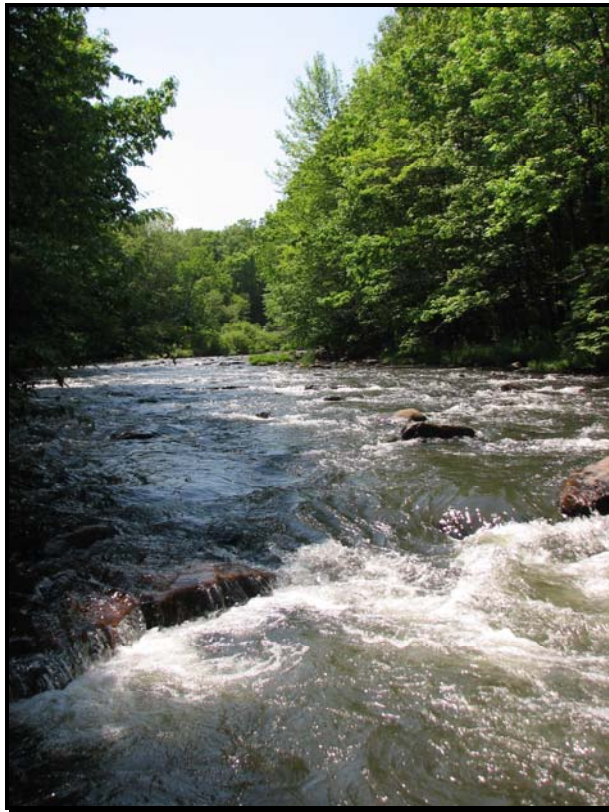


***Stonycreek River
and
Upper Conemaugh River Basin***

RESTORATION TIME LINE

25 Years and Counting



Stonycreek River, Somerset County

Compiled by LEN LICHVAR

Edited by JOE GORDEN

2012

Stonycreek River and Upper Conemaugh River Basin

RESTORATION

In the beginning.....

1985 – Johnstown Tribune-Democrat sportswriter Joe Gorden pens a two-part series detailing the opinions of Pa. Fish and Boat Commission Southwest Regional Biologist Blake Weirich that the Stonycreek suffers from AMD. Weirich indicates that he is “pretty sure the problems can solved.”

1987- Len Lichvar, member of the Greater Johnstown Watershed Association, publishes an article detailing Blake Weirich’s special presentation on water quality data in the Stonycreek River. A slide program by Len Lichvar and Lester McNutt on the attributes of the upper Stonycreek River precedes the presentation, which is delivered on the banks of the Stonycreek River at Kantner.

1989-Somerset Conservation District Manager Dave Steele meets with Armstrong County Conservation District Manager Dave Rupert to discuss new passive treatment technologies for AMD.

Bruce Penrod writes an article in *American Whitewater Journal* on the Stonycreek’s current and potential whitewater opportunities.

1990- An effort to create an Environmental Compact for Cambria and Somerset counties fails in a ballot referendum.

The Southern Alleghenies Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) is created with Ron Donlan hired as a federal coordinator charged with improving economic opportunities through conservation.

The Benscreek Canoe Club sponsors the American Canoe Association’s Whitewater Open Nationals and requests a release from the Quemahoning Reservoir. Bethlehem Steel denies the request.

The Somerset Conservation District produces a “Stonycreek River Proposal” detailing steps needed to improve water quality in the Stonycreek River.

1991- To reach some of the intended goals of the failed Environmental Compact, Somerset Conservation District Chairman Dave Mankamyer and Cambria County Conservation District Chairman W. R. Rossman take U. S. Congressman John Murtha on a tour of Rural Abandoned Mine (RAMP) sites in Cambria and Somerset counties. They

present to him a detailed plan written by Southern Alleghenies RC&D Coordinator Ron Donlan to clean up AMD. Congressman Murtha calls a meeting of more than 50 county, state, federal and local officials to discuss cleaning up the Conemaugh and Stonycreek Rivers.

