

**Volume XXVI
Number 1
Winter 2019**

Save the Date:

March 21– SCRIP board meeting, Gander Outdoors, 3 pm.

March 30– Picking Up Paint Creek Litter Cleanup. *See page 2 for details.*

March 31– Bens Creek Litter Cleanup. Volunteers meet at Jim & Jimmies along Rt. 985, 9 am. *For more info contact Randy Buchanan 814-467-4034.*

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Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

Rock, Paper, Water: Western Pennsylvania Landscapes and the Painterly Eye by Joan Hawk



Scalp Level artist, George Hetzel's 19th century painting of Paint Creek

Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art (SAMA) is planning a multidisciplinary exhibition scheduled for Spring 2021 at SAMA-Bedford, 137 E. Pitt St, Bedford, PA. 15522. 814-589-3020. The exhibition will feature the artwork of the nineteenth century Scalp Level artists, including women artists, from Pittsburgh who were so captivated by the scenery of the Scalp Level area that they came here every summer for decades to sketch and paint. This is a very exciting and ambitious project because the exhibition will focus not only on the art, but on geology, ecology, water resources and industrial development—hence the title.

The Energy and Earth Resources Department at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown will be lending support as well. A robust series of programs will accompany the exhibition, including interpretive field trips along Paint Creek or at select spots to discuss the geology and ecology. Paint Creek, despite the impacts of industry, is still a beautiful stream and has an important story to tell. For further information contact Debbie Grazier (dgrazier@sama-art.org) or Joan Hawk (joanhawk@comcast.net).

Become a Certified Master Naturalist

by Melissa Reckner



Photo courtesy of PMN

Become a certified Pennsylvania Master Naturalist volunteer in Westmoreland County and join its growing team of volunteers working locally for nature conservation. This course is perfect for educators, volunteers, and nature-lovers who want to discover and protect the natural habitats of the Laurel Highlands. (You do not have to work or reside in Westmoreland County to participate!) Volunteer service and life-long learning are at the heart of this program. To become a certified Master Naturalist volunteer, you must complete an initial 50-hour training course followed by annual volunteer service and continuing education in the natural sciences.

This initial training course will be offered this fall at Brandywine Conservancy's Penguin Court in Laughlintown. Twelve weekly classes from 6-8:30 PM on Tuesdays, August thru October 2019, will be supplemented by four Saturday field trips. A discounted rate is offered until May 1. Only 15 applications will be accepted with 10 people selected for the training. Don't delay, apply today! Learn more and apply online: www.pamasternaturalist.org.

Trout in the Classroom Continues

Save the Date

(continued)



April 5– 9th Annual Fly Tiers Reunion, Sporting Clays Lodge at Seven Spring Mountain Resort 6pm

April 20– Yellow Creek Cleanup- volunteers meet at 8 am for breakfast, 9am for work day at New Frontier Restaurant
For more info, contact Randy Buchanan 814-467-4034.

April 27– Shade Creek Road Cleanup– Volunteers meet at 9am. *For more info, contact Randy Buchanan 814-467-4034.*

May 4– Westmoreland Earth Day 2019, Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve at St. Vincent College, 1-5pm. *See details this page.*

May 16-18– Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference, Skytop Lodge in The Poconos. Register online: ConserveLand.org/2019-conference.

July 23– Intro to Kayak Fishing, sponsored by SCRIP/PA Fish and Boat Commission, Quemahoning Family Recreation Area, 5-9 pm.



A Shanksville Elementary School student shows off the bluegill she caught while fly-fishing during their Outdoor Day.

Photo by Melissa Reckner

Trout in the Classroom (TIC) continues in many local schools! Though she's now with the Brandywine Conservancy's Penguin Court, Melissa Reckner is still coordinating TIC Release Days for nine schools and helping with a few other schools' activities. Volunteer help is needed, especially with the schools that have a fishing component to their field trip! If you're interested in helping with one or more days, please contact Melissa at mreckner@brandywine.org or 724-238-4991. Thanks!

Save the Date

Party For the Planet

Westmoreland Earth Day 2019: Celebrating Ecological Diversity

EXHIBITORS WANTED:

Outdoor recreation, eco-art, sustainability, marketplace exhibitors wanted for the 2019 Westmoreland Earth Day!

Saturday, May 4th, 2019
1:00 pm - 5:00 pm
Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve
at Saint Vincent College
744 Malzer Way, Latrobe, PA 15650

For more details and to register as an exhibitor, please visit www.wpnr.org.

