

# SOMERSET COUNTY CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

FALL / WINTER 2014

A CHARITABLE TRUST



## MEET THE PRESIDENT by Trish Miller

Twenty years ago, Jim Moses, then president of the Somerset County Sportsman's League, was asked to join the SCC board. Since then, Jim has worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the Conservancy. He first held the presidency from 1997 – 98 and assumed the role again in 2000. Jim will end his 14 year term as president at the end of this year. As president, Jim is a member of all committees, including land, education, and finance. Jim works very hard to ensure that trails, buildings, and much more are maintained and that board meetings run smoothly. During his leadership, SCC has had many great accomplishments, but Jim considers the establishment of Kimberly Run Natural Area as the greatest.



Jim doing what he loves

Jim is married to Meg Moses. They have two children each and seven grandchildren. Jim worked for 37 years as an electronic technician for a medical instrument manufacturer and is now retired. When he is not engaged in SCC activities, which are many, he enjoys hunting, fishing, hiking, cross country skiing, and chasing his new puppy!

Jim has been a critical component of the success of SCC. If you see him, please thank him for his hard work for and commitment to SCC. We will certainly miss having him as president of the board, but thankfully, he will continue as an active board member.

### In this issue:

Summer Intern Reports	2	Annual Picnic	6
Somerset Lake Action Committee	3	The War on AMD	7
Lakefest 2014	4	Somerset County Natural Heritage Inventory—2006	9
Species Spotlight	5	Report on Education Efforts	10
Kimberly Run Stream Improvement Project	6	Invitation to Annual Membership Banquet	11

## OAK TRAILS STUDENT TOUR

SCC board members Jeff Payne, Dave Mankamyer, Lester Brunell, and Trish Miller hosted Berlin 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at Oaks Trail Mine Reclamation Site on May 20th. Students learned how AMD is treated and explored the treatment ponds for amphibians and macro invertebrates.



## SUMMER INTERN REPORTS

By Chris Payne and Logan Lichvar

I was happy to get the chance to work for the Somerset County Conservancy once again this summer. Most of the work I did took place at KRNA, with a few trips to Somerset Lake. I spent the first part of summer helping Jim turn the garage at KRNA into an educational area for high school field trips. This job involved many aspects and took us several days. First we built and secured three work benches along the walls as well as two tables for the kids to work at. We then installed light fixtures and wiring to ensure that they would have plenty of light to do their work. We hung a screen door to separate the old part of the garage from the educational area, put in an eyewash station for safety and secured the supply cabinet to the wall so it could not be stolen. I also painted the door, desks and tables white to match the inside of the room and help create more light. Once the area was done, I trimmed branches along the road to allow access for the school buses. On both days that there were field trips, I helped chaperone the kids at the creek, gather samples and answered whatever questions I could.

Once the field trips were finished, I started on jobs more similar to what I did last year. This included some general maintenance jobs such as weed whipping the trails and parking lot, spreading mulch around the new plants by the parking area, watering the plants daily, helping to dig out the old drainage ditch by the cabin and burying a new pipe in the ditch. In addition to these jobs, I ran another series of bird surveys through the property to compare to the data I gathered last year. I also spent some time cleaning up the cabin, which involved scrubbing the walls and floor inside, cleaning the bathtub and pressure washing the outside walls. Once it was dry outside, Logan and I spent two days painting the exterior, which had not been done in many years.

The final thing I did this summer was help at Lakefest. I assisted with setup in the morning, loaded and unloaded kayaks for both the outfitter and Fish and Wildlife, helped people get in and out of the kayaks safely and took part in cleanup at the end of the day. I was happy that I could take part in such a successful event and glad for the opportunity to work for the SCC this summer.



Chris Payne



My name is Logan Lichvar. I grew up near Stoystown, PA. I have always enjoyed the outdoors, especially pheasant hunting. This summer I had the privilege of working for the Somerset County Conservancy. I cleared, weedeated and mowed the trails at Kimberly Run Natural Area, Oven Run, Hawk View and Mallards Rest. I also did things such as mulching, planting trees and checking duck boxes. One of the bigger jobs I helped with was painting the cabin at Kimberly Run. I also assisted the Somerset Conservation District with some stream sampling and reseeding projects. I really enjoyed my time working for the SCC and I learned a lot. This fall I am attending California University of Pennsylvania and majoring in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology. After I graduate, I hope to become a Wildlife Biologist and work to improve pheasant habitat here in Pennsylvania.

