



Moshannon Group News



Moshannon Group of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club

May 2003

May 20, General Meeting:

PERMANENT PROTECTION OF STATE FOREST WILD AREAS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE FORESTS

By Guest Speaker Dave Coleman

A century ago, Pennsylvania's forests were practically non-existent. Cut over with no apparent regard for preserving even the smallest parcel of the original forest, Pennsylvania's landscape was completely disturbed, subject to mudslides and wildfire. Biodiversity plummeted with hundreds of species brought to extinction or expatriation. Water quality of the streams that drained the former forest land consequently was very poor to the detriment of wildlife and humans alike. Outdoor recreation – especially hunting and fishing – was dismal. Very few would argue that a colossal mistake had not been made. A mistake, that no large scale preserves of original forests – representing their former grandeur – were maintained for the benefit of future generations.

Today, with all of our resources, commitments, goals and aspirations, surely we can do a better job of fully utilizing the potential of our public forest land. We should be more like architects – envisioning, planning, designing and implementing a vision of interconnected wildlands in Pennsylvania. With over 2.1 million acres of state forest land, a

commitment of the Bureau of Forestry to manage 25% of it as “old growth forest”, our shared goals of preserving biodiversity, enhancing quality of state waters and providing a unique wilderness recreational experience can be realized in Pennsylvania now for the first time in over 100 years.

The opportunity before us is the creation of old growth forests in Pennsylvania. Too much time and energy has been expended by the experts in trying to define this term - “old growth” forest. If nothing else, it is much more than just big trees. It is a forest that can fully offer tangible benefits only with large undeveloped, non fragmented and minimally impacted landscapes. Why bother to come up with a definition? An old growth forest is a forest that has been allowed to grow old without unnatural disturbance. It is that simple.

Sure we have remnants of “old growth” trees in Pennsylvania. Scattered across the state, almost all exist simply due to boundary disputes between logging companies, most of these sites are composed of just dozens,

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EVENTS CALENDAR

GENERAL MEETINGS

Tuesday, **May 20** 7PM: the Centre Furnace Mansion and Centre County Historical Society at Porter Road and East College Ave. Guest Speaker: Dave Coleman will speak. See article on Page 1.

NOTE: BEGINNING THIS FALL OUR GENERAL MEETINGS WILL BE HELD ON THE SECOND WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH. WE ARE MAKING THIS CHANGE WITH THE GOAL OF ENCOURAGING MORE OF YOU TO ATTEND AND TO GET INVOLVED.

OUTINGS

Saturday and Sunday **June 7-8**: Canoe camping on the West Branch of the Susquehanna from Karthus to Keating. This is 22 miles of up to Class 1 water. Contact Dave Coleman at least 10 days before trip, 814-234-0839 or dyatesc@aol.com.

Sunday, **June 22**: Hike the proposed M.K. Goddard Wild Area. Moderate Hike of up to 8 miles. Contact Dave Coleman 814-234-0839 or dyatesc@aol.com.

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Letter From The Chapter Chair

Blair and Bedford Counties: Welcome to Moshannon Group!

Because it could not find enough leaders, Headwaters Group has changed its status from Group to committee this year. That means that most of Headwaters Group will be served by Allegheny Group and will receive the Allegheny Group newsletter. But since Blair and Bedford counties are so far from Pittsburgh, Moshannon Group has suggested that our members in those two counties become part of Moshannon Group.

This change does not mean that members from these counties cannot take part in Allegheny and Headwaters activities. You may and you are encouraged to do so. But you may also take part in Moshannon Group activities. And you will receive the Moshannon newsletter.

Geographically, Blair and Bedford Counties are in the same pattern of ridge systems as Moshannon. But some of you are a long way from State College where Moshannon Group holds most of its meetings. Moshannon Group may plan to hold one or more meetings in the Altoona area and hopes to find more active members from that area.

At the end of this year, we will review Headwaters' status and either reinstate the Group or assign its members to other groups. Headwaters was one of our founding groups over 30 years ago. It has run an active outing program for years. We would like to see it reenergized.

