



Somerset County Conservancy A Charitable Trust

www.somersetcountyconservancy.org

Newsletter

Fall / winter
2015

A new Roof for the Conservancy's Cabin



The proceeds from our Spring Fund raising campaign were applied to Replacing the roof on the Cabin at Kimberly Run Natural Area. In June the Dotson Construction Company of Somerset, removed 4 layers of wet leaking roofing and insulation, and replaced it with a new metal roof. With materials supplied from The Berlin Lumber Company and labor furnished by Dotson Construction Company we now have a warm, dry gathering / meeting place at Kimberly Run Natural Area.

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SOMERSET LAKE ACTION COMMITTEE UPDATE

BY Jeffrey Payne

A lot of great news to report since our last Spring Update! We now have Somerset County's first county park – The Somerset Lake Nature Park lease was officially signed by all three County Commissioners and Executive Director John Arway of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission on June 19 at the second Lakefest. In addition to the lease signing, there were many activities including boating, fishing, birding, kid's games, geocaching, and great food was enjoyed by more than 850 attendees.

The other recent great news is that the Governor's Office will be releasing the Capital Budget money necessary to augment Fish and Boat Commission money and SLAC's donation which will provide all the funds needed to replace Somerset Lake's dam. Fish and Boat Commission's Tim Schaeffer and Engineer Michelle Jacoby revealed the plans for the new dam and a timeline having the lake refilled completely by Spring 2019.

In addition to this year's Lakefest, we enjoyed a fun-filled "Give a 'Dam'" fundraiser put on by the Chamber of Commerce's Young Leaders Group. The music, games and food were enjoyed by a large crowd and over \$10,000.00 was raised for the lake park.

Another very successful fundraiser was introduced by State Farm Agent Angie Tenant. An application for a neighborhood grant was written and picked to be in the top 200 of 4,000 overall nationwide applications. After this, there was a period of online voting from our community with the end result of the Somerset Lake Project receiving the third most votes in the Country and a check for \$25,000.00! It is hoped to use this money as a match for a \$250,000.00 DCED trail building grant that has been applied for by the County.

The County Parks and Recreation Board will be running the Park and SLAC has been making recommendations for development to stay consistent with a nature park. One more goal for SLAC is to help institute wildlife habitat and management practices at the north end of the Lake that could benefit shorebirds, waterfowl, fish and people (see related article on page 8).



Habitat improvement with a Prescribed Burn

By Len Lichvar

Habitat management has evolved over the years and the fields at the Kimberly Run Natural Area became a participant in that process on August 27, 2015 when a prescribed burn or controlled fire habitat improvement project was conducted on 34 acres.

The fire, which was professionally overseen and managed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), was authorized by the Conservancy Board of Directors. Prescribed burns are becoming increasingly the preferred method to stimulate the soil and foster renewed plant growth that benefits wildlife.



The burning of warm season grasses actually increases their vigor, encourages seed set, reduces invasive plants, recycles nutrients and stimulates insect life far better than simply mowing. The burned ground leads to better re-growth that produces improved cover and habitat for game as well as non-game species.

The Conservancy has an agreement with the PGC to manage these fields as well as stock pheasants and the Conservancy agrees to keep the property open to public access and hunting. Although the pheasants are artificially introduced to provide sport hunting opportunities, woodcock, a native game bird, calls Kimberly Run home as well. Song birds, birds of prey and deer and turkey also utilize these fields as food source and cover.

The burn itself was strictly controlled and was specifically conducted on a day when wind and weather currents were conducive to keeping smoke away from the nearby Pennsylvania Turnpike and State Route 219. That combined with the expertise of the trained personnel conducting the fire and following a predetermined plan, prevented any smoke or other disturbance from reaching either heavily travelled roadway.

The future of this part of the Natural Area should be bright for both sustainable bird and mammal populations to thrive that will produce enhanced recreational opportunities for hunters as well as those who simply enjoy viewing wildlife

Somerset County Conservancy Education

By Pam Diesel

One goal of the Somerset County Conservancy is to engage in and promote scientific study and education regarding our natural resources. Environmental education is occurring at the Kimberly Run Natural Area and the Oak trail site, both conservancy properties.

On May 8, 2015 Mrs. Beth Anderson and the third graders from Berlin Elementary school visited the Oven Run or Oak Trail mine reclamation site to learn firsthand about wetlands and the treatment of abandoned mine drainage. A tour of the area was completed with collection of organisms found in the lower retention ponds. Fish, tadpoles, crayfish and various macroinvertebrates were identified. This concluded a wetland unit for the third graders. Assisting were Lester Brunell, Jeff Payne and Pam Diesel from the conservancy board.



