

WPCAMR Watershed Coordinator's Report

Andy McAllister

August 21, 2009

PROJECT SITE VISITS, PLANNING MEETINGS, PRESS EVENT ATTENDANCE:

- SW Regional Watershed Specialists' Roundtables, Allegheny & Beaver Counties.
- Tour of the Booker AMD treatment site, Armstrong County
- MRAB Reclamation Committee meeting, Ebensburg.
- Set Aside Ad Hoc Committee meeting, Alexandria.
- Attended Statewide Environmental Justice Conference, Harrisburg.
- Presentation (on AMD and Remediation Activities) at the Six Mile Run Watershed Festival, Defiance.
- Presentation (on Monitoring AMD Projects) at the 319 Implementation Dialogue meeting, State College.
- Jefferson County Watershed Festival, Brookville
- Attended the unveiling of the geothermal project at Wesley AME Church in the Hill District in Pittsburgh.
- CSAW meetings in New Cumberland
- Cambria Conservation District awards banquet
- Ohio River Watershed Celebration Planning meetings, Pittsburgh.

GENERAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Continued researching for Abandoned Mine Post (AMP) Newsletter articles. Archived Abandoned Mine Post articles may be found at the Abandoned Mine Posts blog site: www.amp.wpcamr.org. Plans are to continue publicizing watershed successes and newly completed projects...we have a few more articles/videos in the works.

As a result of a suggestion given at the February WPCAMR meeting to use AMP to get the word out about Watershed Specialist funding, we've have started a new AMP series entitled, "Tales from the Creeks". This series is meant to educate the public on the value of Watershed Specialists and instructs them on how to "take action". It will continue for several months. I'll cover this more in my report on the Watershed Specialist Advocacy Project.

I gave several presentations throughout this reporting period, those are listed above. In addition to those, I interviewed with the "Allegheny Front" radio show from WDUQ talking about Western PA's AMD legacy and what's being done to tackle that.

Also, I finally finished "Out of the Ground: Western Pennsylvania's Coal Mining Experience". I spoke about abandoned mine reclamation and WPCAMR's mission to an audience of 80 people at the Johnstown Heritage Discovery Center in April as part of a preface to a screening of the documentary and once again in May at the Derry Area Historical Society. It was also shown at the Johnstown Film and Wine Festival in July. These have been great opportunities to educate the public about AMD/AMR and WPCAMR.

I will again show the film and introduce it and facilitate an audience sharing of their families' mining past at the Indiana Theater. The tentative date for this is Saturday, September 26th at 2pm. It will be shown as part of IUP's Coal Culture exhibit in their museum. That exhibit will run from September 19th through the beginning of December. If anyone has an event and would like for me to show the film (and facilitate a discussion), please let me know and I will add it to my calendar. I'm looking at different avenues for copies, etc. so as soon as I'm able, I will get copies to our districts. The documentary has a Facebook site. You can Google the words, "Facebook, out of the ground" to get to that site, or if you like to type, go to: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Out-of-the-Ground-Western-Pennsylvanias-Coal-Mining-Experience/84147561373>

In the meantime, I'll be "taking the show on the road".

2009 AMR CONFERENCE: WRAP UP

A good portion of the spring and summer were spent helping to coordinate the AMR conference which was held July 13-16 at the Living and Learning Center at Univ. of Pitt, Johnstown campus. After a good deal of planning, especially with the pre-conference tour, the conference went off with no major hitches. We had 168 attendees. The day before the conference, there was a bus tour of AMD/AMR and reclamation sites in the area. Bruce and I were part of the tour subcommittee and invested time in developing a tour that showcases some of the region's success stories. We were gratified to know that the tour and the presentations from our reclamation community here in Western PA were seen, by the attendees that I talked to, as among the most memorable. You can see archived presentations at www.treatminewater.com.

