

**Volume XXVI
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Save the Date:

September 19–
SCRIP board meet-
ing, Windber Hotel,
3 p.m.

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Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

Rock Tunnel AMD Treatment System Improves Water Quality and Aids Watershed’s Wild Trout Population by Len Lichvar



A wild brown trout caught and released on the South Fork of Bens Creek.
Photo by Len Lichvar

On July 16, 2019 the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Board of Commissioners designated a section of the South Fork of Bens Creek in Somerset County as a Class A wild brown trout water. The section is downstream from the Rock Tunnel abandoned mine drainage (AMD) passive treatment system near Thomas Mills and will serve as a positive contribution of the ongoing efforts to maintain and improve the system that was originally constructed in 1993.

The Rock Tunnel system was the first system put on the ground through the coordinating efforts of the Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP). The project served as the precursor to the design, funding and implementation of the 6 site multi-million dollar Oven Run treatment systems that have been and continue to be the reason the Stonycreek River has significantly improved and is now the catalyst for the growing eco-tourism and positive economic impacts occurring in the Cambria- Somerset region that clean water always brings with it.

The main stem of the Bens Creek combined with its tributaries of the North and South Forks and smaller tributaries coming off the Laurel Ridge have gradually improved over the decades. The North Fork is home to wild brown trout and Allwine and Riffle Runs are home to wild brook and rainbow trout and the headwaters of the South Fork are already designated Class A wild trout water.

The primary detractor in the watershed was the heavily iron laden AMD discharge at Rock Tunnel coming from the abandoned Hillman mine pool. Even when the system was constructed it could not be sized large enough to properly treat the 1,000 GPM flow because of wetland permitting issues. Due to this constraint, the system has undergone several reconstructions and upgrades along with a very recent tweaking all through the efforts of the Somerset Conservation District. The District, by default, has assumed the oversight for the system since the original and current deed holder, the Greater Johnstown Watershed Association, no longer operates.

(continued on page 2)



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starting with the Win-
ter 2020 Edition**

See article on page 5 for details.

Rock Tunnel *(Continued from page one)*

Another AMD issue arose several years ago with outflow of AMD from the abandoned Lion mining operation. However, the PA Department of Environmental Protection was eventually able to fund and construct a treatment system at Forwardstown that has successfully eliminated the impacts of that episode.

The Bens Creek watershed was scientifically surveyed in 2007 during the Somerset Conservation District's Stonycreek River Watershed Reassessment Project and was examined again during the updated Kiski-Conemaugh River Assessment in 2017. The Bens Creek watershed was and still is the finest fishery within the entire Stonycreek River watershed. With the upcoming addition of the Class A segment coupled with ongoing upgrades of the Rock Tunnel system along with a number of stream improvement projects implemented by the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU), the Bens Creek watershed continues to improve in both water quality and recreational value, so much so that the section of the South Fork downstream of the currently proposed Class A section just missed reaching the benchmark to also be considered for Class A status during recent PFBC fish surveys.

With all this in mind MLTU and the Somerset Conservation District have partnered with the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to create a GIS data base of the watershed to properly determine what additional projects are best focused on to continue the progress that has been made.

The value of self-sustaining wild trout populations should not be underestimated and needs to be fully understood and appreciated by both anglers and non-anglers alike. The presence of wild trout are indicators of outstanding water quality, creates a destination fishery and quality angling experience and eliminates the need for hatchery fish to be placed in the stream that have very low survival rates and also cost significant dollars from ever shrinking funding sources to produce.

Thanks to public sector funding sources, coupled with professional and volunteer conservation efforts and the continued efforts of the Somerset Conservation District to oversee, maintain and improve the Rock Tunnel AMD treatment system, the Bens Creek watershed's wild trout resource is trending in a direction that provides for far reaching benefits to the human resource.

State Funding Compromises Conservation by Len Lichvar

Financial budgets by their nature are always difficult and challenging and no one is ever 100% satisfied because there will always have to be compromises. However, the recently passed Pennsylvania state budget compromises natural resource conservation to a level that is both inequitable and inappropriate.