Members who want to participate in Headwaters or Allegheny outings should check the Allegheny Group Web site: www.alleghenysc.org

Phil Coleman
Chapter Chair

Getting the Red Out Of The Moshannon

By Dave Coleman

The Moshannon Creek Watershed Coalition (MCWC) hosted a tour of the Chillers Seeps Acid Mine Drainage Treatment Facility on the evening of April 24th. I took Tammy, David and dog Bandit along with me to Philipsburg to join the group of 15 MCWC volunteers, community leaders, conservation district administrators, engineers and a representative of DEP to see this facility which is upstream of the Cold Stream Dam near Philipsburg on the northwestern edge of Centre County.

Michelle Barr, representing the engineering firm that designed the facility and also a volunteer for MCWC, showed the attendees around the site and described the physical and chemical concepts involved in the design. Corey Cram of the Hawk Run mining office of DEP was on hand to explain some of the more involved water chemistry concepts that presented a challenge to determine the most efficiency treatment methods.

Art Beveridge, the President of the Moshannon Creek Watershed Coalition, said that the Chiller Seeps was named due to the appearance of the dead trees around the acid seeps being similar to the image on the introduction to Chiller Theatre which was broadcast from a Pittsburgh television station in the 1970's. While I did watch Chiller Theatre religiously on Saturday nights during my teen years, I vaguely remember the image of the dead looking trees. But there was no mistaking the contrast of the dead trees surrounding the bank of seeps from the more healthy trees on the other side of the Project 70 ditch. This ditch was constructed in the mid-70's to divert the acid seep water around the still healthy trout stream feeding Cold Stream Dam.

A couple of years ago the Wood Duck chapter of Trout Unlimited secured funding for the \$400,000 project to construct a passive treatment system to reduce the acidity reaching the tributary to Moshannon Creek. The treatment system is comprised of six distinct ponds which perform separate treatment steps. A Pre-treatment basin receives the flow of the ditch and allows suspended sediment to settle out which otherwise would clog the bed of the next pond, the "Vertical Flow Wetland". This pond has a layer of mulch over a layer of limestone. The mulch serves to remove dissolved oxygen from the water and the limestone – the heart of the treatment system – adds alkalinity to the water and raises the pH. Using the litmus paper strips I had brought along, I measured a pH of 3 coming into the treatment system and 4.5 coming out. This is enough rise in pH to allow the dissolved metals (in this case mostly aluminum) to come out of solution. The Settling pond following is to accumulate the precipitated metals. Two aerobic wetland ponds complete the treatment train to provide final settling and adsorption of contaminants and reintroduce some dissolved oxygen. The treatment system had bettered the water flow as evidenced by several strings of toad eggs that David observed in the final pond.

From the information that Corey Cram provided, I calculate that the treatment system is on average removing as much as 216 lbs

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Events Calendar *(Continued from page 1)*

Sunday, **July 20**: Canoe the upper end of Black Moshannon Lake and Bog Natural Area. Late afternoon and evening. A gentle evening paddle suitable for the entire family. Water Lilies should be well into blooming. An extra canoe or two are available if you do not have your own. Contact Gary Thornbloom at 814-353-3466 or bearknob@chilitech.com.

Sunday **August 24**: Hike the Hammersley Wild Area on lightly used trails. Some bushwacking may be necessary. Moderate to difficult hike up to 10 miles. Contact Dave Coleman 814-234-0839 or dyatesc@aol.com.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

These meetings are held on the **first Tuesday** of the month and they are open to all members. Call an Executive Committee Member for the next meeting location.

MCWC (Continued from page 2)

per day of acidity from the Moshannon Creek Watershed. However, this is just a small fraction of the estimated 130,000 lbs per day of acidity that Moshannon Creek contributes to the West Branch of the Susquehanna. Clearly much work remains if the "Red" Moshannon is to become a trout fishery again. Volunteers like those of MCWC have their work cut out for them. It will take hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours, millions and millions of dollars and a long time – perhaps decades - to make a difference. But what is even clearer is that it didn't have to be this way. If the mining had been done with a real concern about the watershed and water quality, maybe Moshannon Creek would

still be the valuable trout stream it once was. Sure, something has to be done about Moshannon Creek including installation of more treatment systems like the one at

MCWC is looking for more volunteers to be involved in community outreach, stream sampling and cleanup programs. If you would like to be involved in "getting the Red out of the Moshannon, contact the Clearfield County Conservation District, 650 Leonard Street, Clearfield, PA 16830 or call 814-765-8130. The website of the group is www.moshannoncreek.org

pollute another high quality watershed so that a prefix like "Red" needs to be added to the stream's name.

