

**Volume XXXI
Number 3
Summer 2024**

Save the Date

Nov 13– SCRIP board meeting, Windber Hotel, at 3 pm.

March 15– Nature-Works at Bottle-Works, Johnstown, 10 am-2 pm

April 12– Mountain Laurel Trout Unlimited banquet at The Willow, 650 Airport Road, Johnstown

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Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project

Electrofishing Surveys of Area Streams by Len Lichvar

The Somerset Conservation District coordinated an electro fishing survey of Higgins Run, Coal Run, Shingle Run and Dark Shade Creek recently. The surveys were conducted through the District's partnership with Garrett College of Maryland. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and MLTU provided assistance for the effort.

The Higgins Run survey was conducted to assess the impact of the large wood addition project on this Class A wild brown trout stream. According to Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick, "The survey documented that there are more trout in the 2 to 3 year age class and the young of the year are larger than pre-habitat installation. There were actually 102 wild trout captured in the 100 meter section and that does not include those that escaped the survey." Shustrick adds, "We hope to see this documented trend continue in the coming years."

In the Shade Creek watershed the surveyed section of Coal Run produced no trout. However, the Gahagen AMD treatment site has only been in full operation a short time so expectations were low to begin with.

The very bottom of Shingle Run held wild brook trout. This stream received limestone sand in 2008 and also had wild brook trout transferred to it in order to reestablish a wild trout population. The stream was resurveyed in 2009 and wild trout still survived. However, since that time, data has been lacking. Shustrick points out, "This stream is a candidate for large wood addition, but more monitoring, water chemistry, and macro data is needed. There is real potential for this waterway."

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Pictured Left: A wild brook trout from Dark Shade Creek.

Pictured Right: Wild brown trout from Higgins Run

Photos by Len Lichvar

Electrofishing Surveys

Continued from page one

In the upper portion of Dark Shade Creek, several wild brook trout were captured, and others were seen escaping. This survey documented that wild trout are indeed present in the Shade Creek watershed. More evaluation and data is required in order to determine how best to increase both the quality and quantity of wild trout in these waterways.

Laurel Run Phase II Completed

by Jackie Ritko

The Cambria County Conservation District and the PA Fish and Boat Commission recently completed Phase II of our stream habitat improvement project on Laurel Run, a tributary of the South Fork Branch of the Little Conemaugh. This project was made possible through a PA DEP Growing Greener Grant received by the Conservation District and the close partnership with the Dunlo Rod and Gun Club.

The first phase of the project was completed in 2021 on the Dunlo Club property just downstream of the current phase. The adjacent property owner was so impressed with the stream bank improvements that he readily agreed to let us continue the project upstream. This second phase stabilized approximately 1000 feet of stream banks, created new fish habitat and reduced sedimentation.



Phase II work on Laurel Run. The workers are constructing a modified mud sill.

Photos by Jackie Ritko

Shade Creek Watershed's 25th Anniversary Celebration



At first, most people, including the future presidents of the organization, thought the cleanup of the Shade Creek Watershed was a pipe dream. But inspired by the successful cleanup of the Stonycreek, they took on the task. Larry Hutchinson (*pictured right*) was the founding member and served as its president at the beginning of the watershed's existence in 1999. Jeff Sarver (*pictured left*), the current president, has been serving in that capacity for the last 7 years. At the celebration on Saturday, September 21, they were presented with awards. Larry's plaque was emblazoned with the words "the founding father of Shade Creek Watershed Association and for all his work in the community." He also received a colorful AMD glazed coffee cup, while Jeff was gifted a custom decanter of bourbon.

A tour of some of the watershed's AMD sites was part of the celebration. **The first stop, Reitz # 1**, consists of 3 areas, filtered AMD water, filtered wetland water, and Laurel Run stream water. Water from the Reitz #1 mine goes into a vertical flow pond with pipes at the bottom and limestone and compost above. The compost takes some of the oxygen out of the mine water, the mine water dissolves the limestone and takes the acid away, and the pipes then collect the treated water. The treated water passes into the wetland area and minerals in the treated water settle out. The white minerals are aluminum and the orange ones are iron. The treated water then flows into Laurel Run. Fish, frogs, insects and other living things can live in this water. Recent testing showed the pH of the water going into the system was a 3.2 pH (very acidic) and after treatment, coming out at a 7 pH (neutral).



Reitz #1 ponds, filtered AMD water (*left*) and filtered wetland water (*right*).

The second stop was Reitz #4, the worst discharge in the entire Stonycreek River. The picture below shows iron oxide flowing into Dark Shade Creek.



The stream's chemistry is bolstered by the Coal Run SGL 228 project upstream until the Reitz # 4 discharge. "We are looking forward to getting rid of this, [but] in one year, that has moved more than I remember," Hutchinson said.

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Larry Hutchinson at Reitz # 1

Photo by Melissa Reckner

A Pitch for Trees by Joe Gorden

We have heavy crops of acorns, apples and hickory nuts this year. Many of them have already begun to drop. It's the perfect time for me to make a pitch for something I've been thinking about for some time.