The Tribune-Democrat publishes an editorial titled “Stonycreek Cleanup: Go For It.”

Dave Steele meets with USGS Water Resources staff in Lemoyne, Pa., and enlists support for the watershed cleanup efforts.

Congressman Murtha invites community, agency and business leaders to the first meeting of an ad-hoc steering committee on the project. The group adopts the name “Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project” (SCRIP). The congressman appoints his communication aide, Brad Clemenson, to oversee the effort, and SCRIP’s board of directors officially meets for the first time.

1992- SCRIP announces the initiation of a \$660,000 study of AMD discharges in the Stonycreek River watershed, funded by the U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS), state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Somerset Conservation District. The study is headed by USGS hydrogeologist Don Williams.

The Cambria County Conservation District initiates its own study and assessment of the Little Conemaugh River watershed, utilizing college students from the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and the Cambria County staff geologist with help from DEP.

Congressman Murtha obtains a \$500,000 grant from the Army Corps of Engineers for a study of the entire Conemaugh River Basin.

The Somerset Conservation District meets with Bethlehem Steel to inquire about diverting water from the Quemahoning Reservoir’s 66-inch pipeline to restore historic flows to the Stonycreek River. The request is denied.

SCRIP and the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited lobby DEP for a conservation release from the Quemahoning Reservoir pending its expected sale.

The USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) holds its annual staff meeting in Somerset County and tours Wilbur to document AMD problems in the Stonycreek River watershed. Ron Donlan leads the tour. Len Lichvar explains the lost potential of the Stonycreek. Discussion ensues with James Gettinger and others regarding a little-used PL-566 NRCS flood-control funding program that could help in AMD abatement.

Bob Deason of PBS Coals agrees to make industry connections in regard to existing AMD abatement technologies. Damariscotta, a private consulting firm, is hired to assist

the NRCS Technical Field Office in Somerset in developing public-driven AMD abatement designs similar to current industry models.

With support from Conservation District Board Chairman and RC&D Council member Dave Mankamyer and District Manager Dave Steele the Somerset Conservation District becomes the local sponsor for the PL-566 program, and accepts responsibility for securing land rights and operation and maintenance of the yet-to-be-implemented treatment systems.

Dan Seibert leads the SCRIP coordinated NRCS component of the effort, named “The Oven Run Project” to design, fund and build AMD remediation projects at six sites identified from the ongoing USGS discharge survey.

1993- The Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU) sponsors a public meeting in Hooversville to unveil SCRIP’s proposed six-site, \$5 million Oven Run abatement project on the Stonycreek River. SCRIP announces its first AMD passive treatment project will be constructed on Benscreek near Thomas Mills at a discharge known as the “Rock Tunnel Site” with funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission and DEP.

The Cambria County Conservation District takes Richard Duncan of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts and James Gettinger, NRCS District Conservationist, to the Hughes Borehole to demonstrate the scope of the AMD problem in the Little Conemaugh River watershed.

SCRIP initiates its Adopt-A-River program with Bruce Penrod as head riverkeeper to oversee a network of volunteer riverkeepers.

SCRIP assists DEP in promoting a new program that gives companies the option to clean up AMD in lieu of paying fines for mining violations.

Volunteers from SCRIP, MLTU, the Cambria County Conservation District and the Benscreek Canoe Club remove several truckloads of debris from the polluted Stonycreek River between Benscreek and Ferndale.

Nationally known fly fishing author Charlie Meck fishes the upper Stonycreek River with Len Lichvar and Randy Buchanan, then writes a feature story in Fly Fisherman Magazine and devotes a portion of his book “Trout Streams of PA” to the angling opportunities of the river, profiling the efforts of SCRIP and MLTU.

1994- Joe Gorden writes an article for “PA Resources,” a publication of the PA Association of Conservation Districts, on SCRIP and the progress of the ongoing design, planning and funding for the Oven Run Project by the USDA NRCS Technical Field Office in Somerset.