For-Profit Exhibitors:
\$30.00 Registration Fee
Non-Profit Exhibitors: FREE

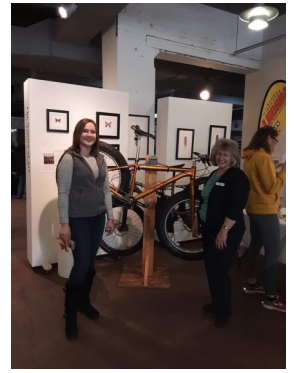
Paint Creek Cleanup on March 30



The annual Picking Up Paint Creek litter cleanup is scheduled for Saturday, March 30, 2019. Volunteers are asked to meet in the pull-off about half way down Berwick Road in Richland Township at 8:30 AM. Small groups of volunteers will be sent to either end of Berwick and also to a one-mile section of State Route 160 between Elton and Windber, while a few will clean up the local fishing holes in time for the opening day of trout. Light refreshments, gloves, vests, and trash bags will be provided. Volunteers should wear closed-toe shoes or boots and dress for the weather. Contact Melissa at melissareckner@hotmail.com if you have any questions.

NATURE WORKS

NatureWorks was held on Saturday March 2 from 10 am-2 pm at the Bottle Works with approximately 350 people attending. The 23 exhibitors provided activities and/or information on various environmental topics, activities and clubs in our area. Credit for organizing the event goes to Melissa Reckner and Sue Konvolinka (*pictured to the right*) and to BottleWorks for hosting. Stonycreek River Improvement Project was one of the sponsors of the event. A sampling of the exhibitors are below.



Unattributed photos on this page by Melissa Reckner.



Iron oxide chalk activity with SC RIP's Larry Hutchinson



Animal tracks with Conemaugh Valley Conservancy



Andy Fresch with Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited



Penguin Court, a Preserve of Brandywine Conservancy & monarch butterflies



Laura Hawkins with Kiski Conemaugh Water-Trail



Somerset County Conservation District

Photo by Len Liebvar



Lauren Burkert Lazzari with Stackhouse Park



Cambria County Conservation District



Tom Hindman with National Wild Turkey Federation (Allegheny Plateau Chapter)



Benscreek Canoe Club

State of the Environment

by Len Lichvar

Every year the President gives the State of the Union address. Perhaps it is time to make a State of Our Environment address. So here it is.

The Keystone State's natural resources have been infringed upon, altered, reshaped and often degraded for over 100 years. Of course the reality is much of the use and abuse of those natural resources also allow us to have the comforts and lifestyle we now enjoy. There does need to be a trade off.

However, thanks largely to public funding and public sector federal and state programs and regulations as well as professional conservation organizations and countless volunteers and non-profits the abuse of our natural resources is not any further out of balance with the use of them.

That balance, which is often out of balance in favor of the abuse, is potentially going to get worse unless there is motivated support for actions to be taken to counter the trend.

For example the PA Department of Environmental Protection which is in charge of protection and oversight of our natural resources has seen a 30% reduction in staff since 2002 equating to a loss of over 900 staff. The ability to regulate air and water pollution, require proper safeguards for development, address climate change and dozens of other essential conservation initiatives has been crippled for going on two decades.

At the local level conservation district funding was also cut a number of years ago and partially replaced with funds from the natural gas impact fee under Act 13.

However, the work load of Districts has increased and so have expenses while the funding levels have been stagnant that has forced District's to curtail and limit their locally driven programs and projects.

Pennsylvania's hallmark legislative conservation funding known as Growing Greener has been very successful in empowering local organizations to achieve significant conservation goals for years. However, the program funds have decreased from over 200 million dollars a year in the mid 2000's to only 57 million this year. No viable method has been put forth by the legislature to re-create the funding levels that are still very much needed. Even worse, the Governor's recent budget request transfers funding from the Keystone Recreation and Conservation Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund to pay for operating costs of DEP and DCNR that will further reduce the available funds for Growing Greener thereby robbing Peter to only partially pay Paul.

On the national level the current White House Administration has initiated an assault on the federal Clean Water Act. The EPA's current politically driven effort to amend the Clean Water Rule would eliminate protection on 20% of the state's wetlands and leave countless other high quality waterways around the country at risk of degradation.

To make the point locally in order to maintain the much heralded water quality improvements in the Cambria-Somerset region at least 1.5 million dollars are still required to upgrade and maintain the AMD abatement systems that have returned life to the Stonycreek River and tributaries along with renewed economic vitality.

