

# Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

**New Treatment Systems and Stream Improvement Initiatives  
Help to Improve Water Quality Along the Bens Creek**

By Len Lichvar

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**Save the Date**

**Sept. 16**– SCRIP board meeting, Gander Mt., Richland, 9 am.

**Oct. 15**– SCRIP board meeting, tentatively set for Windber Hotel, Windber, 6:30 pm



**Greg Shustrick, Watershed Specialist for the Somerset Conservation District and Mountain Laurel Chapter Trout Unlimited member drills a hole in a log while backhoe operator and Trout Unlimited volunteer, Bill Conlin, holds it in place.** *Photo by Len Lichvar*

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The Bens Creek watershed in northern Somerset County is both a unique and important waterway. Its headwaters of the South and North Forks originate high on the Laurel Ridge and combine to form the mainstem with over 26 miles of combined flowing water that enters the Stonycreek River at the village of Benscreek in Cambria County.

The North and South Forks contain some of the finest water quality found in the region and harbor excellent aquatic life including wild brook, wild brown and wild rainbow trout. Downstream the waterway increases in size and volume and is a stocked trout stream,

but has suffered from water quality impairments such as abandoned mine drainage (AMD). The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) has significantly abated a large source of AMD with a treatment system located at Forwardstown along State Route 985. Conservation partners such as the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP), Somerset Conservation District and the Greater Johnstown Watershed Association have recently combined to completely reconstruct the Rock Tunnel AMD treatment system located at Thomas Mills in order that it can now effectively remove the iron prior to it reaching the creek.

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**A completed log deflector on the South Fork of Bens Creek.** *Photo by Len Lichvar*

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With these two major AMD sources now dealt with along with a new sewer line project that was completed a few years ago the water quality of the stream is ever improving.

The Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU) began an intensive stream improvement initiative on Bens Creek nearly 20 years ago that has significantly improved the stream's habitat for trout, increased aquatic insect life and reduced soil erosion. This long term effort's latest on the ground project has recently been completed through a cooperative effort between MLTU and the Somerset Conservation District.

MLTU has provided funding, volunteer labor and the Conservation District has contributed professional technical assistance as well as funds that have added log veins, root wads, mud sills and random boulders that all combine to provide improved habitat for game fish such as trout as well as stabilize banks and reduce soil erosion. This year's effort actually took place on two separate properties thanks to the cooperative efforts of landowners Dean Glasser on the South Fork and Jack Lehew on the mainstem.

Both projects are now completed thanks to volunteer labor and equipment from MLTU members as well as the professional expertise from the Conservation District. Earthshapers of Ebensburg and Berkey Excavating of Boswell were contracted to provide the heavy equipment utilized for the projects.

Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist and Trout Unlimited member Greg Shustrick who oversaw the installation of both projects, comments, "Thanks to the willingness and cooperation of the landowners and the volunteers from MLTU the recreational opportunities as well as the water quality have both been improved in the watershed."

Randy Buchanan, President of MLTU added, "This continues the long standing project of our chapter and demonstrates that the money we raise goes back into protecting and improving the coldwater resource. Anglers, landowners and the local economy all benefit from these conservation efforts."

*Reprinted from the Somerset Daily American*



*Photo on left by Len Lichvar*

*Photo on right by Donna Shull*



**The Somerset Conservation District's Quemahoning Reservoir Fish Habitat Project added twenty new fish structures in August. The ongoing project is in cooperation with the PA Fish and Boat Commission's Bureau of Habitat Management Lake Division, the Cambria - Somerset Authority and Shaffer Block of Somerset. Volunteers from the Somerset County Sportsmen's League assisted with the project. The project has increased both the quality and quantity of gamefish in the reservoir since it was initiated nine years ago.**

Len Lichvar

**The Kiski-Conemaugh Stream Team and volunteers are partnering with California University of PA to survey fish from several river locations throughout the Basin. The photo above was taken on August 5 at the Stonycreek in Benson. The Stream Team is acquiring data on river and stream sites to compare to historical data as it works to update the 1999 *Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Conservation Plan* and quantify changes in the watershed. Stay tuned for public meetings this fall to let your voice be heard.**

Melissa Reckner



# Nozzles Shut Off But Water Still Being Treated

by Malcolm Crittenden

For years the spray nozzles at the Lion Mining Company's Grove #1 Deep Mine passive treatment system were a sign to residents fishing in the South Fork of Bens Creek that the mine water was being treated. The nozzles were visible from a nearby public road.

Now, those nozzles have been turned off-but the water is still being treated. It's part of a new plan to ensure long-term, uninterrupted treatment of the discharge from the mine that last operated in 1998.

Earlier this year a \$352,867 Growing Greener Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act grant was awarded to Stream Restoration Inc. of Mars, PA to install a new stainless steel borehole that will serve as the primary collection system for the Lion treatment system. As part of the preparation for that work, the spray nozzles from the current system were shut off to lower the mine pool and allow the installation of the new borehole.

The project being undertaken is the result of a public-private partnership effort formed in 2014 with the goal of installing a new borehole and ensuring that treatment of the mine water would continue for years to come.

In 2000, two years after the mine closed, a seep of mine drainage in Bens Creek was reported. The seep concerned residents who fish the creek. It contains native brook trout and has been a popular fishing spot for years. Lion Mining installed a borehole to divert the deep mine water into a series of treatment ponds where it was chemically treated. In 2006, DEP took over control of the site. In 2011, a less costly and more efficient passive treatment system featuring the distinctive spray nozzles was put into operation.

*Malcolm Crittenden is Watershed Manager for the Department of Environmental Protection.*



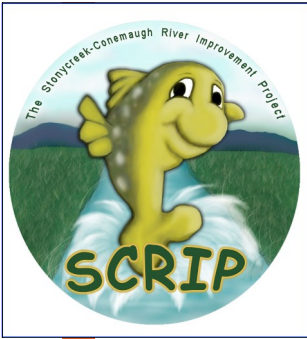
**Spray nozzle at Lion Mining Company's Deep Mine Passive Treatment System on the Bens Creek**

*Photo by Greg Shustrick*

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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 814-444-2669 or [mreckner@kcstreamteam.org](mailto:mreckner@kcstreamteam.org).* Send donations to: **SCRIP, P.O. Box 164, Windber, PA 15963**



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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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