To set the stage, Pennsylvania's most recent water quality report verifies that 40% of its 86,000 miles of waterways are in violation of the state's water quality standards due primarily to sediment runoff and abandoned mine drainage (AMD). The state's commitment to reach its Chesapeake Bay pollution goals by 2025 is woefully behind in its efforts and portions of the Susquehanna River were finally declared impaired by the PA DEP, verifying that the largest conduit to the bay slicing through the heart of the state, has been and continues to be severely impacted by pollution.

There is a one billion dollar backlog in state park and forest maintenance. Public agencies, which are on the front lines of resource protection, such as Conservation Districts and the state Fish and Boat Commission have not seen their funding increased since 2005; that forces them to operate with 2019 expenses on 2005 incomes, severely limiting their programs and capacities. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) has had its funding slashed up to 30 % in the past that continues to limit their ability to perform their many oversight and assistance providing roles.

Locally and across the state, aging AMD passive treatment systems such as the ones on the Stonycreek and Casselman Rivers in Somerset County are in dire need of maintenance and complete rehab yet still no dedicated funds have ever been created to cover the long term costs of these critical water quality improvement facilities. *(continued on page 3)*

Conservation Funding *(continued from page 2)*

Apparently underfunded and understaffed public sector agencies and shrinking numbers of overwhelmed watershed groups and non-profit volunteers are supposed to just continue to protect and conserve our natural resources that our recreational, eco-tourism, business, industry and agriculture industries require for their sustainability and every citizen depends on for their livelihood and quality of life.

That is because the state legislature, instead of adding to the empowerment of these dedicated stewards of our resources, provided the ability to cut 16 million dollars from the Environmental Stewardship Fund that funds the Growing Greener Grant Program, AMD abatement and the preservation of essential farmland and other conservation initiatives. The state's recycling fund was also given a 10 million dollar capacity to be slashed. The money can now be redirected toward sustaining the day to day operations of DEP and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) rather than using funds from the general fund for that purpose.

Instead of restoring conservation funding to appropriate levels, the budget plays a difficult to follow funding route shrouded by a shell game that clearly demonstrates that conservation is not a priority in Pennsylvania. Of course the push back is always that if these agencies and programs were funded properly, then taxes would have to be raised. NOT SO. Innovative new sources of money, that is not tax money, from such sources as the Governor's proposed Severance Fee and or even better a nominal fee on water usage that would raise millions if not billions of new capital, without undue burden on the providers, never get any serious consideration.

To potentially make matters worse - if that is possible - the state Senate recently passed SB 619 by a 26-24 vote. Although this is not part of the budget, this legislation would make major changes to the determination of water pollution under the state's Clean Stream Law effectively making spills and discharges to waterways no longer pollution and most likely taking away the ability of PA DEP and the Fish and Boat Commission to even enforce current pollution laws. The bill now goes to the state House for consideration.

Pennsylvania used to be a nationwide leader in conservation and there still are legislators and others today who lead in that direction, but not as many as in the past. A few previous examples of many include the environmental awareness of the nation being created by Pennsylvania's own Rachel Carson. Maurice Goddard almost made good on his promise of a state park within 25 miles of every Pennsylvanian and former governor Tom Ridge's administration originated Growing Greener.

Perhaps someday Pennsylvania will be great again in the stewardship of its natural resources that are the foundation upon which its economy and pride of place is built; however, today is not that day.

Kayak Fishing Instruction Was Held at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area on July 23



Chad Foster , Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Western Region Education and Outreach Coordinator, instructs participants in the sport of kayak fishing.

On July 23, SCRIP partnered with PA Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) to host an Introduction to Kayak Fishing at the Quemahoning Family Recreation Area in Hollsopple. The program is intended for those who are interested in learning about basic paddling skills and kayak fishing equipment and use. *(continued on page 4)*

Kayak Fishing *(continued from page 3)*

The event began with an introduction by Mandy Smith, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Southwest Region Education Specialist, outlining the program agenda. Kristi Niekamp, PFBC Environmental Interpretive Technician, continued with the safety lessons. PDFs, personal flotation devices, otherwise known as life jackets, were the first pieces of equipment covered.