Without this rehab work the systems are and will further fail to function. Add to that the millions of dollars required for a long term trust fund for maintenance of these and many other systems well into the future throughout the region continues to be funded at exactly zero.

To add to the growing current level of unmet need is the as of yet inability of the state legislature to provide a requested small increase in a user fee, known as a fishing license, that would enable the PA Fish and Boat Commission, that receives no contributions from state tax dollars, to properly meet its charge of protecting our water resources and enhancing angling and boating recreation that generates over 2 billion dollars a year to the state economy.

Unfortunately, the political will to address and support funding for conservation measures has fallen on hard times.

Well then what can be done to improve these shortfalls and counter the imbalance? Actually a partial but important example was the foresighted passing of the state transportation legislation Act 89 in 2013 by the legislature that added significant funding support for the Dirt and Gravel Road Program. This statewide initiative is actually a water quality conservation program since its primary goal is to reduce erosion and polluted runoff coming from unpaved roads by properly designed road and culvert improvements and yet has a secondary benefit of improving rural transportation.

The additional good news is there are very viable alternatives to directly taxing citizens.

(Continued on page 5)

Environment (continued from page 4)

On January 31, 2019 Governor Tom Wolf proposed a 4.5 billion dollar 4 year Renew PA Initiative to fund community and environmental infrastructure that would include funding for AMD abatement and other essential conservation programs. The problem is, however, it is intended to be funded by a severance fee imposed on the natural gas industry that is unpopular with the gas industry and therefore not surprisingly has opponents on the political end.

Another innovative user fee funding source is a water extraction fee that actually had a state legislative bill introduced last year that if enacted would raise hundreds of millions of dollars annually even by exempting farmers and public water suppliers. Water is the state's most available natural resource and the PA Constitution states that the water is the common property of the people.

In Memorium

SCRIP Board Member John Vatauvuk, passed away on January 27 at Windber Hospice. He has served as a Somerset County Commissioner from 2008 up until his passing. Retired from the North Star School District, where he taught for 36 years and touched the lives of hundreds of students. John was a champion for the completion of Route 219 from Somerset to Meyersdale. That section of highway was opened in October of 2018, fulfilling a great part of his longtime dream of seeing it constructed the whole way to the Maryland border. In addition to the SCRIP board, he served on the Board of Trustees of the Penn Highlands Community College, the North South Highway Coalition, the Continental One Board, Windber School Board, and numerous other boards and committees throughout the County of Somerset. His expertise and kind demeanor will be missed.

When this common property is used by for profit entities the citizen owners deserve a return on that use. Currently major water users in the state usurp the resource for free.

Only when the citizens demand that the elusive even balance between use and abuse of our natural resources is created and maintained will the political will be powerful enough to offset the imbalance and forthcoming environmental and economic disasters we heading straight toward.

This was previously published in the Daily American and opinions stated here do not necessarily represent those of SCRIP.

**New SCRIP Board Member
Thomas Clark, Jr.**

Tom Clark grew up in Eureka Mine #42 north of Windber, PA and is a graduate of Forest Hills School District. Tom received his B.S. in Biology (Terrestrial Ecology emphasis) from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown in 1998. He then received his M.S. in Biology (Aquatic Ecology emphasis) from the California University of Pennsylvania in 2003 working under Dr. William Kimmel, respected acid deposition and mine drainage researcher. During that time, Tom was a 3-year intern at the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation under the guidance of Pam Milavec. From 2000-2007, Tom was an independent watershed consultant and served as the contracted Watershed Specialist for both Indiana and Armstrong Counties. In 2007, Tom accepted the Mine Drainage Program Coordinator position with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, where he continues to serve. Tom lives in Indiana, PA with his wife Kristi and their identical twin 14 year old sons, Adam and Alek.

Join or renew* SCRIP today!

Name _____

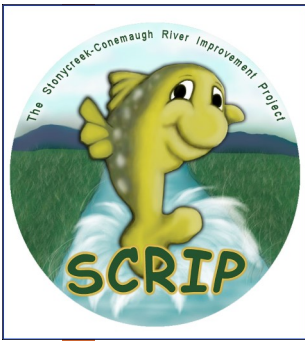
Street Address _____ City _____

State/Zip _____ Email _____

Phone _____ Date _____ Do you wish to volunteer? _____

_____ Student (\$6)	_____ Individual (\$15)	_____ Family (\$20)
_____ Club/Small Business (\$50)	_____ Patron (\$50)	_____ Sustaining (\$100)
_____ Sponsor (\$500)	_____ Lifetime (\$1000)	

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**



Southern Alleghenies Conservancy
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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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