2010 AMR CONFERENCE: LOOKING AHEAD

Bruce and I have been working with the American Society for Mining Reclamation (ASMR) and the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) on the details of a joint AMR conference in Pittsburgh, June 5-11, 2010. It will be held at the Radisson Green Tree. The theme is: "Bridging Mining Reclamation, Science, and the Community".

The 2010 conference involves: ASMR, The PA AMR Conference, the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI), and OSM's Technical Transfer program...essentially, four conferences in one. There will be two sessions; one for the peer-reviewed technical papers that are a staple for ASMR and OSM conferences, and one session called, "Science, Community, and Reclamation" that will have the mix of technical and non-technical presentations...more of the flavor of the PA AMR Conference. The committee expects this conference to be a big one and one that will be a great experience for everyone.

We've been working with the Joint Conference Committee on crafting a call for papers and other submission materials which are now completed. Bruce and I have already been to two meetings with the 2010 committee and several conference calls to plan for this conference and, after a brief period of down time to concentrate on the 2009 conference, we will be at it again in September. We hope to have funding in place for scholarships but need to iron out some details with the rest of the Joint Conference Committee. More information will be presented as plans for this conference develop. Bruce is actively working on the conference

website with OSM staff. There's a lot yet to be fleshed out on that. The website is: <http://www.pghminingreclamationconf.com/> Check back often during the coming months as more information is posted on the website.

2009 OHIO RIVER WATERSHED CELEBRATION

Meetings and planning for the 2009 Ohio River Watershed Celebration continue. As of May 18th at 10am, reservations are being accepted by going to the event's reservation website: <http://www.streamrestorationinc.org/rsvp/>

Originally, the cruise was to be held on Thursday September 24th but, due to the G-20 event, the committee decided to move the cruise to the following Thursday, October 1st. There will be two boats again this year, one for the adults to network and the other for school children. This year, the Port of Pittsburgh is the prime sponsor. The Port staff are very excited to be a part of this and are very aware of the good work being done by the districts and watershed groups that leads to improvement downstream. The Port is looking forward to sharing this kind of information by its involvement with the celebration. To me, this is a very good thing since many folks in Pittsburgh aren't aware of the good work being done by districts and watershed groups far upstream. I will continue to be part of the planning committee for this event and participating in monthly planning meetings in Pittsburgh and will help the Port in their efforts to publicize all the good work being done upstream. Please spread the word to watershed groups/conservation districts and the general public about the event. It is free but you must register:

www.streamrestorationinc.org/rsvp/

PREVAILING WAGE COALITION UPDATE

The prevailing wage coalition held a legislative breakfast in Harrisburg on April 22nd. about 10 legislators and/or their aides attended the 2 hour event. Those who attended were mostly supporters of changes to prevailing wage. This breakfast was meant to give them more information for their efforts and to let them know that we're mobilized. The attendees commented that if nothing else, this effort will keep the issue alive until the climate is right for change. The group continues to craft some proposed legislation for a legislator (or legislators) to propose at an appropriate time.

The coalition sent a letter to the Pennsylvania Senate urging them to adopt some common-sense reforms that are immediately available to obtain more value from taxpayer dollars. Those reforms are the options that have been talked about including: eliminating prevailing wage from taxpayer-funded programs, updating the threshold, option to use market based wages for the area instead of prevailing wage, or using the occupational wage rate by PA Dept. of Labor and Industry as the clear definition of the prevailing pay rate. To date there has been no response to the letter from the Senate. The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review published a favorable editorial saying that the coalition's ideas could "...finally unshackle Pennsylvania from punishing prevailing wages". Obviously, this is a long road and we still have a long way to go.

SET ASIDE AD HOC COMMITTEE

I've been working with Bruce on ways to involve the reclamation community in the State's use of the Title IV Set Aside. After many hours and several iterations of recommendations, we crafted a potential plan that makes sense and forwarded that to the rest of the Ad Hoc Committee. See more in Bruce's report.