Relaxing provisions of the Clean Water Act (as proposed by the Bush Administration), or dismantling the protections of our high quality and exceptional value watersheds in Pennsylvania (as some of the extreme factions of our state legislature are attempting to do) are measures that take us back to the time when concern about the future was not an issue. The choices are clear. We can treat our forests and waters with more diligence now, or pay with lots of money and a lowered quality of life for our children later.

Chiller Seeps. But we also need to make sure we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We need to make sure we do not

- surrounded by younger trees of a spectrum of ages. Yes, hundreds of board feet rotting - but not wasted. Undeniably more valuable to the forest as eventual soil than lifted away by a Huey helicopter, and also just as valuable to the ecosystem as it was when it was standing tall.

We should take it upon ourselves to take a relatively small portion of our commonwealth and create old growth forests as our generation's gift to succeeding generations.

Be a part of the process of permitting portions of our state forests to stand tall; allowing the intricacies of biodiversity to redevelop, improving and preserving water quality in our Exceptional Value watersheds and providing the awe inspiring wilderness setting for the citizens and guests of Penn's Woods.

Permanent Protection (Continued from page 1)

maybe hundreds of acres of old trees and are protected within the 61 designated state forest natural areas. But these protected areas are too small to produce the tangible benefits possible from old growth.

State forest wild areas, on the other hand, all in the thousands of acres, provide an great opportunity to create fully functional old growth forests that will preserve biodiversity, protect entire watersheds and provide a wilderness setting for quality passive recreation.

Some will suggest that foresters and other land planners need the flexibility of logging old growth forests to create or improve wildlife habitat. Sure, some game species may prefer open or edge habitat, but it is not like we have a shortage of habitat of this type in the state. Just about every landscape level activity we perform, fragments forest habitat. Open and edge habitats are increasing every year while interior unbroken forest habitat is continually diminished. We are clearly not creating this type of habitat. We have to begin now in stopping this trend, and at least keep the roadless undeveloped forest land we have left. In order to create old growth forests, we have to start by letting the forest grow; we have to let it be.

We need to get beyond misconceptions such as that salvage logging improves forest health and therefore should be

permitted in old-growth forests. In reality, besides the soil disturbance associated with timber removal, the forest loses valuable structure and substance when the "dying and diseased" trees are removed.

Perhaps one paradigm that needs refocused is that of the icon of the old growth forest. Right now, the vision of the majority of citizens of old growth forest is of huge trees. In north and central PA, we celebrate the sight of large pine (although puny in comparison of what we had until the latter 19th century) and hemlock. Our most notable forested natural areas (Alan Seegar, Dutlinger, etc...) are described almost exclusively using this icon.

The paradigm shift should be that towards the icon of a large tree trunk, lying on the ground, covered in various mosses and fungi - the trunk in various stages of decay



A Recent Moshannon Group Outing On Beech Creek Photo by Phil Coleman

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We're on the web!—<http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org/moshannon/>

Moshannon Group Directory

*members of the Executive Committee

Chair & Conservation	*Dave Coleman	234-0839	dyatesc@aol.com
Vice Chair , Newsletter & Outings	*Gary Thornbloom	353-3466	bearknob@chilitech.com
Treasurer	*Bill Tanner	542-8519	billtann@penn.com
Secretary	*Judy Tanner	542-8519	billtann@penn.com
Web Editor	Elisa Beshero-Bondar	237-3983	eeb4@psu.edu
Membership,	*Jan Filiaggi	466-7362	rjf21@adelphia.net
Ex-Com Member	*Hilary Vida	371-3277	
Ex-Com Member	Available position.		
Newsletter Mailing	Nancy deStreel		
Programs	Available position.		
Intern	Available position.		

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