**By Jeff Payne**

SLAC has been busy this summer pursuing the twin goals of establishing a Somerset Lake County Park and getting the unsafe dam replaced. Somerset County and the PA Fish & Boat Commission are in the process of negotiating a lease of the upland area surrounding the lake. This would allow the county to establish a park with a hiking trail around the lake, picnic facilities, improved wildlife and bird viewing opportunities and possibly a canoe/kayak livery. The Fish & Boat Commission would continue to manage the lake for its traditional activities. Hopefully the lease can be implemented by early 2015.

We sponsored a Lakefest on the property which was well attended and a lot of fun. We had great publicity from the Somerset Daily American which did weekly two page, full color advertisements for four months and donated a generous amount to the Lake Fund. Somerset Trust Company featured our efforts at their community July 4 festival. They made a bunch of nice t-shirts for us and also made a generous donation. Kantner Iron and Steel has been advertising their efforts to help save the lake and made two generous donations so far based on the number of customers who have been patronizing them. Riggs Industries has recently stepped forward to supply material to replace the deteriorated dock at the Lake. We received a grant from the Benjamin Bosler Fund of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies towards putting on the Lakefest. The Somerset Conservation District and Mr. Anthony Marich have also made generous donations.

We have collected hundreds of signatures on electronic letters of support to fix the dam and establish a park. We also met with our state Representative and Senator, the Governor and Lt. Governor and many members of the Fish & Boat Commission to elicit broad based support for this project. Final design for the new dam has been funded by the state and should be done by next summer.

We have also been working towards raising \$100,000.00 of local monies to be used towards these projects. This goal was a challenge from Fish & Boat. To date we are over 20% of the way to meeting the goal. To find out more, or to sign a letter or make a donation, please visit our website -- [SLAC@somersetconservancy.org](mailto:SLAC@somersetconservancy.org) or [www.somersetlakepa.org](http://www.somersetlakepa.org).





# LAKEFEST 2014

BY JEFF PAYNE



The Somerset Lake Action Committee (SLAC) subcommittee of SCC hosted a Lakefest at Somerset Lake on June 14. The purposes were to draw attention to the recreation potential of the lake and its plight in being drawn down due to the dam being declared unsafe, to allow folks to have fun and lastly, to try to generate some funds toward the dam repair. By all accounts it was successful on all fronts!

Activities were many, including boating with kayaks and canoes supplied by PA Fish & Boat as well as a private outfitter, a day long carp fishing contest with high tech equipment and anglers from all over, kids' activities concentrating on nature, a geocaching demonstration, a biodiversity display with animal tracks, a duck calling and decoy demonstration, a raffle with great prizes, bird watching walks and of course, lots of good food. Over 500 people attended throughout the day, with over 100 people, including many kids, trying the boats.



We had coverage from both print newspapers and television. We collected many signatures on letters of support for SLAC's goals of establishing a county park in the uplands of the lake and having the state and Fish & Boat Commission fix the dam. Although it was the least important aspect of the day, we did manage to net about \$800 towards the expenses of the dam fix and park. After getting our feet wet this year we

hope to have a bigger and even more successful event next year!



## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT BY TRISH MILLER

One foggy fall morning, my husband and I were taking our usual loop around Somerset Lake when the water level was still high. We stopped at the north end to look for ducks and to our



amazement, we saw a family of five river otters swimming and playing about the lake. We enjoyed watching them for about 15 minutes before they headed off to the south. Otters are not typically found in lakes; they are an iconic mammal of streams and rivers. Due to unrestricted trapping, water pollution and loss of wetland habitat, the North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*) was nearly extirpated from Pennsylvania by the 1950s.

In 1982, a young graduate student at Penn State, Dr. Tom Serfass now of Frostburg State University and resident of Somerset County, undertook the daunting task of reintroducing otters to Pennsylvania, which included reintroduction to Laurel Hill Creek and the Youghiogheny River in Somerset County.