SCRIP creates and publishes its initial set of River Fact Sheets to inform the public about the watersheds in the upper Conemaugh Basin.

1995- The Somerset County Conservancy is created, through the efforts of Dave Mankamyer, to take title to properties on which the Oven Run project can be built.

SCRIP contributes \$500 toward the creation of the land trust.

SCRIP sponsors a public raft trip through the Stonycreek Canyon.

SCRIP enters the Internet with a 39-page website.

Ground is broken at a public ceremony on the first Oven Run AMD project at Site D.

Construction of Site D is completed and the system goes on line.

1996- Len Lichvar writes a proposal, on behalf of MLTU, for the cleanup of Quemahoning Creek. The proposal is approved by the Somerset Conservation District and the Southern Alleghenies RC&D Council. The U. S. Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining and the Environmental Protection Agency's Appalachian Clean Streams Program approve funding for an AMD project at Jenners in the Quemahoning Creek watershed. MLTU secures a \$2,000 grant from National Trout Unlimited's Embrace-A-Stream Program, and the local chapter contributes \$3,000 of its own funds to construct an interpretive trail at Oven Run Site D.

Oven Run Site E is constructed and goes on line.

1997- Oven Run Sites B and C are constructed and put on line. Site B is designed, funded and constructed by the PA DEP BAMR.

A news report in The Tribune-Democrat and a report in the SCRIP newsletter confirm trout are beginning to return to the Stonycreek River at the Riverside Bridge just outside the city limits of Johnstown.

Ground is broken on Oven Run Site F, construction is completed and the system is put on line.

SCRIP develops a partnership with the Alliance for Aquatic Monitoring (ALLARM) through its Riverkeeper program. Mark Antonik takes over as head Riverkeeper for SCRIP.

The NRCS Somerset Technical Design team headed by Dan Seibert receives a Three Rivers Environmental Award for the ongoing Oven Run Project.

Congressman Murtha's Communications Director, Brad Clemenson, tells SCRIP that Manufacturers Water Company properties, including Quemahoning, Hinckston Run and Wilmore reservoirs, Border and South Fork dams and 5,000 acres of land, will be sold by Bethlehem Steel. SCRIP devises a plan to publicly acquire the properties.

1998 – State Fish and Boat Commission Area 8 Fisheries Manager Rick Lorson conducts electro-shocking fish surveys at specific sites on the Stonycreek River and tributaries, finding more fish of various species than anticipated. But, the river is virtually lifeless downstream of Carpenter's Park.

SCRIP sponsors its first whitewater raft trip on the Canyon section of the Stonycreek.

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt comes to Jenners to dedicate the completed Jenners Passive Treatment System on Quemahoning Creek.

SCRIP establishes an endowment fund at the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies.

A six-month-long feasibility study facilitated by the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy (SAC) and SCRIP, begins and completes its work, determining that Manufacturers Water Company could be a standalone entity, and a public purchase would be possible. The announcement is made to the public and media at a special event coordinated by the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Spurred by the news and public support, the Somerset and Cambria county commissioners combine to negotiate with Bethlehem Steel. The Greater Johnstown Water Authority buys full-page ads in local newspapers attempting to derail the commissioners' efforts to bring the properties into public ownership.

SAC Executive Director Len Lichvar requests and receives the largest land grant in the history of the state from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The \$1.5 million seals the deal for the public purchase of the Manufacturers Water Company properties. Somerset and Cambria counties win a bidding war and begin the process of acquiring the properties for \$6.23 million dollars.

The Quemahoning Creek Streambank Improvement Project, funded by Pa. DEP's Growing Greener Program and administered by the Somerset Conservation District, is completed and dedicated by DEP Secretary Dave Hess.

The Lamberts Run AMD passive treatment system is completed by PBS Coals through the PA DEP in-lieu of penalty program on land secured by the Somerset County Conservancy.

