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Moshannon Group News



Moshannon Group of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club

November 2004

Issue 5

Finding Accountability for I-99

by Ben Cramer

For nearly a year, the construction of the new I-99 superhighway over Bald Eagle Ridge between State College and Port Matilda (Centre County) has become the most contentious environmental issue in Central Pennsylvania, and possibly all of the state. An ecological hazard that goes far beyond the site of the highway itself is inflicting damage on nearby watersheds, with serious implications for drinking water, wildlife, and ecosystem health. The worst part of this crisis is that it could have been at least partially prevented with a simple acknowledgement of previously available information.

The culprit is the naturally occurring mineral iron pyrite (yes, "fool's gold"), which was already known to occur widely across the region. Geologists are still investigating the geologic forces that resulted in such large amounts of pyrite being present near the I-99 construction zones. In any case, Bald Eagle Ridge is constructed primarily of sandstone, which over the eons has cracked up into large blocks. This is a common phenomenon in Pennsylvania's ridge and valley region. Other minerals, as

well as topsoil, tend to fill the cracks in the sandstone over time, giving the ridges a well-rounded appearance and ample tree cover. The composition of this natural "fill" varies by location. For whatever geologic reason, the cracks in the sandstone ridge in the Skytop area west of State College, the future route of I-99, are filled with very large quantities of pyrite.

Pyrite that sits below the topsoil (or "overburden") is a benign and natural part of the environment. But when pyrite finds itself on the surface, the iron sulfide present in the mineral reacts to outside oxygen and produces sulfuric acid, which can eat through metal when used in concentration. The acid unleashed by a single block of pyrite is negligible and of little concern. However, where this acid is present in appreciable quantities, it will mix with rainwater and wash into the local watershed and drainage system. When thousands of tons of pyrite are smashed open and exposed to the elements during the construction of a superhighway, the surrounding ecosystem cannot handle the amount

(Continued on page 3)

EVENTS CALENDAR

Public Presentations

Public Presentations are held at the Interpretive Center of the Centre County Solid Waste Authority—253 Transfer Road—just north of the Nittany Mall off Route 26, and are open to both members and non-members.

Upcoming guest speakers will be listed on our website as soon as they are scheduled. They will also be listed in our next newsletter.

OUTINGS

Sunday, December 19: Explore Wallace Run and Grindstone Hollow. See the **On The Trail** column on our website. Contact Gary Thornbloom at 353-3466 or bearknob@chilitech.com.

Sunday, January 9: A winter hike at a location to be announced, somewhere in Centre County, depending on weather conditions and participant interest. Check our website. Contact Ben Cramer at 237-4187 or doomsdayer520@yahoo.com.

Saturday, January 15: Cross country skiing on the Rock Run trails. Contact Gary Thornbloom at 353-3466 or bearknob@chilitech.com.

WINTER PARTY

Sunday, February 6: For details, see the notice on page 2.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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

Check our website for the most current additional outings & information
<http://pennsylvania.sierraclub.org/moshannon/>

FROM THE EDITOR

Gary Thornbloom

WELCOME— BLAIR & BEDFORD COUNTIES !

Our mailing labels should finally include Sierra Club members in Blair and Bedford counties. A belated welcome to you!

Sierra Club members residing in those two counties have been part of the Moshannon Group for a little over a year and we have been scheduling outings in those areas. Articles in the Newsletter have also come from those areas.

I would like to encourage you to join us in our outings and at our public presentations.

Our Winter Party also offers a great opportunity for all of us to get together.

“Christmas Party” in December becomes “Winter Party” in February

In lieu of the usual Christmas party in December, the Moshannon Group is hosting a “winter” party on Sunday, February 6. Not only will this avoid the normally hectic holiday season, but it will provide some diversion in the post holiday “slump”. All members, friends, and guests of the Moshannon Group are included in an invite to come out and enjoy a partial or full day of fun.

We’ve chosen cabin 20 at Black Moshannon State Park for the location. This converted ski lodge has lots of space and a great view of the area. Hot chocolate / beverages will be available all day and the lodge will be the meeting point for several ski outings (weather dependant and of varying length / ability*). Sledding and tubing is also a possibility.

Dinner consisting of “passed dishes” and “favorite deserts” will be at approximately 4 pm. A limited number of beds / rooms are available by prior arrangement (contact cavenkenu@wmconnect.com) for those that may want to stay overnight.

Directions to Cabin 20: Route 220 to Unionville; Route 504 towards Black Moshannon State Park; turn right at the Cabin 20 sign just prior to hill descending into the park.