While their playfulness has endeared the otter with many, the species was loathed by many fishermen. They were thought to take large numbers of game fish. But otter scat collected by Serfass in the Poconos revealed that otters are generalist predators, preying on everything from insects to fish, with the mainstay of their diet being crayfish. Because of their diet, otters are great indicators of water quality. Streams and rivers that are occupied by otters have high water quality. Work to

improve stream quality throughout the state and nation, such as installation of acid mine drainage (AMD) treatment sites, has a direct impact on aquatic life and thus on otter populations. Somerset County Conservancy has been instrumental in improving water quality in the streams of our county and thus providing habitat for otters. Reintroductions were key in restoring otters to Pennsylvania, but without high water quality the effort would have been for naught. So the next time you see a river otter sliding into a stream, remember to thank your local watershed organization and conservation district for providing habitat to this once rare species. For more information about river otters in the Commonwealth search the internet for "PA River Otter Management Plan."



Otter Patch



# Kimberly Run Stream Improvement Project

By Jim Moses



Bob Hook stocking fingerlings

The Somerset Conservation District is working to develop a stream improvement project on Kimberly Run as it passes through KRNA. They have deployed Data Loggers and Temperature Loggers in the stream to monitor water quality and will continue to collect data for the next year. Based on previous data and data collected by the SAHS Honors Biology students participating in the Education Committees' "in stream biological assessment," the Conservancy decided to release 500 rainbow trout fingerlings throughout the stream as part of continuing efforts to improve Kimberly Run.



Three inch Rainbow fingerlings

Jim Moses loading buckets



## ANNUAL PICNIC



SCC held its annual picnic at Kimberly Run Natural Area on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Picnic goers enjoyed hamburgers and hot dogs around the fire and explored KRNA with board members. Red Efts, like the one pictured above, were out and about on the trails.



## THE WAR ON AMD by Len Lichvar

With the summer recreation season in full swing many local residents as well as visitors will be heading out to enjoy our water resources. Today the Cambria-Somerset region has more water oriented opportunities for fishing, boating, kayaking, float tubing, swimming, bird watching and scenic beauty than ever before.

This was not always the case. Many life-long residents all too well remember the yellow and orange stained waters that abounded. The primary culprit was and still is abandoned mine drainage (AMD) infiltrating our waterways and impoundments for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It has only been in the past 25 years that dramatic improvements through innovative technology, public-private partnerships and public and private investment have reversed that trend. Today many new residents to the region, as well as the younger generation, actually have little knowledge or understanding of what this region endured for over 100 years because of the natural resources that were extracted. The use of these resources powered America's Industrial Revolution and helped win two world wars. The unfortunate part was the staggering negative environmental and economic impacts it left in its wake.



These days it is a commonly held belief that our waterways are much improved, which is true, but the not so common knowledge is that the pollution sources that impaired them have only been masked and treated – not eliminated.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's a new technology, known as passive wetland treatment, began to be pioneered by public resource agencies such as the federal Office of Surface Mining, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the PA Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP). That same public sector capacity to design, fund and construct these treatment systems that relied on natural processes such as retention time and acidic reducing and alkaline generating compost and rocks, rather than chemical treatment, flourished. Local grassroots organizations and non-profits such as the Southern Alleghenies Resource Conservation and Development Council and Conservancy, Somerset County Conservancy, Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Stonycreek-Conemaugh River Improvement Project, Somerset and Cambria County Conservation Districts and local watershed groups provided the needed administrative and coordinating delivery mechanisms. In addition, local, state and national elected officials, such as the late U. S. Congressman John Murtha, put their political capital into pursuing the on-the-ground implementation of this new technology. A more detailed historic story of how all this came to be can be found on the Somerset Conservation District's website at [www.somersetcd.com](http://www.somersetcd.com).

The 6 site 5 million dollar Oven Run AMD abatement project on the main stem of the Stonycreek River was the hallmark of these efforts. But other sub-basins, coordinated by local watershed groups, have also constructed similar treatment systems in the Quemahoning Creek, Wells Creek, Lamberts Run, Shade Creek and Paint Creek watersheds.