They say the best time to plant a tree is 30 years ago, and the next best time is today. I planted quite a few trees 30 years ago after getting to know an old man who spent his life planting, grafting and arguing for trees for crops instead of grains. Now that I find myself with more years behind me than ahead, it occurs that it is my turn.

I'm inspired these days by two Facebook pages. One is the *Phantom Planter*, a fellow in Ireland who visits the massive, legendary oaks throughout the United Kingdom to collect a few acorns, which he grows into saplings, then plants to preserve the genetics of trees that have survived for hundreds of years. More recently, he has begun to graft and plant native Irish apple trees as well.

He does his planting above the mow line in parks, estates and any other areas where he can get access, but not necessarily permission. His passion is to create areas where people can easily pick free fruit, and he also plants apple trees, plums and cherries.

The other person who has inspired me has a Facebook page called *Trees from Seed* where he emphasizes the importance of propagating native trees, usually by gathering their seeds and scattering them in likely habitat. Although it is a low-percentage method, it is Mother Nature's way, and to critics who say many will be eaten by wildlife, he replies that animals, too, have to eat. In any case, they won't get them all. I am no longer able to dig holes to plant saplings purchased or home grown, so I have fallen back on Mother Nature's way to continue trying to increase the forest diversity on my property. But the Phantom Planter has made me realize that there is a wider canvas out there, and I've resolved to spread native tree seed beyond my borders.

Because you all spend time outdoors, I'm going to ask you to help me. But, I'm not going to ask you to work hard at it. Although you can improve results with a little more effort, Mother Nature's system will work.

Gather whatever native tree seeds you encounter during your daily activities – from your yard, from along curbs in neighborhoods, from rain gutters. Put them in a dry spot and take a pocketful with you the next time you go to a place that could use trees. Most of us find ourselves visiting AMD treatment systems.

We also hunt, fish, hike, survey and do habitat work in areas that could use more trees. A pocket full of acorns or a bucket of apples tossed around at random in such areas may do a lot of good.

Some of you are young enough that you may someday pick fruit off a tree you planted. I am now gathering thousands of walnuts a year from a tree I planted and many chestnuts I planted are producing their own nuts now. I have a 30-year-old persimmon tree I grew from seed, but it doesn't produce fruit because I don't have another one to pollinate it.

I'm now trying to grow paw paws and, if I can source enough seed, hope to create a few of the thickets that once grew in the low areas near most of our waterways. And I'm searching for wild plums to bring back a species that used to grow near my property when I was young.

But don't just concentrate on fruit or nut trees. Our forests are richly diverse, and any native species deserves to have its place. We are losing hundreds of acres a year to invasives, and we have to do what we can to help all the natives. We do need oaks and wild cherries and trees that produce food for wildlife. But we also need understory plants such as spicebush and American bittersweet as well that support songbirds and insects.



The trees are doing their part right now. Let's give them a hand.

Red Oak Acorns

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The SGL 228 Treatment System was the 3rd stop.



Jeff Sarver shows the Coanda screen that replaced previous methods of intake for the system that were constantly plugged with sediment and leaves. A quick swipe with your hand can remove any leaves that accumulate on the screen. The system has a flow capacity of 400 gal/min and a control valve is there if it needs to be throttled back. It's been in for 6 months so it still needs to be tested through the winter but no problems of this sort have been noted by other users.



This larger pond is for the water to spread out to cover the limestone. The bottom is level, but the limestone goes uphill; it's 4.5 ft deep at one end and 5.5 -6 ft. deep at the other.

If there is a full system of water then they know that the stone is plugged and needs to be turned. Pipes connect to a water control structure with a solar panel that allows them to flush the system. The far end of the pond has vertical pipes that lead to the settling pond (*pictured below*) on the other side. The water comes in at a 4 to 4.5 pH and comes out at a 7.5 to 8 pH. The water can then be directed back into the stream. This system has made an impact at Reitz #4, as mentioned previously.



The next pond is for any sediment or debris to fall out. It has an overflow on the other side so if there is too much rain, it can be pushed out and go back into the stream. A box is located in the middle with a weir which limits the flow to 400 gal/min.



Shade Creek "Big 5" Active Treatment Plant proposal in next newsletter.

Join or renew* SCRIP today!

Name _____
Street Address _____ City _____
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To renew or become a Member, please complete Parts 1 and 2 below.

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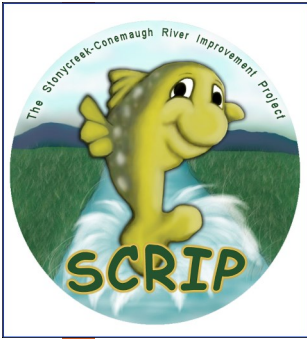
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Make your check payable to **SCRIP**, or for a tax-deductible contribution, make the check to **Southern Alleghenies Conservancy/ SCRIP**. * If you are not sure of your membership status contact SCRIP's secretary at info@scripPA.org. Send donations 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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