

WPCAMR Watershed Coordinator's Report

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PROJECT SITE VISITS, PLANNING MEETINGS, PRESS EVENT ATTENDANCE:

Loyalhanna Creek Mine Drainage Coalition meeting in Latrobe.
Blacklick Creek Watershed Association meeting in Indiana.
Dunkard Creek Project meeting in Waynesburg
CSAW quarterly meeting, New Cumberland.
Prevailing Wage Coalition meeting in Harrisburg.
BAMR Title IV measurable goals meeting with WVU personnel in Morgantown
Two Ohio River Watershed Celebration organizational meetings in Pittsburgh

GENERAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Continued writing Abandoned Mine Post Newsletter articles, sending them out and archive the postings on the blog site and researching new article ideas. Archived Abandoned Mine Post articles may be found at the Abandoned Mine Posts blog site: www.amp.wpcamr.org. With the invaluable assistance of Rick, we were able to put out the 4th WPCAMR Video Diary featuring Somerset County's Watershed Summit and improvements in the Casselman River Watershed. Plans are to continue publicizing watershed successes and new projects, such as the Brinkerton project in Westmoreland county and the Bear Creek project in Indiana County. These outreach efforts continue to receive positive comments from our subscribers.

I'm working on getting a convening grant from the Foundation for PA Watersheds to put together outreach materials on AMD and mining aimed at school children. During the 2008 AMR conference, Wil Taylor from the Jennings's Environmental Center presented his "trunk" of outreach materials and an educational game. This set of outreach materials was very well received by those who attended Wil's presentation. The idea is to have this outreach material available on loan for Conservation Districts and others who are educating our youth.

CONSERVATION DISTRICT OUTREACH

With visits to Cambria County CD, Greene County CD and Westmoreland CD, the round of Conservation District visits has been completed. At first glance the individual needs of each district is as unique as the districts themselves however, there may be some commonalities. One of the most obvious common remarks is the need for continued funding for projects and/or dedicated funding for the Watershed Specialists. Given that concern and uncertainty of the Growing Greener funding that funds those positions, this topic is being brought up as New Business.

I plan to compile the results of my visits and present them to the board at the following WPCAMR Quarterly meeting.

I've been asked to be a part of Greene County's Dunkard Creek restoration project core committee, providing insight and knowledge of any funding opportunities or data gathering relating to that project.

2009 AMR CONFERENCE: LOOKING AHEAD

Work continues in organizing the 2009 PA AMR Conference, this year led by EPCAMR. The dates of the conference are July 13-16 and it will be held at the Living and Learning Center at Univ. of Pitt, Johnstown campus. More information will be posted on www.treatminewater.com as the committee continues it's planning efforts.

PREVAILING WAGE COALITION UPDATE

The group continues to meet monthly but due to cost and time considerations, I've only attended two of these one hour meetings. However, I've stayed in constant contact with the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) to keep abreast of what's going on. I attended the January meeting and during that meeting the coalition tried to set a tentative date for a legislative breakfast to inform new and old legislators about prevailing wage and some of it's negative consequences. The coalition is planning to hold the breakfast sometime during the last two weeks of March, likely at the PA Manufacturers' Association Building on State Street. Timing for this event is important and has to take into account the legislative sessions as we wish to give as many legislators as possible to chance to learn about this issue. The coalition would like all participating organizations to "pitch in" some money to help cover the cost of the continental breakfast. They've asked me to relay that request to the WPCAMR Board and said that if WPCAMR could contribute about \$25 to the event, it would be greatly appreciated.

The group is drafting some proposed legislation for a legislator (or legislators) to propose in the coming months. I've been working closely with the group to ensure that such proposed legislation includes the interests of various organizations that compose our reclamation community (ie. not just non-profit watershed groups but also conservation districts and municipalities). It is the general idea of the group that making public any "game plan" could be detrimental to the effort, hence the reason you haven't seen anything in Abandoned Mine Posts about this. If you are in regular contact with a legislator whom you think would be willing to consider being a sponsor or co-sponsor of any legislation to address the Prevailing Wage issue, please let me know and I will forward their name to the rest of the group. Also, I've been collecting data that compares costs of environmental projects with prevailing wage cost VS. without prevailing wage costs. This is important information that will help to prove our case. If you have such project cost comparisons, please call me to discuss them.

WATERSHED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT PROGRAM MATCH STATUS

It recently came to our attention that language regarding the Watershed Cooperative Agreement Program, that used to be part of the annual federal appropriations bill, was (inadvertently?) left out of the FY 08 Appropriations Bill and now the same has occurred for the FY 09 Bill that's soon will be considered. We're working on bringing this oversight to the community's attention through Abandoned Mine Posts. Bruce and I worked with the Eastern Coal Regional Roundtable to re-word their take action alert so it relates better to our PA folk.

The language that's missing in the appropriations bill would allow the WCAP funds to be considered as non-government match for other federal monies, as has been the case in the past. Traditionally, federal funds can't match other federal funds. However, with WCAP things were different.

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.

Where's the appropriations bill now? Well, FY 2009 is four months old now, but Congress has made little progress on regular FY 2009 appropriations with the exception of Defense, Military Construction and Homeland Security. As of 12 Feb., the government is still operating under a continuing resolution that extends funding for programs in unsigned 2009 appropriations bills (there are 9 of them) at 2008 funding levels through March 6, 2009.

It is my understanding that once work on the recovery package is complete and the President signs it, Congress will take up an omnibus spending bill that consists of the nine uncompleted FY 2009 appropriations bills. Once the appropriations bill is finalized, I will put out an Abandoned Mine Posting regarding the outcome and, if necessary, will continue to push the issue for FY10 appropriations.

Keeley Ruling And It's Possible Implications

I have been working closely with Bruce in trying to fully understand the Keeley ruling and how it could affect the reclamation community in PA. Although the ruling itself is very understandable from a layman's point of view, the understanding of its implications is a bit complex and involves a thorough understanding of the Clean Water Act and the (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) NPDES permitting system. Both Bruce and I are working through our thought process on this. Our discussion in new business will provide more in-depth information on the ruling and details regarding its potential implications.

FUTURE OF THE WATERSHED MOVEMENT

We're in the beginning stages of the survey mentioned at the last WPCAMR meeting. We're working in cooperation with The Foundation for PA Watersheds (FPW). Additionally, The Consortium for Scientific Assistance to Watersheds (CSAW) had been discussing the need to assess watershed groups and their needs. CSAW members had expressed interest in working with WPCAMR and FPW so we're not duplicating each other's efforts. More information in Bruce's report and during the update in New Business.