WATERSHED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT PROGRAM (WCAP) MATCH STATUS

The language allowing the WCAP funds to be used as match for other federal programs has been re-inserted into the FY10 Bill...thanks to WPCAMR's constituent Districts and members of our watershed community in Pennsylvania and elsewhere making their voices heard in D.C. The bill is now in conference in the Senate. Why is this important? If we can match WCAP funds with as many other funding streams as possible, that will help local non-profits get more done. If we don't use WCAP funds because of this match problem, it is entirely plausible that WCAP will be used less and less by watershed groups. This chain of events could then lead the appropriators to think that WCAP funding is not needed by the reclamation community...a bad thing. We will keep you apprised of when the appropriations bills get voted on.

FUTURE OF THE WATERSHED MOVEMENT

Bruce and I are continuing to flesh out the framework for the survey to watershed groups and watershed specialists to determine the state of the watershed movement. It's likely we will be coming up with a game plan to get the information we need from the watershed groups in the coming months.

BEST WISHES TO RICK, OUR AMERICORPS VOLUNTEER

Rick Thompson of Portage has completed his hours with WPCAMR as our AmeriCorps volunteer and is now on to nursing school in Johnstown. We wish him the very best. During his time here, Rick helped to promote Abandoned Mine Reclamation at Watershed festivals and other events. With his technical abilities, he helped to refine some of the methods that I used to create Video Diaries, edited articles, and served as a helping hand from both the technical point of view as well as from a creative writing point of view. I've learned a few things from him. A few days before he left he told me, "I never knew how intricate all of this (AMR work) was until I came here. You guys do a lot of different things." An amateur musician, he actually recorded his own music for us to use as needed! Thanks for your help Rick and good luck!

CONSERVATION DISTRICT OUTREACH

My Conservation District outreach visits have resulted in a list of "needs" that were identified by districts in WPCAMR's region. With the help of Rick, our Americorps volunteer, I have compiled a list of needs within several of the most commonly mentioned categories. As one would expect, District needs can vary greatly between Districts. Rather than list every single "need" identified by each district, I've chosen the most universally mentioned needs in each category to try to identify common ground. The categories are listed in order from the most commonly mentioned category of needs (Funding) to the least mentioned category (Other).

Top CD needs based on visits and subsequent conversations with Watershed Specialists and/or District Managers.

Funding

- Watershed specialist dedicated funding
- Money for projects/pre-construction sampling
- OM&R funding
- Get grant programs like RWSI (regional watershed support initiative) re-instated.
- List of up-to-date funding sources and who matches whom

Trainings

- Various trainings/ technical seminars/workshops (including: invertebrates, GIS, chemistry, communication, wetland delineation, marketing conservation, writing OMR plans, grant writing, treatment system function, group sustainability)
- Technical assistance with mapping/design (GIS after-care and support not just training)

Education/Advocacy

- Educating the municipalities/legislators
- More AMP articles on important subjects

Resources

- Projector/laptop/GIS equipment
- Educational materials for children
- Testing kits

Other

- Examples of agreements and easements

WATERSHED SPECIALIST ADVOCACY PROJECT

Based on what I've seen in the district outreach data and with suggestions given at the last board meeting, I have begun the e-newsletter series bringing light to the funding situation for the Watershed Specialist program and the good work that the specialists do. Bruce and I are working with PACD to glean more information from all of the Conservation Districts throughout the state through an electronic survey, to help us with this endeavor. In the meantime, we continued with our Abandoned Mine Post initiative with an article released August 18th that instructs the public on how to let their legislators know about the value of Watershed Specialists. Also, I'm finishing a Video Diary now that highlights the work of Rob Cronauer, Watershed Specialist from the Westmoreland District and draws attention to the need for those positions to continue. That Video Diary is being finished now and will either be released just before or just after the WPCAMR quarterly meeting August 21st. Additionally, after a short discussion with the Delaware Riverkeeper, I'm happy to report that the Delaware Riverkeeper and her network of organizations plan to include the Watershed Specialists funding as one of their top issues as they draft letters to the legislature in the coming weeks.