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Phil Dunn appointed to executive director of SCRA

By LARRY DEKLINSKI THE NEWS-ITEM

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Dunn

Newly appointed Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance (SCRA) Executive Director Phil Dunn envisions a future where Shamokin Creek fully supports aquatic life, provides recreational opportunities and represents community pride.

Dunn plans to take a holistic approach to advancing the nonprofit's continued mission of improving the creek turned orange by decades of abandoned mine drainage.

"I'd like to increase membership. We have about 75 members right now, including some municipal members," Dunn said Wednesday. "I like to get our membership up; that's a goal of every nonprofit."

Dunn is no stranger to SCRA, having served on its Board of Directors since 2019. He commended President Jim Koharski and Leanne Bjorklund for having the foresight to form the organization in 1996 and Vice President Steve Motyka, Treasurer John Bucanelli and Heather Makal for ensuring its continued success.

“Steve is just a tremendous advocate. He has a great passion for doing this work,” Dunn said of Motyka, who also serves on Kulpmont Borough Council. “Jim and Leanne and all of the current board members are a committed group. I’m excited to work with them.”

Dunn said his firsthand experience with the organization positions him as an ideal leader to foster collaboration between citizens, municipal officials, other conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies.

A native of Huntingdon County, Dunn also brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to environmental stewardship to this new role.

After graduating from Franklin & Marshall College, he embarked on a 35-year career with the Pennsylvania Senate, culminating in his retirement in 2019 as chief of staff to then-Sen. John Gordner.

Dunn worked extensively with state programs related to agriculture and environmental protection, establishing a rapport with Northumberland County officials.

“I spent a lot of time working on issues in Northumberland County. I was the point person with the flood control project in Mount Carmel in 2015 and worked with numerous Growing Greener Grants,” Dunn said. “I’m not saying I have the most skills in the world, but I’ve worked with a lot of municipal leaders. I want to build upon those relationships. I want to get them to really buy in with everything.”

After retiring from the Senate, he worked in conservation outreach on farms in 12 central Pennsylvania counties.

In addition to his legislative background, his dedication to environmental causes is further underscored by his role as a Penn State Extension Master Watershed Steward and his Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Riparian Buffer Training Certificate.

Dunn also is a member of One Water Partnership, a program sponsored by Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake.

Dunn said SCRA's efforts go beyond building treatment ponds, which remove metals and raise PH from discharge points before entering Shamokin Creek.

"I'm looking at this as a holistic thing," Dunn said. "I will work with landowners to help them stabilize their banks and reduce runoff on their properties."

Dunn said SCRA prioritizes projects since it lacks the funding to restore Shamokin Creek entirely but has received numerous grants over the years.

In November, SCRA was awarded \$500,000 through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish a brick-and-mortar office, pool available resources and provide a full-time community coordinator position. SCRA served as the grant applicant and works with partners FAR Better Together and Shamokin Community Gardens and Pocket Parks.

Dunn's appointment is made possible through a grant from the Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, which the groups said is a testament to the shared commitment to preserving and restoring the Shamokin Creek Watershed.

John Dawes, executive director of the foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, said, "Phil Dunn is a known entity to the Foundation for PA Watersheds through working with Senator Gordner's office as he led the use of American Rescue Plan dollars for enhancing Pennsylvania's state parks and forests."

Motyka said, "We are thrilled to welcome Phil Dunn as our new executive director. His extensive experience makes him the perfect fit to lead our organization into its next chapter."

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MORE INFORMATION

Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance, partners to receive \$500,000 grant

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