On May 27 and 28, 2015, Mrs. Jennifer Broughers biology classes from Somerset Area Senior High School completed an analysis of Kimberly Run. Students collected dragonfly, damselfly, mayfly, stone fly and crane fly



nymphs, pickerel frogs, tadpoles of green and bull frogs, crayfish, sculpin, and creek chubs. Water quality tests of dissolved oxygen, pH, alkalinity, nitrates, dis-

solved solids and phosphates were completed.



Water temperature and salinity were also needed for the complete analysis of the stream health. After spending time in the stream, samples were taken to the Kimberly Run Natural Area classroom for further analysis with microscopes and hand lenses. Students were assisted by Jim Moses and Pam Diesel, board members and Logan Lichvar, conservancy intern.

On September 16, the Advanced Placement Biology class of Mrs. Karyn Verhovsek also collected and identified organisms from Kimberly run. Chemical tests were run and good results obtained. Results from both spring and fall indicated good pH around 7.0 to 7.5 and optimal dissolved oxygen of 8 mg/l. Assisting classes were Bob Hook and Pam Diesel from the conservancy.



Conservancy education programs are meeting the goal of promoting scientific study and education regarding our natural resources.



Somerset Lake Nature Park Mud Flat Narrative

(Prepared by Somerset County Conservancy)

Somerset Lake Nature Park is being designed as a multi-use natural area with activities to include fishing, boating, hunting, hiking, picnicking, photography and nature viewing. The various activities are seasonal and can be complimentary. Nature viewing, especially bird-watching is already well established with Somerset Lake being a National Audubon Society identified Important Bird Area. The lake attracts large numbers of birds due to its elevation and position on the flyways. It also attracts large numbers of birders due to the variety and rare occurrences found there. In 2012 a concerted effort to bird Somerset Lake resulted in 242 species and several PA rarities being found in just that year!

To best enhance nature viewing the development of one to several acres of seasonal mud flats at the northern, shallow end of the 252 acre lake would be necessary. This type of habitat attracts long distance migrant birds known as shorebirds. This group of birds is generally uncommon in PA. Through the recent drawdowns the lake has demonstrated a remarkable ability to attract a large number of species and individuals of this group of birds (see attached list). On a statewide basis it has been documented to be one of the better places to attract these birds and the best place in PA for easy viewing of these uncommon birds. This has attracted large numbers of birders and the resulting recreational and economic impacts can be enhanced with thoughtful management decisions.

To explore the possible management options for creating the seasonal mudflat habitat necessary for shorebirds, Mark Roberts, State Coordinator, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted and visited the site on 7/14/2015. After looking at the hydrology and the narrow upland property margins it was deemed that the best plan would encompass remodeling of the lake bed when dry, combined with seasonal, modest water drawdowns to expose mud. It is believed that this can be accomplished at a modest cost and be compatible with fishery management. Several possible funding sources include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PA DCNR, PA Game Commission, Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society and Somerset County Conservancy.

The concept of multi-use planning to include habitat for watchable wildlife on one of PA's many unsafe dams is a somewhat new concept. Across the country many wildlife refuges, parks and birding trails are attracting birds and many of the estimated 50 million bird watchers in the U.S. Pursuing this plan through cooperative efforts of state and federal agencies, NGO's and interested citizens will result in better habitat for more species and additional recreational opportunities. It could also serve as a blueprint for cooperative and comprehensive resource management.

Boy Scouts Build Trail

By Jeff Payne

Berlin Boy Scout Troop 135 approached the SCC about the possibility of doing a project. They have a group of eight Scouts and several adults who will be participating in a High Adventure at Sea Base in the Florida Keyes. The boys are working toward building a cohesive unit and trying to raise some money to defray the Adventure's cost. As the SCC was in the preliminary steps of constructing a streamside trail from the kiosk parking lot to the first wooden bridge, we asked if they would like to help construct the trail. A group of eight boys and five leaders spent a busy October afternoon clearing brush, raking, and installing stepping stones to complete the more than one-half mile long trail. It will complement and connect to portions of Red Dog Road and the White and Blue Trails. It will offer new hiking options and easy-access to the stream for Science classes and fishermen. A donation will be made from the SCC to Troop 135. Thanks go out to all the Scouts and Leaders for a job well done.

Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (EITC).

Pam Diesel

Somerset County Conservancy is an eligible entity for participation with the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (EITC). This program is your opportunity to benefit your business while helping your community.

ETIC is a Pa state program that provides businesses with a 75% tax credit for donation to a nonprofit organizational scholarship or educational improvement project. The tax credit increases to 90% if the business commits to making the same donation for two consecutive years. Tax credits can be applied against the liability of the business for the tax year the contribution was made.

Somerset County Conservancy's educational program has been approved again this year. SCC's education program is centered at Kimberly Run Natural Area (KNRA) with an emphasis on stream analysis. KNRA is able to provide a specialized area to enhance the curriculum of the local public schools. Our area provides access to a stream for analysis. Students can complete chemical analysis such as pH, dissolved oxygen levels, alkalinity, acidity, iron levels, etc. The students can also judge stream health by doing a stream health index, collecting and identifying macroinvertebrates. These organisms can be pollution tolerant, pollution sensitive or pollution intolerant.