Charlie Meck's new book, "Mid-Atlantic Trout Streams and Their Hatches," is published, profiling angling on Benscreek and the conservation efforts of SCRIP and MLTU.

The Kiski-Conemaugh Stream Team is formed by the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy with Tom Grote as its director.

1999- Rob McCombie heads up the effort to develop the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Plan with funding and program support from the DCNR River Conservation Program. The Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance is created to foster implementation of the plan.

The Wells Creek Watershed Association is created with Denny Aust as president.

SAC and SCRIP create the "Conemaugh River Water Resources Management Plan Concept Paper," which determines recreational and economic potential of the former Manufacturers Water Company properties and recommends a course of action.

Thurman Korn and Bob Ritchey become Head Riverkeepers for SCRIP.

2000 - The Kiski-Conemaugh is chosen as Pennsylvania River of the Year primarily because of the efforts of the Kiski-Conemaugh River Basin Alliance and the AMD abatement efforts in the Stonycreek River watershed. A River of the Year newspaper insert is published to commemorate the selection.

The Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association is formed.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency, Central City Borough and Shade Township begin a two-year Brownfield Demonstration Project to continue to assess land and water restoration efforts in the Dark Shade Creek watershed.

The Conemaugh Township (Somerset County) supervisors meet with Mark Antonik, senior planner for the Somerset County Planning Commission, and Scott Cuppett, American Whitewater regional coordinator, to hear about potential development of a recreational plan and facility at Carpenter Park and at a recently acquired 9.7-acre parcel formerly occupied by Yoder's Greenhouse along Route 403 in Tire Hill.

Somerset and Cambria county commissioners create the Cambria-Somerset Authority (CSA) to formally acquire the Quemahoning, Wilmore and Hinckston Run reservoirs and Border and South Fork dams.

Data collected by SCRIP Riverkeepers Karlice McCuchan and Eva Strang confirm that the Stonycreek River has changed from a net acidic to a net alkaline waterway.

Bob Ritchey is the featured “Person of the Week” in The Tribune-Democrat for his leadership role in stream remediation through SCRIP and the Cambria County Conservation District.

2001 – The Wells Creek Watershed Association, under the leadership of President Thurman Korn, secures a DEP Growing Greener grant for the abatement of the Adams Deep Mine AMD discharge into Wells Creek.

The Little Conemaugh Watershed Association is formed.

The Trout Run Watershed Association is created.

The Shade Creek Watershed Association is organized.

Oven Run Site A is constructed and goes on line.

DEP Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation (BAMR) locates the largest AMD discharge in the Quemahoning Creek watershed. The Somerset Conservation District begins to attempt to permit, and request funding for, an AMD abatement project at the site. The Jenner Rod and Gun Club donates \$25,000 to the Somerset County Conservancy to purchase the site and put it into public ownership.

SAC and the CSA jointly receive a Governor’s Award for Watershed Stewardship.

More than 2,400 smallmouth bass are planted at four locations in the Stonycreek River watershed, making the transition of the Stonycreek from a recovering fishery to a managed fishery. Len Lichvar and Lester McNutt initiate a fund drive to purchase the fish, with SCRIP contributing \$1,000. Additional funds are secured from MLTU, Hooversville Game Protective Association, Somerset County Sportsmen’s League, Jenner Rod and Gun Club, Hooversville Lions Club and the Johnstown Sportsmen’s Association.

The Cambria County Conservation District begins an extensive monitoring program on the Topper Run discharge in St. Michael to develop a treatment strategy.

The Traditional Anglers of PA secure a \$38,000 Growing Greener grant for the Trout Run Improvement Project.

The Wells Creek Watershed Association receives \$750,000 from DEP’s Office of Surface Mining and the EPA to construct three AMD treatment systems on Wells Creek.

A bony pile is removed in Gahagen through the Dark Shade Creek Brownfields Project and PBS Coals.

