

# WPCAMR Regional Coordinator's Report

Bruce Golden

February 19, 2009

---

## **2009 AMR Conference Planning**

WPCAMR is, as usual, active in the planning process of the annual AMR Conference. The conference itself will be held July 13-16 at the University of Pittsburgh campus in Johnstown. Mark your calendars. The lead organization for this year's event switched back to EPCAMR. We therefore don't anticipate anywhere near the load we experienced in 2008.

## **Chemical Snapshots for PA's Passive Treatment Systems**

Employing our FACTS grant to organize two chemical snapshots of PA's publicly funded passive treatment systems was reported in the November meeting. We're presently experiencing some logistical challenges for the first snapshot and now anticipate something in the March-April timeframe for its implementation. In particular, we need to line up more people to do sampling and we need to find an affordable lab in the anthracite region. We hope to be able to get an extension on the grant's ending date (6/30/09) by a few months to give some breathing room for the second snapshot and other ending activities.

## **Ad-hoc SMCRA AMD Set-Aside Advisory Committee: Overarching restoration goals**

As reported last meeting, DEP BAMR's Pam Milavec and I have been tasked with exploring what an over-arching goal of the AMD Set-Aside program may be. We've generally been using the notion of "maximizing the number of fishable stream miles in PA" as a starting point. Members of the committee have been enlisting the advice of others.

- In, a November meeting in Harrisburg with a variety of knowledgeable individuals from DEP and the Fish and Boat Commission, we explored the possibility of employing newly revamped ICE standards used in determining stream designated use.
- In December we traveled to Morgantown, WV to the National Research Center for Coal (NRCC) and Energy at West Virginia University to learn more about West Virginia's statewide approach to AMD impaired streams. Their overarching goal is to "restore sustainable fisheries in the majority of 2,775 AML impaired stream miles". They have developed a GIS-based decision support system that will help in determining optimized treatment strategies at the 10 digit HUC level. They will rely heavily on in-stream alkaline dosing because of its cost effectiveness. Information garnered through continued monitoring will give them feedback to adjust their strategies as their work progresses. They use a system akin to our ICE standard to measure how fisheries are doing and assume their treatment strategies (which only directly affect control water chemistry) will lead to the improvements necessary for sustainable fisheries.

- A January Ebensburg meeting with the PA Fish and Boat Commission helpful to further advancing our thinking. There was significant discussion over the meaning of "sustainable fishery". According to the FBC, a "fishery" must, 1 - support recreational angling and, 2 - have a fish community available for angling. There are 4 measurable parameters: water quality, macro IBI, fish and recreational use (access). A tentative proposal resulting from that meeting was for a 3 tiered approach for restored waterways: Stream goal #1. meet stocking criteria; Stream goal #2. Successful stocking (to be determined by FBC surveys) and Stream goal #3. meet macro IBI delisting threshold and fish biomass criteria (full attainment). Restoration plans would be expected to meet at least goal #1 before Set-Aside funds could be directed to that watershed. Project selection scoring criteria would provide additional points to watersheds where there is a reasonable expectation that goal 3 could be met. A plan for additional work was made to further advance this proposal.

### **The Future of the Watershed Movement in PA**

Working in cooperation with the Foundation for PA Watersheds, we see a need to obtain an updated picture of how watershed groups are doing across the state, a "*State of the Watershed Movement*" if you will. Unfortunately, information of that sort is generally difficult to come by and spotty when you get it. We have the idea to collect some of that information via surveys to select audiences. A good starting point is with the conservation district watershed specialists who have decent knowledge of watershed groups in their respective counties. Our approach in creating the initial survey is a parallel to what is done in strategic planning by asking "SWOT" (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) type questions about watershed groups. We are in the early development stage of that survey. What we hope to get back is information that will then guide us in developing a follow-on survey to watershed groups themselves, which in turn will yield a much richer picture of the overall picture than we have today. We are developing this as time permits.

### **Developing WPCAMR Employee Handbook**

Bob Eppley has provided guidance on developing an employee handbook for WPCAMR. The general approach is to not reinvent the wheel but to adapt and customize what has already been developed for our own needs. I've been able to advance the project by using a pretty good example that serves as boilerplate, but have reached the point where WPCAMR's own policies will be required to further advance the project.

### **Computer Network Upgrade**

As a result of an gradual overall degradation of performance and reliability of our computer network experienced in 2008, I've moved the file server activities to a dedicated computer. The newly implemented network file server is doing its job nicely and we've experienced far fewer problems. I've added some new security measures and have plans for more. We've also invested in UPS backup power supplies for the server and other communications equipment to minimize the impacts from power interruptions.

### **Winding down several WPCAMR sponsored grants**

Five WPCAMR held grants are expected to be completed over the next couple months. They include all of the innovative technology grants for which we are the fiscal sponsor. Also included is the first FACTS grant in which we are also an active participant in the execution of activities. I anticipate spending considerable administrative time in bringing these projects to completion, but can expect the overall administrative demands to be much more manageable once done.

### **A potential threat to the future of abandoned mine drainage treatment**

We have concerns that a recent federal district court decision in West Virginia is one step further on a path that could lead to the requirement of NPDES permits for all AMD treatment systems. Because of the awesome implications of such a requirement, we have placed this issue high on our radar. We see the need to become knowledgeable in this area for the benefit of those we serve and anticipate this may be an issue for some time. We are purposely taking a low key approach for the immediate future. We've prepared a separate information sheet on the court decision and is included with this report.

### **Appointment to the Mining Reclamation Advisory Board\***

I'm pleased to report that the PA State Conservation Commission has appointed me to serve as the conservation district representative to the Mining Reclamation Advisory Board (MRAB). I take the position that was so ably filled by Dave Mankameyer, who after for many years of service has decided to retire. Robert Hughes from EPCAMR was appointed to be the alternate for this board slot. MRAB meets quarterly. I anticipate serving on the subcommittee dealing with SMCRA Title IV issues.

\*The Mining and Reclamation Advisory Board is authorized and organized pursuant to Section 18(g) of the Pennsylvania Surface Mining Conservation and Reclamation Act (Act 181 of 1984) as amended by Act 173 of 1992. The advisory board is charged to assist the Secretary of Environmental Protection to expend the funds for the purposes provided by this act and to advise the Secretary on all matters pertaining to surface coal mining and reclamation.