

**West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition
Meeting Report
Tuesday, October 10, 2006**

Opening This meeting of the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Amy Wolfe. The meeting was held at the Ross Library in Lock Haven, PA.

Present The meeting was attended by: Amy Wolfe, Dr. Mel Zimmerman, Dr. John Way, Art Rose, Jennifer Demchack, Rachel Kester, Terry O'Connor, John Larson, William Hellier, Jason Fellon DEP, Erin Dunleavy, Paul Deph DEP, Carl Undercofler, Ken Flanigan, Mary Vuccola, and Becky Dunlap.

Information and Discussion Items

Item 1: Participant Introductions - Amy Wolfe asked that all meeting participants identify themselves and the group they were representing. The minutes of the July 11, 2006 meeting were reviewed.

Item 2: Amy Wolfe introduced Jason Fellon DEP, who described his role as a liaison for DEP to interact with watershed groups for the purpose of sharing information.

Item 3: Amy Wolfe updated the group regarding the lack of legislative action on S2616 pertaining to the AML Fund re-authorization and urged contact with legislators.

Item 4: Amy Wolfe provided a spreadsheet received from Beth Dillon containing the data sets collected by the SRBC to date. An informational report regarding SRBC data collection/distribution was provided.

Item 5: Amy Wolfe reported on efforts to obtain economic benefits analysis for the West Branch AMD remediation. Downstream Strategies, a Morgantown W. Virginia Company, was awarded the project for ~\$42,000. Trout Unlimited is covering this cost. The completion date for the study is December 31, 2007.

Item 6: William Hellier provided an update pertaining to restoration efforts on Cold Stream. Art Rose provided updates regarding projects on Brubaker Run and Laurel Run.

Item 7: Amy Wolfe provided a history of the West Branch Restoration Coalition and reiterated the educational role of the Coalition.

Item 8: MOU - Draft

**West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition
Memorandum of Understanding**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) constitutes an agreement among the entities comprising the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition listed below for the following reasons:

- To formalize the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition (WBSRC or Coalition) as a coordinating body with a purpose, scope, and set of strategies common to its members aimed at addressing water resources impacted by abandoned mine drainage within the greater West Branch Susquehanna River watershed.
- To declare officially that the signatories are actively cooperating in ongoing efforts (1) to raise public awareness of the scope and extent of the acid-mine-impaired waters in the West Branch watershed and (2) to promote all reasonable and scientifically tested efforts to return these waters to historic levels characterized as high-quality fisheries.
- To provide documentation of the mission, vision, and goals of the Coalition for all to see.

- To clarify and emphasize that each of the signatories is autonomous and operates according to its own respective rules and procedures and with this MOU each agrees to work toward the Coalition's common goals.

ARTICLE I. ENTITIES

This document constitutes an agreement for cooperation among the following entities under the WBSRC's banner:

Anderson Creek Watershed Association
Beech Creek Watershed Association
Clearfield Creek Watershed Association
Kettle Creek Watershed Association
Moshannon Creek Watershed Coalition
Woodduck Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Lloyd Wilson Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Susquehanna Heartland Coalition for Environmental Studies
Cameron County Conservation District
Clearfield County Conservation District
Clinton County Conservation District
PA Senior Environment Corps of Clearfield County

ARTICLE II. RATIONALE

A. West Branch Regional Description and Extent of Impairment

The West Branch Susquehanna subbasin drains an area of approximately 4.47 million acres, just under 7,000 square miles, nearly 20% of the Commonwealth. The West Branch flows from Carrolltown, Cambria County, to Northumberland, Northumberland County, and includes significant portions of Cambria, Clearfield, Elk, Cameron, Potter, Centre, Clinton, Tioga, Sullivan, Lycoming, Union, and Montour counties. The watershed contains more than 1.4 million acres of state forest land, 250,000 acres of state game lands, and over 29,000 acres of state park land, along with a scattering of small urban centers. The larger urban centers in the region include Clearfield, Lock Haven, State College, and Williamsport. Nearly 600,000 people live within the watershed.