## THE WAR ON AMD continued

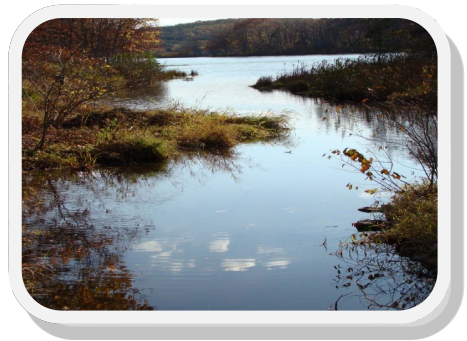
The result has been the reestablishment of over 20 miles of coldwater fishery that had been absent for nearly 100 years and the creation of a new and growing boating, kayaking and white-water destination point. However, as it turns out, the real heavy lifting was and is not the resurrection of the fishery and the startup of water sport opportunities, but the continuation of them.

All these constructed systems have two things in common. Most importantly they all have effectively served their intent by reducing impacts of AMD. The other common denominator is that they must be maintained in order to continue to function. When these systems were originally constructed the guesstimate was they should operate well for 20 years or so. The real world reality is that even before the 20 year mark a lot has been learned about these now not so new technologies. The hard lesson is that operation and maintenance is often required well before the two decade mark and even more is required once they do, which is now. The other sobering reality is that when they were built no funds were set aside to pay for that upkeep.

Consequently, the task of maintaining the effectiveness of the systems falls on the backs of organizations such as the Somerset Conservation District, which signed legal documents 20 years ago to be responsible to maintain treatment systems at Oven Run. Local all volunteer groups such as the Somerset County Conservancy, Wells Creek Watershed Association, Shade Creek Watershed Association and the Paint Creek Regional Watershed Association have also assumed much of the same responsibility for their systems as well.

The Somerset County Conservancy owns the land on which several of the treatment systems reside. Conservancy President Jim Moses knows all too well that, “We have made tremendous improvement in water quality in the Stonycreek River and operation and maintenance of these systems is the key to preserving the improved water quality now and in the future.”

All of these groups have struggled operationally as well as monetarily to keep these treatment systems providing the band aid treatment they apply since the source of the AMD at each continues to flow. At any given time there is a very thin line separating our continued water quality improvements and a quick and severe reversal of fortune for those resources. That tipping point is closer than anyone seems to realize. Historic and ongoing water quality sample data, collected by the Kiski-Conemaugh Stream Team, confirm this reality check.



The Somerset Conservation District, knowing full well of the situation at hand, has stepped up its obligation to the Stonycreek River by making sure each system is on a regular flushing schedule. The District has already designed and installed small scale innovative and cost effective retrofits that have increased the life span of the systems and bought valuable time. The District has also secured significant grant from the Department of Community and Economic Development Act 13 funds to rehab the region's oldest AMD treatment system, the Rock Tunnel site on Bens Creek that was originally constructed in 1993.



## THE WAR ON AMD *continued*

Perhaps more importantly the District has reinforced its partnership with the PA DEP and the PA Association of Conservation District Technical Assistance Group in reevaluating the more significant needs of the systems. With data derived from that partnership, Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick is preparing a major PA DEP Growing Greener grant request to fund the design and construction of needed extensive repairs and upgrades. As Shustrick points out, "The window of opportunity may be opening for us to secure the future integrity of these systems. We need to be and we are ready to act now to take advantage of this financial and technical assistance opportunity."

At the same time the District, PA DEP and local landowners are examining the additional opportunity and potential for an Oven Run II project to reduce the impacts of still remaining sources of AMD that continue to impair aquatic life, limit the further expansion of the fishery and degrade water quality in the Stonycreek River.

The emphasis for the short term, however, is maintaining what is currently functioning to reduce the potential for a catastrophic failure. The real key to maintaining and improving not only our region's ever increasing notoriety as a recreational destination point, but all the sustainable economic impacts it generates, is to reinforce our defenses against a pollution enemy that, although beaten back, has never really been defeated.