PDFs come in a variety of styles and sizes. A Type III jacket is preferred for this sport since it allows more room around the arms to paddle. Size is important too. Using the “Touchdown” Test will ensure your PDF fits properly: After the jacket is on, raise your arms over your head as if you were signaling a touchdown. Have someone lift your jacket straight up by the shoulders. If it’s the right size it should stay in place. Other tips offered: When out on the water, be sure to wear a hat and put on sunscreen. Every kayak should have a baler to get water out of the boat. Be sure to have a whistle or other sound producing device, a white light if you are on the water at night, a first aid kit, a dry bag and a multi-tool. Registration and launch permit regulations were also discussed.



Chad Foster explained all the parts of the fishing kayak and the paddles used in them. He also described tournament fishing equipment, like a fish finder (*left*)

which uses sonar to locate fish. Newer fish finders have integrated GPS navigation, marine radar, and compasses.

Dave Ohmer, Laurel Highlands Chapter of Kayak Anglers, finished the instruction section by explaining fishing techniques, different rods used and types of bait. He capped off his instruction of casting by exclaiming, “The only bad cast is into a tree!” Participants had the remainder of the time to try out the fishing kayaks and test their paddling and fishing skills.



Dave Ohmer instructs participants on different types of rods and casting techniques.

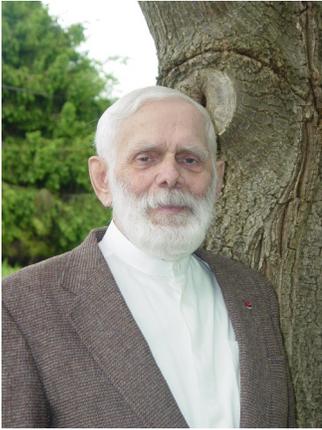
Building Fish Habitat Structures at the Que

An ongoing project at the Quemahoning Reservoir in Hollsopple is building fish habitat structures. On August 15, students from the Commonwealth Technical Institute at the Hiram G. Andrews Center along with other volunteers from the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Jenner Rod and Gun Club and the Somerset County Sportsmen's League with assistance from the Somerset-Cambria Authority built the structures. The three pictures below give you a sense of the steps used to build them. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Bureau of Habitat Management Lake Division staff oversee and provide technical assistance for the project. It has been organized and sponsored by the Somerset Conservation District since 2006.



SCRIP Co-Founder Dies at Age of 92

by John Dryzal



SCRIP co-founder and former Chairman Walter R. “Dick” Rossman passed away May 7, 2019 at the age of 92.

Although he was a forester by trade, Dick was passionate about water quality and local natural resource improvement. He was active in numerous organizations addressing water quality issues at all levels. From assisting with local watershed group organization to serving on county, regional and state boards, Dick always kept the natural resources front and center.

Dick willingly served on boards for numerous governmental, educational and non-profit organizations.

He developed the first PA “Erosion and Sedimentation Control Manual for Timber Harvesting” and the first “Erosion and Sediment Control Manual for Line Construction” which was later adapted for use by all electric utilities in PA.

He served as a representative for the Cambria County Conservation District with the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD), serving 10 years as chairman of the Forestry Committee and he established the M.K. Goddard Award for Forest Conservation.

Dick was so passionate about this work that he presented a review of the Stonycreek/Conemaugh River Improvement Project (SCRIP) to the International Environmental Conference in Moscow, Russia in August of 1994.

Dick’s genuine love and desire to improve and protect our natural resources made him a true “Watershed Hero”.

SCRIP Newsletter Moving to E-Version Starting With Winter 2020 Edition

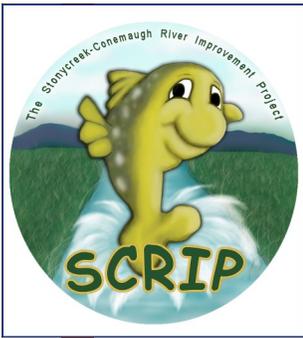
At the March board meeting, SCRIP directors discussed the time and cost involved with the distribution of the newsletter. To avoid a dues increase, the SCRIP board has decided to go to an all-electronic newsletter beginning with the Winter 2020 edition. Dues paying members can request a hard copy for an extra \$5/year to cover the costs and the membership form will be updated at that time.

We appreciate your understanding in this matter.

Join or renew* SCRIP today!

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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 info@scripPA.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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