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TOP STORY

Secretary of DEP tours acid mine drainage sites with SCRA members

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Jul 3, 2019



DEP Secretary Patrick McDonnell, right, inspects damage to a bridge caused by a mine subsidence years ago near the Reinhart Fo complex in Coal Township.

KULPMONT — State Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Patrick McDonnell saw first-hand Tuesday the detrimental effects of past mining operations and the work being done by Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) volunteers to alleviate an acid mine drainage problem in the area.

McDonnell toured the Shamokin Creek watershed with SCRA members, other DEP officials, Northumberland County Conservation District Watershed Specialist Chantel Shambach, state Rep. Kurt Masser and Northumberland County Commissioner Kym Best.

McDonnell said the tour was spurred by an environmental justice roundtable he attended last year in the community.

“Shamokin Creek was heavily impacted by acid mine drainage,” he said. “We are determined to find solutions to this problem.”

McDonnell said past mining operations and agriculture are the two major causes for waterways being impaired.

The DEP secretary said funding to clean up waterways is limited, but a recent Environmental Protection Agency grant has helped improve the Shamokin Creek watershed.

“Shamokin Creek is high on the list of projects that need to be addressed to improve our waterways,” McDonnell said.

After meeting at the Veterans Memorial Sports Complex near Kulpmont, where SCRA and the county conservation district have conducted successful educational and tree planting activities, the group traveled to a wooded area off Route 61 known as Dark Run, which is across the highway from the Kulpmont-Marion Heights Joint Municipal Authority.

At the Dark Run site, acid mine drainage in the form of orange rusted water pours from a tunnel and travels through the wooded area from Kulpmont into Coal Township.

SCRA President Jim Koharski and SCRA Director Leanne Bjorkland discussed the work done by SCRA over the years and how the nearby Coal Township-SEEDCO Industrial Park and local businesses could benefit from clean water. Koharski said a feasibility study has been developed to recommend ways to improve water quality.

The group then traveled to the industrial park, where they viewed a bridge near Reinhart FoodServices that was damaged years ago by a mine subsidence.

After describing the benefits and challenges of an existing passive treatment system, the group returned to the Veterans Memorial Sports Complex.

"I am so thankful Secretary McDonnell and his staff took time out to tour our area so they know what needs to be done here," Shambach said.

She pointed out the conservation district was approved Tuesday for a \$1,300 environmental and educational grant from DEP.

Other DEP employees in attendance included Marcus Kohl, northcentral region director; and staff from the Environmental Justice Program, Bureau of Abandoned Mine Reclamation and the Environmental Cleanup and Brownville Program.

The headwaters of Quaker Run begin near Kulpmont and flow through a small portion of Mount Carmel Township before going through the Veterans Memorial Sports Complex, Coal Township-SEEDCO Industrial Park and Ranshaw.

Koharski said the stream has flowing water from the Kulpmont area through a portion of Mount Carmel Township during normal storm water runoffs from Kulpmont and Route 61.

He said the industrial park area is a victim of past mining practices. Quaker Run is impaired by siltation for about 2 1/2 miles and metal for 1 1/2 miles. Dark Run brings sediment and metals at its jointure with Quaker Run above an old beaver dam and flows continuously from mine discharges.

All water flowing from Quaker Run is mine water.

The soil through the Quaker Run sub-watershed is extremely porous as only about 10% to 20% of the average rainfall reaches the stream-gauging station at the Wayside Inn, according to Koharski.

Koharski said a new stream channel and wetland area were created at the entrance to the Reinhart complex by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from State College. The channel and wetland ponds were lined with a plastic liner to retain water and keep water out of the mine pools.

He said the stream channel and holding pond areas are an asset to the area.

In January, SCRA was awarded an \$85,575 state grant for assessment of the Quaker Run and Buck Run sub-watersheds within the Shamokin Creek watershed.

The grant money was used to formulate a comprehensive assessment and restoration plan for those two sub-watersheds.

