



West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition

Spring 2009



Bear Run Success!



Photos by Phil Gardner

Top: Bear Run before Phase I construction

Bottom: Same view of Bear Run after Phase I construction

See Page 2 for details

Economic Benefits in Times of Financial Uncertainty?

In response to the nation's current economic climate, environmental-related issues have taken a back-seat to domestic policy and unemployment. In fact, a January poll by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center cites that only 41% of voters deemed protecting the environment a top priority – down 15 points from last years' 56%. While this precipitous drop is not surprising, it highlights the fact that environmental issues are not likely associated with job creation or increased local economic productivity.

Contrary to this evidence, Trout Unlimited (TU), a national nonprofit organization

dedicated to the protection, restoration, and conservation of North America's cold water fish and their watersheds recently published a study documenting the economic benefits associated with remediating local abandoned mine drainage pollution. The study reports that cleaning up the more than 1,200 miles of polluted waters and 42,000 acres of abandoned mine lands in the West Branch Susquehanna River watershed could potentially create approximately 6,000 green-collar jobs and an associated \$800 million in economic benefits. The study also reports that streams free of abandoned mine drainage pollution would

potentially generate \$22.3 million in sport fishing revenue on an annual basis.

But, for now, let's forget things like green-collar jobs and unemployment – and start from the beginning: Coal mining is arguably the backbone of north central Pennsylvania's economy. Mining boomed as extensive historical logging provoked reduced large-scale lumber availability in the region. By the late 1800's and early 1900's the mere presence of coal sparked a fury of crude extraction operations and coal towns comprised of company-owned stores and houses began to dot the landscape. Coal provided a way of life not only for the miners and their families who lived in this area but also for a nation dependent on its extraction.

The economic significance of historical coal mining in our area is profound. However, despite its regional and national importance historical coal mining has left us with thousands of miles of polluted streams and thousands of acres of barren abandoned mine lands in the West Branch Susquehanna river watershed. Streams like Two Mile Run, a tributary to

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Clearfield Creek Watershed Association Making Progress

A glance at a map of acid mine drainage (AMD) in the Susquehanna Basin will show that Clearfield Creek is among the most affected watersheds in the region. The Creek, which starts near Cresson, PA and extends about 40 miles to its mouth at Clearfield, drains

an area of about 400 sq. miles in Cambria and Clearfield Counties.

The Clearfield Creek Assessment concluded that about half of the 107 tributaries of the Creek are affected by AMD from past coal mining.

The Clearfield Creek Watershed Association (CCWA) was organized in mid-2001 by a group of several dozen residents with the aid of the Cambria and Clearfield County Conservation Districts.

CCWA's mission is to protect and enhance the quality of the watershed. Currently, the Association has over 100 members, and has taken on various projects including passive treatment system construction, annual children's fishing derby, a re-vegetation project, and stream/roadside cleanups, to name a few. The CCWA meets monthly on the 3rd Tuesday. Please visit www.clearfieldcreekwatershed.org for more information about ongoing projects and how you can help.

Still not a member of the WBSRC?

It's easy to join—go to www.wbsrc.org for more information.

Economic Benefits cont...

Kettle Creek, once known to be a superb trout fishery are today stained orange with iron pollution and are too toxic for any aquatic life.

TU embraced the significance of historical coal mining in north central Pennsylvania and its lasting effect on our regions' streams and rivers and established the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Initiative in 2004. As part of this Initiative, TU published the report *An Economic Benefits Analysis for Abandoned Mine Drainage Remediation*. This timely report outlines how pollution from abandoned coal mines has negatively impacted the waterways and economy in our region and also documents how any investment in cleaning up this pollution will encourage green jobs and a stronger present-day economy through increased recreation and eco-tourism.

Bear Run Success cont...

The photos on Page 1 demonstrate the improvements that have been seen in Bear Run, which enters the West Branch near McGee's Mills, since the completion of the Bear Run Phase I construction project. The Phase I system treats the largest source of iron loading to Bear Run, reducing it from an average of 36 mg/l to 2 mg/l, while generating additional alkalinity. This project was undertaken by the Evergreen Conservancy with assistance from the Indiana County Conservation District and the SRBC. Additional work will be completed in the watershed utilizing funding from the DEP's Watershed Renaissance Initiative grant program.

AMD Education Tours Coming to a Watershed Near You!

Utilizing funding from the DEP's Environmental Education Grant Program, TU has partnered with the Clearfield County Conservation District to bring AMD Education to the West Branch. Beginning later this summer and fall, a series of educational forums and tours will focus on the work of six different watershed groups that are working to clean up abandoned mine drainage throughout the watershed. These tours will take the place of the annual West Branch Susquehanna Resto-

ration Symposium.

Each educational event and tour will be tailored to fit the mission of the focus watershed group and will feature the projects that they are working on to restore the West Branch.

A special effort will be made to reach out to municipal officials, college students, teachers, and the local community, while introducing them to the Economic Benefit Analysis for Abandoned Mine Drainage Remediation that was completed for the

West Branch, as well as, the West Branch Susquehanna AMD Remediation Strategy.

For downloadable copies of both documents, visit www.wbsrc.org and be sure to watch for more information about the AMD tours!

Upcoming Grant Deadlines:

EPA Environmental Community Grants—March 16

WREN—April 3

Foundation for Pennsylvania

Watersheds—August 21

Growing Greener—TBA

A Familiar Face in the West Branch Joins Team TU!

Trout Unlimited (TU) is excited to welcome Rachel Kester to our West Branch Susquehanna team. Rachel is a graduate of Lock Haven University with a B.S in Biology: Ecology and Environmental Biology. She is also the former Watershed Specialist for Clearfield County, where she became a familiar

face among the various watershed groups and gained first-hand knowledge of the AMD problems facing the West Branch.

Rachel was hired as Project Coordinator for the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Initiative and will be working with WBSRC members and partners on a vari-



ety of projects throughout the watershed. You can contact Rachel at rkester@tu.org or 570-748-4901.

Just a Reminder—FREE AMD Technical Assistance Available

As announced in the previous edition of the WBSRC newsletter, Trout Unlimited's Abandoned Mine Drainage Technical Assistance Program will continue thanks to funding provided by the DEP's Growing Greener Grant Program.

The types of **free** technical assistance being provided include:

- 1) Rapid characterization of mine drainage
- 2) Rapid watershed assessment
- 3) Conceptual design of AMD treatment systems
- 4) Existing treatment system evaluation and recommendations
- 5) Construction oversight
- 6) Pre- and/or post-construction biological and habitat surveys
- 7) Other, as determined on

a case-by-case basis.

Watershed groups, TU chapters, conservation districts and other groups working to cleanup AMD across the Commonwealth are eligible for this program.

To take advantage of this **free** assistance, contact Amy Wolfe, TU's Director of Abandoned Mine Programs, at awolfe@tu.org or fill out a request form at www.wbsrc.org. It's that easy!