L to R -- Phil Gardner of the PA Association of Conservation Districts Technical Design Group, Greg Shustrick, Watershed Specialist for the Somerset Conservation District and Dave Leiford of the PA Department of Environmental Protection discuss operation and maintenance requirements for the Oven Run AMD Passive Treatment Systems. (Photo by Len Lichvar)

### **SOMERSET COUNTY NATURAL HERITAGE INVENTORY-2006**

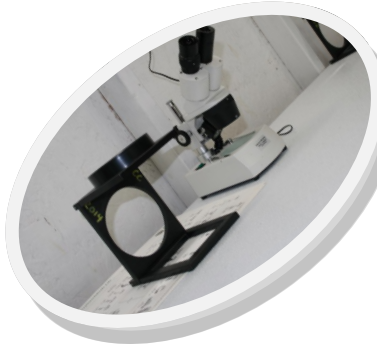
by Lester Brunell, Secretary

The Somerset County Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) was completed in 2006 by the Western PA Conservancy. The inventory focuses on the best examples of living ecological resources in Somerset County. We should consider the inventory as an invitation for the people of Somerset County to explore and discuss their natural heritage and to learn about and participate in the conservation of the living resources of the county. While the inventory is extensive, biological inventories often do not locate all areas of highest biodiversity. Therefore, the NHI is best viewed as a preliminary report rather than the final word on the county's natural heritage. Further investigations could, and likely will, uncover previously unidentified areas of significance

The NHI is useful not only to interested individuals, but to organizations as well. Conservation organizations that have as part of their mission the conservation of biological diversity can turn to the inventory as a source of prioritized places in the county. The biological diversity areas are listed under the townships in which they are found. There are relatively few print copies of the inventory available; our conservancy has several. However, for many people the best way to learn more is by accessing the document via [http://www.co.somerset.pa.us/files/planning/Somerset\\_CNHI\\_Rpt.pdf](http://www.co.somerset.pa.us/files/planning/Somerset_CNHI_Rpt.pdf)

# REPORT ON EDUCATION EFFORTS

By Pam Diesel



Some of the equipment purchased with donated monies



Somerset County Conservancy received two donations through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program from Somerset Trust and Somerset Veterinary Hospital which were used to purchase equipment and convert a garage into a classroom. This donation program is administered by the Community Foundation of the Alleghenies.

Using the donated monies, the education committee purchased scientific equipment for student use at the Kimberly Run Natural Area and other locations. Two dissecting microscopes, one compound microscope, microscope projector system, collecting nets, kick net, magnifiers and a water quality backpack with water quality tests were purchased with the donated funds. The third bay of the existing garage at Kimberly Run Natural Area has been converted into a classroom with tables, storage, lighting and electric outlets for student use.

On May 28 and 29 high school students from Somerset Area Senior High School biology classes completed a stream analysis of Kimberly Run, using the new equipment and facilities. Approximately 60 students spent half a day at Kimberly Run collecting macroinvertebrates and identifying them, as well as completing water quality tests, such as dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrates, iron, salinity, alkalinity and acidity. Students were excited to use the new equipment and facilities and returned to their classrooms with samples and data for further study.

Directing the analysis were Jennifer Brougher, Somerset biology teacher, Pam Diesel and Jim Moses from the Conservancy and Chris Payne, Conservancy intern.

The EITC program is available for next year. Business applicants receive tax credits when they contribute to education improvement organizations like the Somerset County Conservancy. Businesses receive a tax credit against the tax liability of the business year in which the contribution was made. If you are interested go to <http://www.newpa.com> for more information.



Converted third bay at Kimberly Run





**An Invitation to the Annual Membership Banquet  
of  
The Somerset County Conservancy  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2014  
Cocktails at 6:30 pm - Dinner at 7:00 pm**

**Somerset Trust Company's Meeting Room  
131 North Center Avenue  
Somerset, PA 15501**

**The old building is at the corner of N. Center Ave. & Union St.  
Enter through the Union St. side door entrance (post office side)**

**Come and enjoy dinner under the DOME!  
Catered by Chuck Wagon Restaurant**

**\$25.00 per person at the door**

**There will be a presentation of the  
Somerset Lake Action Committee**

**Reservations required**

**E-mail [mail@somersetcountyconservancy.org](mailto:mail@somersetcountyconservancy.org)**

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

Somerset County Conservancy  
Box 241  
Somerset, PA 15501

**HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!**

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

Enclosed is:   \$ 15   Individual Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 25   Family Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 75   Sustaining Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100   Patron, Club, Organization Member

\_\_\_\_\_ \$750   Lifetime Member

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

SEND ALL SUBMISSIONS FOR  
FUTURE NEWSLETTERS TO  
The above address

Somerset Co. Conservancy  
P.O. Box 241  
Somerset, PA 15501