

Volume XXIV
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 Summer 2017

Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project



Kayakers at Whitewater Park during Stonycreek Rendezvous Photo by Melissa Reckner

diversity of fish reside in our rivers, and I bet several of you have a story about seeing a bald eagle in Johnstown or surrounding communities. Improving access to the water and making it easier for people to find these access points so time spent on the river can be as short as a couple of hours or day-long is essential to luring people to its edge.

**Developing a marketing and awareness campaign.* Perhaps it's a "Why I love the rivers" promotion or encouraging businesses to turn back to the rivers, as Pittsburgh has done, but getting word out there about the state of our rivers and the potential they hold is key. Our rivers are assets and we must treat them as such. *Continued on page 2*

Save the Date:

Sept. 14- SCRIP board meeting, Greenhouse Park, 3 pm

Rivers Work

by Melissa Reckner

Undoubtedly, Johnstown's three rivers have enormous, largely untapped potential, especially given the 180 they've done in the last two decades. SCRIP's efforts and those of its partners and countless volunteers are paying off and could potentially pay big for entrepreneurs looking to start a new venture focused on river life.

Soap Hollow Run Improvement Project

by Len Lichvar

Greenhouse Park, an 11 acre facility, located in Conemaugh Township Somerset County, is a well known recreation area for water sport enthusiasts, campers, picnickers as well as a location that hosts countless special outdoor events. It is also well known that it is located along the banks of the Stonycreek River.

However, what is lost on the users and visitors is that there is second waterway known as Soap Hollow Run that also flows within the confines of the park. The small stream flows in close proximity to State Route 403 and the western edge of the park until it enters the Stonycreek River at the park.

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As a result of Johnstown Vision 2025's River-wall Charrette held a year ago, a Rivers Capture Team formed and decided to focus on three main outcomes that encapsulate ideas generated from the Charrette that do not hinge on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' hydrologic study and plans for the 9.2 miles of concrete river walls that line the banks of the Little Conemaugh, Stonycreek, and Conemaugh Rivers. The areas of focus include:

** Enhancing river access and connectivity.* After decades of being told to "avoid the water," "stay away from the rivers," "don't go down there," it's understandable that the majority of residents and visitors to our region do not know that the rivers are open! Open for yes, kayaking and tubing, but even fishing, bird watching, and general enjoyment. A growing

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River Work *(continued from page one)*

***Planning/coordinating events and recreational outings centered on the rivers.** Thinking back on a marketing piece completed by Westsylvania back in the mid-2000s, I can still hear Jen Johnson's voice saying, "We need water to survive; we need water to thrive." Maybe it's those reasons that water appeals to so many. Maybe it's the fun and healthy outdoor living that water brings. It's very apparent that the local sale of kayaks and paddleboards is up, and we need to ensure people are using their new purchases responsibly and safely. People want to go on the rivers, but they aren't sure how. Coordinating events that celebrate and highlight river life can help with that.

On August 16, a public meeting to "Refresh our Rivers" was held at the Crow's Nest in Tire Hill.

Soap Hollow Run Improvement Project *(continued from page one)*

Its small size and being almost hidden belie its excellent water quality that is home to a wild brown trout population that has been confirmed in surveys by the PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) through its un-assessed waters initiative. The stream actually harbors enough wild trout to warrant the highest level of fish biomass classified by the PFBC. The PFBC Board of Commissioners just recently officially approved it as a Class A wild trout stream.

A waterway with this high level of water quality, as well as being a great angling opportunity that requires no artificial stocking to create an angling opportunity, is something rather special to have in a region where water quality impairment has been the norm for far too long.

At least 43 people participated in breakout sessions about the aforementioned topics. I helped to lead the Events sub-committee at which we discussed activities that would be more simple to coordinate such as yoga along the river at Sandyvale and more complex outings like an "Anything Floats" competition and a "Flood Float" that entwines recreation with historical context provided during the paddle or after, during a walking tour of Johnstown. The purposes of the meeting were to elaborate on ideas shared during the Charrette and to develop sub-committees of the Rivers Capture Team that will continue meeting in the future to bring the more feasible ideas to fruition.

If you would like to learn more about these efforts and get involved, contact Jessica Clifford at jessica@jessicalynportraits.com or 814-419-9655.

Its close proximity to urban areas and the city of Johnstown also make it a jewel worth protecting and improving.

With that in mind the Somerset Conservation District, in cooperation with the Conemaugh Township Supervisors, initiated a Soap Hollow Run Improvement Project that got underway recently with an effort of reducing the invasive Japanese knotweed that has encompassed the stream in the park. Volunteers from the Greater Johnstown Chamber of Commerce Leadership Initiative and Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU) assisted professionals from the Conservation District and Natural Biodiversity in a physical effort required to make the first cutting of the prolific plant. A second cutting is set for August 13 and a spraying of the cut will occur later this year. Knotweed is difficult to overcome and the process may well extend into 2018.

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Orenda Park Stream Improvement Project

by Len Lichvar



Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick, directs rock placement along Quemahoning Creek at Orenda Park in Boswell.
Photo by Len Lichvar

The new park along with the improving water quality created a popular destination point for local citizens as well as visitors. The improving waters of Quemahoning Creek were able to begin to be stocked with trout through the efforts of the Jenner Community Sportsmen Club's Cooperative Trout Nursery and through the volunteer efforts of the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and other sportsmen's groups. A new fishery was born and has been enjoyed ever since with Orenda Park providing one of the primary access points for stocking and angling.

Despite these positives, the shoreline of the park continued to be eroded with sediment pollution entering Quemahoning Creek. In addition, the water at the park lacked significant holding water for the trout which limited fishing success.