Pa businesses can begin applying for ETIC credits through Pa Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) electronic single application system. The business application guide explains the process of applying. (http://newpa.com/sites/default/files/uploads/OSTC-EITC_handbook2015.pfd)



Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology

Established 1989

Celebrating 25 Years

Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology holding annual meeting in Somerset in May 2016

by Andy McGann

The Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology (PSO) will be holding its annual meeting in Somerset next year, May 20-22, 2016. The event will be held at the Quality Inn & Conference Center, 215 Ramada Road, Somerset. The schedule promises informative and engaging scientific talks, retail vendors, and of course field trips to highlight and share Somerset County's unique biogeography. The entire event is geared toward fostering friendship and camaraderie among all of Pennsylvania's birders.

The PSO sprouted from the volunteer "citizen scientists" powering the state's first Breeding Bird Atlas project (1983-89), who sought to form an organization to help retain the social network and collective knowledge, skills, and abilities gained through that endeavor. The PSO's mission is to "foster the study and appreciation of the birds of Pennsylvania and to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats." The organization likes to circulate its annual meetings around the Commonwealth for two reasons. First, it likes to visit its members in all corners and counties. Second, it likes to highlight the regional specialties and unique geographies in our large and diverse state. When it comes to the distributions of breeding birds, Pennsylvania has quite a bit of regional diversity,

and Somerset County is the gem of the Laurel Highlands.



On behalf of both the PSO and the Somerset County Conservancy, I would like to warmly welcome anyone receiving this newsletter to participate in the meeting and consider joining the PSO. For more information, visit their website: <http://www.pabirds.org>

Trout Stocking



This spring the Conservancy stocked 200 adult rainbow trout and 200 Rainbow Trout fingerlings in Kimberly Run on Conservancy Property.



ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

By Lester Brunell

The Somerset County Charitable Trust, our formal title, is a Pennsylvania Land trust corporation. We are under the jurisdiction of the attorney general of Pennsylvania. Over time, we have become members of: Land Trust Alliance (LTA), Pennsylvania Land Trust Association (PLTA), Pennsylvania Growing Greener Coalition(PGGC), Laurel Highlands Conservation Coalition(LHCC) and the Somerset Chamber of Commerce. We joined the LTA this year; it is a nation-wide alliance.

The primary efforts of the LTA and the PLTA are directed toward preserving suitable land. The PGGC was formed to advocate for the funding the preservation of land and for environmental improvement projects. The Laurel Highlands is a 3,000 square mile region of Southwestern Pennsylvania. It is the location of state parks and forests, game lands, trails, excellent trout streams, vacation homes, resorts, resort housing developments, and camps of all sorts: church, fishing and hunting, scout and youth. The natural values of the region draws many people to it. Government officials, business interests and environmental groups cooperated to form the LHCC. Their concern was that some types of economic development would degrade the natural character of the highlands. The events that led to the establishment of The Flight 93 Memorial (2,000 acres) and the Quecreek Mine Rescue Museum have considerably increased the number of visitors to the region and to Somerset County, in particular.

Craigwood

Craigwood was the name of a Cabin built on the property acquired by the Somerset County Conservancy. We knew that there was an old chimney standing in



the woods along the red-dog road, but we didn't know its history.

Two years ago we were contacted by Bill McMaster from Los Angeles California. It was his family's summer get-away location and he loved it. He spent as much time there as possible. The sketch of the cabin was drawn by a high school classmate of Bill's. On September 28th this year he came to visit the site, while here he was joined by about twenty family members from Ohio. The weather that day was terrible but the entire family had a good time reminiscing and catching up on family history.



An Invitation to our Annual membership Banquet

The Somerset County Conservancy

Wednesday, Dec. 2, 2015

Cocktails at 6:30 pm Dinner at 7:00 pm

Somerset Trust Company's Meeting Room

**The Trust Building at the corner of N. Center Ave. & Union St.
Enter through the Union St. side door entrance (post office side)
131 North Center Avenue
Somerset, PA 15501**

**Come and enjoy dinner under the Dome
Catered by Chuck Wagon Restaurant
And
Presentation on our National Parks
By Roger Latuch**

\$25.00 per person at the door

Reservations required

E-mail mail@somersetcountyconservancy.org

**Or phone Jim Moses at;
814-445-4850**

Somerset County Conservancy
Box 241
Somerset, PA 15501

Pass this newsletter on to a friend and ask them to join.

HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!

Enclosed is: \$ 15 Individual Member

\$ 25 Family Member

\$ 75 Sustaining Member

\$ 100 Patron, Club, Organization Member

\$ 750 Lifetime Member

Name: _____

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