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FEATURED

## Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance creating water-friendly neighbors

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Kulpmont Borough Council member Bob Chesney, left, talks with DEP Regional Director Jared Dressler about the stormwater retention work done at Veterans Memorial Park in Kulpmont. Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

**KULPMONT** — Shamokin Creek Restoration Alliance continues to rehabilitate coal region waterways, this week highlighting a stormwater treatment system and vegetative planting project in Kulpmont funded in part through a settlement over violations with the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline construction.

Utilizing its Community Environmental Projects, the state Department of Environmental Protection transforms awards into beneficial community outreach and upgrades.

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“With DEP, we get a lot of attention regarding permitting, but when it comes to the forgotten other half of how we meet our mission is inspection and compliance,” said Jared Dressler, regional director for DEP. “This is an opportunity where we can see how we can leverage one of the tools in our toolbox. Where we can refocus some of those funds back into a local watershed that can improve local water quality, it’s a better outcome.”

In a tour Thursday afternoon in Kulpmont, work at Shamokin Creek was touted including projects to clean up the waterway that stretches from Mount Carmel to the Susquehanna River in Sunbury. With the Community Environmental Projects as the backdrop, DEP is able to use grant money to create larger pots of money and extend the reach of the grants.

“One of the things we like to see with grant funds is leveraging the power of partnerships and other funds and this is one thing the SCRA and the borough have done really well. Trying to get a piece here and there, you match it, you might have a private foundation, and you pull it all together and what you end up with is a lot more than what the DEP gave out to start with,” said Megan Lehman, DEP regional communications manager. DEP can use the funds for “a broader effort to develop acid mine drainage treatment systems and educational signage throughout the watershed.”

An initial \$100,000 from DEP helped cover design, permitting and purchasing supplies for the Shamokin Creek project, Steve Motkya, vice president of SCRA, said. It also helped bring in more funding.

“We took what was left (from the original grant) and said maybe we can put a rain garden in,” he said. “We also took that whole concept to the Sierra Club and applied for a grant and they gave us \$12,000 because they thought the project was viable and useful to the community. So the initial investment was \$112,000.

“But the story gets good because we took that design and permit and kept applying for stormwater grants through the borough and we applied for a growing greener plus grant through DEP to help restore the stream bed and keep the water out of the mines which keeps it less polluted and means it needs less treatment downstream, so we were awarded a \$548,000 grant for that, and it was bid out last week, and we should see those bids come in next week.

“We also applied for matching funds for other grants so all said and done we received about \$1.4 million in grants.”

The goal, Motkya said is to make sure downstream communities benefit from work across the watershed.

“For Kulpmont, we live upstream and we don’t want to be bad neighbors and that’s the whole concept with DEP and stormwater because up until recently that water rushed out of town and it was the next person’s problem,” he said. “What we’re doing now is a big benefit to everyone and to Kulpmont.

“The biggest goal for the Creek Alliance is to have clean water from here through all 32 miles to Sunbury, to support aquatic life, and fish and a clean mile of stream is a real economic benefit,

property values go up, people recreate on that portion of stream, the value of clean water is proven time and time again beneficial to the community and overall health.”