The Somerset Conservation District has been at the forefront of the water quality improvement for decades and has been a key player in the AMD abatement efforts in the Quemahoning Creek watershed and elsewhere. Recently, with the creation of the Quemahoning Trust Fund through the efforts of the PA Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), a dedicated source of funding was created. The Conservation District chooses the projects in consultation with PA DEP that are then implemented to enhance the water quality and vitality of the land in the Quemahoning Creek watershed.

As part of that initiative the District installed a \$10,000.00 stream improvement project at Orenda Park that also included funding support from the Somerset County Sportsmen's League, Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project and the Jenner Rod and Gun Club.

During the first 30 years of the 20th Century the world's largest coal tippie and viaduct carried and loaded steam coal from the mine opening in Boswell across Quemahoning Creek to the waiting rail cars to transport the fuel to markets across the eastern United States.

However, after nearly 40 years of operation the Boswell mine closed and the over 2,000 foot long steel viaduct was disassembled in 1939 and the significant visual impression on the landscape and the national economic engine it powered for America slowly faded into history.

The remnants of the tippie, which include stone abutments and other structures that supported the viaduct remained, but were hidden from view for decades by an enveloping forest and thick brush. The Boswell Area Historical Society resurrected the area, located at the north end of Boswell along State Route 601 where the viaduct crossed Quemahoning Creek, through a vibrant, committed and successful all volunteer effort in the 1990's and the area was reborn as Orenda Park. The park includes interpretive historical signage, walkways, benches, picnic tables, a pavilion and a viable access area to Quemahoning Creek. The public park also came into being as two abandoned mine drainage (AMD) passive treatment systems were being completed, upstream of the park, through yet another public sector driven initiative by local, state and federal agencies that began to reduce the historic AMD pollution entering the waterway that had impaired the water for nearly 100 years.

Urban Greenway Trail Facelift

by Linda Messer
Vision 2025 Site Leader

Johnstown Urban Greenway Trail along the Little Conemaugh River, got a facelift on Saturday, August 26th. Native perennials, along with other PA friendly perennials now line the nearly 1/2 mile paved trail abutting PNG Park on Iron Street. The trail is used frequently by local residents, festival goers, and workers from JWF Industries to increase urban connectivity.

This is the first collaborative effort between Johnstown Vision 2025 (V25), Lowe's Hometown Heroes program, Johnstown Redevelopment Authority (JRA), the City of Johnstown (CoJ) Garden Club of Johnstown (GCJ), and Johnstown Area Heritage Association (JAHA). Nearly 200 perennials were planted along the trail, providing future habitat for pollinators and nectar and cover for birds.

Lowe's of Johnstown generously donated tools, wheel barrows, and equipment to complete Greenspace projects as part of their Lowe's Hometown Heroes initiative. We would like to thank Lowe's for their generosity, the UPJ student volunteers who showed up to help, and our volunteers who dedicated their time to making an improvement in the downtown area!

"The partnership and goodwill of businesses like Lowe's working with community members through the Vision process strengthens and fortifies the work we're trying to do." - Wally Burlack, Vision2025 Project Coordinator



Orenda Park Project *(continued from page 3)*

The contractor for the project was R. C. Newman LLC. District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick, who designed the project, explains that, "This project will stabilize an actively eroding streambank and reestablish natural stream features that will increase aquatic life and center the stream flow during both high and low water conditions. We also believe more trout will stay in this section of water for a longer period of time with the installation of mud sills, log veins and rock placement."

In addition, a canoe and kayak launch was constructed as part of the project providing a secure location for those who use the waterway for floats downstream to the Quemahoning Reservoir.



Boat launch at Orenda Park

Photo by Len Lichnar

The streambank and in-stream enhancements at the park make the location an even more inviting place for historic interpretation, fishing, float trips, picnicking or just relaxing in the outdoors while enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Greenway Trail Volunteers, *pictured left to right:* Linda Messer-V25 & GCJ, Mary Kay Butterfield- V25 &GCJ, Melissa Komar-JRA, Dale Harrison- Asst. Store Manager Lowe's of Johnstown, Phil Soloman- JAHA, Joe Slis, CoJ
***Not pictured:* Jennifer Sukenik-V25, Gary Weible-V25, Tim Messer- V25 & Conemaugh Valley Conservancy, Melissa Radovanik- Discover Downtown Johnstown Partnership.**

Soap Hollow Run Improvement Project *(Continued from page 2)*

Many of the wild trout reside in the upper watershed, but improving the lower reaches of the stream could easily expand the trout in both numbers and range. A national Trout Unlimited Embrace-A-Stream grant is being applied for and along with a cash match from MLTU will go toward a stream improvement project.

This final phase of the project will consist of in-stream habitat improvement project structures and also include planting the stream bank with native plants to create a stream side buffer that will shade out the sun to maintain the cold water resource as well as reduce soil erosion preventing sediment from entering the stream and the Stonycreek River.

The project will not only enhance and improve natural resources, but will also improve the appearance of Greenhouse Park by creating a more visually attractive and functioning natural ecosystem. **For more information about the project or to learn how you can join the effort contact Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick at 814-289-4247 or email Greg-scd@wpia.net.**



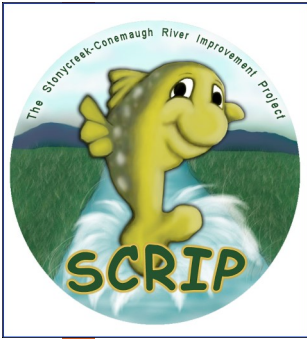
Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick, left, and District intern Tristan Gelvin, along with members of the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the North Fork Country Club plant trees along the North Fork of Bens Creek.

Photo by Len Lichvar

Join or renew* SCRIP today!

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 Student (\$6) Individual (\$15) Family (\$20)
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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.* 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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