and AHDC are helping communities throughout the basin to celebrate the Kiski-Conemaugh as "River of the Year 2000" by assisting with the annual Pennsylvania Canoe Sojourn, promoting River of the Year activities and events, and creating this informational tabloid.*



## EIS

The industry that flowed in along these transportation corridors almost destroyed these rivers and their tributaries. As abandoned coal mines, iron and steel wastes, inadequate sanitary sewage and agricultural effluent turned Westsylvania rivers and streams into industrial flumes,



**This publication was made possible through grants from foundations and these businesses:**

- Allegheny Heritage Development Corporation
- Charter Communications
- Concurrent Technologies Corporation
- Environmental Information Services
- Summit Bank

***Kiski-Conemaugh: a River Revival* was published in conjunction with the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy...**

Dick Mayer, *President*

Michael Quinn, *Facilitator*

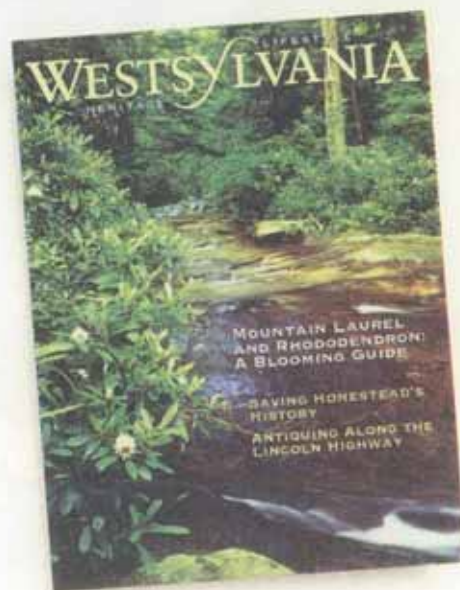
Linda Quinn, *Membership Development*

**... by the staff of *Westsylvania* magazine:**

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Dave Hurst, *Editor*

Judy Torres, *Editorial and Publishing Assistant*



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