The Southern Alleghenies Conservancy completes the “Quemahoning Creek Watershed Restoration Plan” with funding from the Western PA Watershed Program and PA DEP.

The upper Stonycreek watershed is thrust into national prominence when United Flight 93 crashes near Shanksville. The incident changes the dynamics of AMD projects planned for Lamberts Run by SCRIP and the Somerset Conservation District.

2002 – The Greater Johnstown Watershed Association revitalizes and begins a marketing campaign.

SCRIP receives a Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence.

The Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association receives a \$60,000 Growing Greener grant to locate sources of AMD in the Paint Creek watershed.

The Shade Creek Watershed Association begins construction of an anoxic limestone drain on Shingle Run, and begins limestone dosing of Dark Shade Creek tributaries.

MLTU hires aquatic biologist Gene Macri to complete a comprehensive study of Higgins Run, a Class A wild trout stream and tributary to Quemahoning Reservoir.

A new outbreak of AMD erupts on the South Fork of Benscreek, impairing a previously unimpacted stretch of water.

Millions of gallons of mine drainage are spewed into Quemahoning Creek during the Quecreek mine disaster and rescue. Millions more gallons of AMD are permitted by DEP to flow into the waterway and the Quemahoning Reservoir in the days after the miners were rescued, causing a setback in AMD recovery efforts.

2003- SCRIP partners with the local chapter of the NAACP to sponsor a community unity and environmental sustainability event in Johnstown during two weekends.

A proposal for an AMD treatment project on Saltlick Run is spearheaded by Bob Ritchey.

DCNR receives a \$17,000 grant application to study the feasibility of whitewater releases from Quemahoning Reservoir. The Benscreek Canoe Club secures a \$5,000 grant from the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies and \$1,000 from SCRIP as matching funds.

The Little Conemaugh River Watershed Association holds a cleanup along Route 869.

SAC administers a \$500,000 grant obtained by Congressman Murtha for testing of resource recovery field technologies in the Little Conemaugh watershed.

An engineering estimate is completed for the Saltlick Run AMD project.

The Little Conemaugh River Watershed Association receives a Coldwater Heritage Conservation Plan grant for the Little Conemaugh River.

The Stonycreek River is featured on national television by Trout Unlimited TV. SCRIP Chairman and MLTU Stream Improvement Chairman Len Lichvar fishes with and describes the AMD recovery efforts to program host Tim Linehan.

2004 – An AMD outbreak on Higgins Run destroys aquatic life and kills wild brown trout.

A treatment system on the South Fork of Benscreek does not work properly and AMD continues to impact the stream.

The Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association locates a significant outbreak of AMD in Paint Creek emanating from an active mining operation.

SCRIP sponsors the largest in its series of Fun Raisers at Boswell Lions/Jaycees Community Park in conjunction with Boswell's Centennial celebration.

The Tribune-Democrat runs an editorial on the "amazing turnaround" in the Conemaugh River.

Wells Creek Watershed President Thurman Korn reports that surveys by the state Fish and Boat Commission and DEP show that AMD projects on Wells Creek have enabled aquatic insects and fish to re-colonize the stream.

DEP fines Cooney Brothers Coal Co. \$14,272 for pollution in both Little Conemaugh and Stonycreek River watersheds.

The Wells Creek Watershed Association completes the Onstead and Adams Station passive treatment systems.

A second outbreak from an underground abandoned mine spills additional AMD into Higgins Run. A treatment system is completed that treats the discharge shortly afterward.

2005- The premier issue of Johnstown Magazine features an article titled "Stonycreek River of Dreams" and details efforts to improve water quality in the watershed.

A manure storage facility on the upper Stonycreek River fails, sending 27,000 gallons of manure into Glades Run and the Stonycreek River, killing 227 fish.

The Tribune-Democrat publishes a weeklong series of articles and features on water quality improvement in the upper Conemaugh River Basin.

The Shade Creek Watershed Association completes its Reitz Passive Treatment System.

The Paint Creek Restoration Plan is completed by the Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association.