Tucked away in the Commonwealth's rural interior and home to three distinct ecoregions (Northern Appalachian Plateau Uplands, North Central Appalachians, Central Appalachian Ridges and Valleys), the West Branch watershed is truly a "gem in the rough." This region has tremendous potential to serve as a Mecca for outdoor recreation opportunities. Unfortunately, pollution and associated problems derived from historic, unregulated coal-mining activities that once brought economic prosperity to its communities and local industries inexorably constrains that potential today. This legacy, in the form of abandoned mine lands (AML) and abandoned mine drainage (AMD), currently contributes nearly 60% of the pollution to the West Branch's impaired waterways.

Severely impacted in its headwaters in Cambria County, the West Branch Susquehanna watershed comprises more than 1,100 miles of streams that have documented AMD impairment derived from sizable areas of abandoned and unreclaimed mined lands. In addition to many small, impaired tributaries that empty directly into the main stem, the primary mining-impacted subbasins of the West Branch include Chest Creek, Anderson Creek, Clearfield Creek, Moshannon Creek, Mosquito Creek, Bennett Branch Sinnemahoning Creek, Beech Creek, Kettle Creek, Babb Creek (tributary to Pine Creek), and a portion of Loyalsock Creek.

B. Legislative Efforts Addressing Coal-mining Impact

Beginning in the early part of the 1900s, the environmental impacts of coal mining were receiving legislative attention in the Commonwealth. The Clean Streams Law of 1937 was passed largely to protect streams from pollution. The Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act (PA-SMCRA) of 1945 focused on regulating coal mining. Both of these laws form the basis of modern environmental regulations covering coal mining operations.

In 1968, a \$500 million bond issue was passed, in part, to finance the reclamation of abandoned mined lands through an initiative called Operation Scarlift and to purchase land for conservation and recreation purposes. The Coal Refuse Disposal Control Act passed that same year, aimed at controlling pollution from coal refuse piles. In 1992 and again in 1996, PA-SMCRA was amended to address water-supply protection and provide incentives for re-mining previously abandoned areas.

Responding to a major effort in the western U.S. to develop energy resources, Congress passed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act in 1977, with the express purpose of “establishing a nationwide program to protect society and the environment” from the adverse effects of coal mining. Additionally, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act all have made real progress in protecting the nation’s environment.

C. West Branch Initiatives

As a result of the extensive impact that AMD pollution has had throughout the West Branch watershed, countless federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, watershed groups, and individuals have gotten on board and accepted the responsibility of addressing this problem. Moreover, there is growing recognition of the direct economic benefits to the region from tourism and recreation giving even greater impetus to restoration projects.

With the recent designation of the Commonwealth’s northcentral region as the ‘Pennsylvania Wilds,’ the watershed has received more of the spotlight. Governor Rendell stated that “cleaning up acid mine drainage is a priority in the battle to preserve and enhance the 12-county north central region of the state known as the Pennsylvania Wilds.” Currently, the Commonwealth is developing strategies to encourage the growth of tourism and related-businesses based on the area’s significant “outdoor” resources, and fundamental to this initiative are clean and biologically productive waterways.

As part of a grassroots effort, more than a dozen watershed associations recently have come together with the support and guidance of Trout Unlimited to form the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition. The Coalition was a key outcome of discussions held at the West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Symposium on May 6-7, 2005 in State College. In addition to watershed constituents, representatives from conservation districts, educational institutions, and individuals from both the private and public sectors, all of whom have an interest in watershed restoration, meet to exchange information, formulate educational initiatives, and build widespread public support for the efforts aimed at the cleanup of abandoned mine drainage throughout the West Branch.

ARTICLE III. WBSRC VISION

The vision of the Coalition is to see water quality restored to pre-mining conditions throughout this beautiful and scenic West Branch Susquehanna River watershed and to encourage its protection and preservation so that future generations will value this immense natural resource, use it as a living and learning laboratory, and enjoy all that it has to offer.

ARTICLE IV. WBSRC MISSION

The mission of the Coalition is to promote public awareness and stimulate efforts to restore water resources impacted by abandoned mine lands (AML) and acid mine drainage (AMD) within the West Branch Susquehanna River basin, ultimately improving the quality of life for those living in and visiting the watershed.

ARTICLE V. WBSRC GOALS

Toward this end, the signatories to this MOU will work cooperatively and diligently to facilitate public awareness, communication, and educational opportunities in order to achieve the following goals:

- Build a strong local and regional support base through public awareness outreach strategies and proactive educational efforts in order to develop recognition of the need for substantive and ongoing funding for West Branch Susquehanna watershed restoration at both the State and Federal levels.
- Provide a forum for communication and the exchange of valid, understandable, technically correct information and data relating to restoration activities and initiatives within the West Branch Susquehanna watershed.
- Encourage and/or develop opportunities for educators and students to investigate the natural history and culture of the West Branch Susquehanna watershed.

The Coalition anticipates that its efforts will advance public conscientiousness of the intrinsic nature of the watershed as well as demonstrate the economic benefits of restoration efforts aimed at addressing environmental problems within the watershed.

ARTICLE V. THE ROLE OF THE SIGNATORIES

Responsibilities and activities undertaken by each signatory to this MOU in order to accomplish common goals will include but not be limited to the following:

- Promote and participate in planning processes necessary to develop a basin-wide strategic remediation plan for restoring water resources impacted by AML and AMD.
- Foster cooperation and partnerships among members of the Coalition in order to achieve common and individual watershed goals.
- Provide letters of support and oral testimony for projects that address remediation in the watershed.
- Meet periodically to coordinate and integrate the work of each member's group into unified and meaningful strategies that advance the goals of the Coalition.
- Support ongoing public-awareness and environmental-education components for basin-wide and individual watershed objectives, particularly those focused on improvement of water resources impacted by AML and AMD.
- Join with agencies focusing on local and regional tourism and economic development to promote and market the recreational, scenic, and cultural resources as well as business opportunities within the watershed.

ARTICLE VI. THE ROLE OF WBSRC

Responsibilities and activities undertaken by the WBSRC in order to accomplish common goals will include but not be limited to the following:

- The WBSRC will serve as the coordinating body in guiding the planning and implementation of regional and basin-wide projects focused on the restoration of high-quality water resources impacted by AML and AMD.
- Facilitate the exchange of information, data, technology, and methodology among groups to address and solve common remediation problems.
- Develop strategies for funding consistent with goals of the Coalition and priorities reached collectively by each watershed group.
- Coordinate educational and public awareness activities for basin-wide projects as necessary.

ARTICLE VII. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

In order to accomplish its common goals, the WBSRC will consider initiating one or more of the following strategies:

- Institute an advisory committee comprising members who will serve as representatives to the West Branch Susquehanna Task Force, West Branch Susquehanna Heartland Coalition for Environmental Studies, and other groups.
- Form a steering committee comprising members whose primary task is to lay the foundation for establishing a West Branch Legislative Caucus and ultimately the dedication of state and/or federal funds for restoration of West Branch Susquehanna water resources impacted by AML and AMD.
- Form an education work group to create ongoing public-awareness and environmental-education components for basin-wide and individual watershed objectives, particularly those focused on improvement of water resources impacted by AML and AMD.
- Launch and maintain a website dedicated to remediation efforts and Coalition activity.
- Form a symposium work group responsible for planning and executing the annual spring symposium.
- Craft new strategies for involving college and university interns in hands-on, service-based initiatives aimed at augmenting work performed by local watershed groups and non-governmental agencies focusing on data gathering and remediation efforts.

ARTICLE VII. TERMS OF THE MOU

The West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Coalition is an organization comprising autonomous entities with common goals and who agree to work together for the benefit of all. The memorandum will become effective when signed by two or more organizations. Any signatory may terminate its participation by written notification to the Coalition.

Item 8: The group prioritized goals of the Coalition by vote and committees were formed.

<Recorded by Ken Flanigan>