SCRIP Chairman and Trout Unlimited representative Len Lichvar speaks at the National Press Club in Washington in support of reauthorization of the federal Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMCRA).

The Boswell Passive Treatment System in the Quemahoning Creek watershed is completed and begins to function.

MLTU stocks trout from the Jenner Community Sportsmen's Cooperative Trout Nursery in Quemahoning Creek that marks the return of fish to the creek for the first time in 100 years.

2006- SCRIP sponsors its first Quemahoning Classic fishing tournament at Quemahoning Reservoir to raise funds and encourage recreational use of the reservoir.

The inaugural Trout In The Classroom program is initiated by MLTU Stream Improvement Chairman Len Lichvar at North Star Middle School in Kantner under the guidance of science instructor Eva Strang. It is one of the first such programs in the state.

2007 – The Somerset Conservation District dedicates the Boswell Passive Treatment System in a public ceremony at the treatment site.

SCRIP creates its Windmill Policy.

The Somerset Conservation District initiates a fish-habitat structure project at Quemahoning Reservoir in cooperation with the Fish and Boat Commission and CSA.

The Stonycreek-Quemahoning Initiative (SQI) is formed by the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy to oversee projects such as the Whitewater Park at Greenhouse Park and the Quemahoning Whitewater Release.

Whitewater Park at Greenhouse Park is opened on the Stonycreek River.

The Somerset Conservation District begins and completes the Stonycreek River Reassessment Project under the program management of AmeriCorps member Amanda Deal with funding from the Foundation for PA Watersheds and assistance from the Fish and Boat Commission, PA DEP and local watershed groups.

2008- SCRIP founding board member and first chairman Lester McNutt passes away.

The Somerset Conservation District, with funding provided by MLTU, completes a stream access at North Star East Middle School to assist the Trout In The Classroom Program.

The Shade Creek Watershed Association and the Fish and Boat Commission transplant wild brook trout into Shingle Run.

The Cambria County Conservation District sponsors fish habitat structure projects at Wilmore and Hinckston Run Reservoirs in cooperation with the PA Fish and Boat Commission and the CSA.

2009- SCRIP receives a Western Pennsylvania Environmental Award for its many years of successful AMD remediation work.

The Somerset Conservation District receives a \$361,000 grant from DEP for AMD abatement in the Lamberts Run watershed.

SCRIP receives the Earth First Award from the PA Environmental Council and WTAE-TV.

SCRIP revises and republishes its brochure “Fisheries of the Stonycreek and Upper Conemaugh River Basin.”

MLTU revises and republishes its “Fishing The Stonycreek River” brochure.

The Kiski-Conemaugh Stream Team, under the direction of Melissa Reckner, completes a Cold Water Heritage Plan for Clear Shade Creek.

The Cambria County Conservation District develops its “Super Seven” AMD abatement strategy.

2010- The Conservation Release of 10.8 million gallons a day of water is begun at Quemahoning Reservoir, restoring clean, cold water to Quemahoning Creek and the Stonycreek River.

SCRIP completely revises its website.

The Shade Creek Watershed Association completes its limestone bed at No. 3 Ditch and streambank restoration project on Shingle Run.

The Stonycreek River is nominated for River of the Year by SCRIP and SQI.

The PA DEP funds and constructs an AMD treatment system on the South Fork of the Bens Creek eliminating the impacts on the creek.

2011- SCRIP celebrates its 20th anniversary with special events and is the featured watershed group during the Somerset Conservation District's annual Watershed Summit.

SCRIP initiates its 20th anniversary endowment campaign.

The Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association completes a Cold Water Heritage Plan for Little Paint Creek.

The Quemahoning Reservoir whitewater release valve is dedicated in a public ceremony at Greenhouse Park hosted by SQI.

SQI again nominates the Stonycreek River for River of the Year.

2012- The Stonycreek River is named River of the Year for Pennsylvania by PA DCNR and the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR).

NOT THE END