Coming from Black Moshannon State Park: Cabin 20 is just east of Park at the top of the hill . There is a sign for Cabin 20 along Route 504 at the left turn to the cabin.

- check the website for details on times etc. mid January

BEN CRAMER—CANDIDATE FOR AT-LARGE CHAPTER DELEGATE

Moshannon Group member Ben Cramer is running for the Chapter position of At-Large Delegate. Inspired by the writings of Sierra Club founder John Muir, Ben joined the Sierra Club in 2000. Since 2003 Ben has been an active member of the Moshannon Group. Among his many accomplishments are: leading outings, revamping our website and keeping it current, serving as Vice Chair, and writing the final draft of the Pennsylvania Chapter’s extensive district-by-district public comments on DCNR’s 2003 State Forestry plan. Ben also is one of the writers of the **On The Trail** column—a monthly column in the CDT that helps keep the Sierra Club in the public eye.

Ben has a life-long love of the outdoors. Having hiked and backpacked for over 2,000 miles on Pennsylvania’s trails he has seen a lot of Pennsylvania’s backcountry.

As an At-Large Chapter Delegate Ben would bring passion to fighting the good fight in the conservation battles that we are confronted with.

2005 CALENDAR SALE!

Please help support the Moshannon Group. Buy a calendar for yourself, for gifts, for your employees or clients.

Wilderness Wall calendars are only \$11; Engagement calendars are \$12. Mailing costs for one calendar are \$3 and only \$.50 to mail each additional calendar.

By Mail:

Jan Filiaggi, Calendar Chair
310 Mountain Road
State College, PA 16801

Or contact Jan Filiaggi:

466-7362
rjf21@adelphia.net

I-99 Accountability *(Continued from page 1)*

of acid pollution created, so it ends up being carried away by the local streams. Construction practices also spread the danger over larger areas, as massive quantities of rock are removed from cuts in the roadway and used for fills elsewhere.

This is what has happened in the Skytop area on Bald Eagle Ridge. More than a million cubic yards of acid rock (the term being used for rock piles composed significantly of pyrite), which had been safely embedded in geologic formations for millions of years, have been dug up and exposed.

The resulting acid has leaked primarily into Buffalo Run, an official “high quality” stream that runs through the valley immediately to the east of Bald Eagle Ridge, and eventually to Spring Creek and the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. The acid has seeped into the local water table as well. Nearby landowners have detected the acid in their drinking water supplies, though not yet in quantities known to be hazardous to the residents’ health. However, the true effects of the acid for the health of people, wildlife, and ecosystems are unknown and still developing.

PennDot claims to have missed the presence of the pyrite in Bald Eagle Ridge’s rock formations during the environmental assessment process for the I-99 project. However, other state agencies definitely knew about the problem before that. In August 2001, just a few months before the awarding

of construction contracts for the early stages of the I-99 project, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) made note of the presence of pyrite on the ridge when evaluating a permit application for rock mining. This issue had also been made known to the local residents back in May 2000 during a DEP public meeting in Stormstown. In addition, the presence of potentially damaging pyrite in the general region has been known since at least the mid-1960s. At that time a similar problem with acid runoff occurred during the construction of I-80 in the Snow Shoe area, resulting in one death from tainted drinking water.

Thus we have multiple precedents that should have alerted PennDot to the potential environmental hazards of building a superhighway amongst the sandstone formations of Bald Eagle Ridge. But the information obtained by DEP just a few months before the final approval of the project was apparently unknown to PennDot personnel. Meanwhile, the state has called for an investigation into the decidedly rushed and under-performed environmental assessment process associated with this segment of the I-99 construction. Not only did the process fail to turn up valuable information from other state agencies, but also the fairly obvious presence of vast amounts of pyrite that should have been detected during a well-planned survey of the area’s geology.

In any case, after construction began in the Skytop area, the pyrite and its acid became a looming crisis, and it is now

too late to turn back the clock. The realities of politics and economics will not allow a halt on the construction of a superhighway that is already partially completed. However, the environmental damage that has begun to affect nearby homeowners, and which will have potentially serious impacts on the local ecosystems, demands accountability.

In addition to an immediate cleanup and mitigation of the environmental damage that has already been done, the state should learn how to prevent such bureaucratic mistakes from happening again. Hopefully, an investigation into PennDot’s operating procedures, and inter-agency relations in state government, will encourage the associated parties to take responsibility for minimizing any further threats posed by the remaining I-99 construction and mitigating the damage caused by this spreading environmental hazard. Perhaps a backlash from the affected citizens and local governments will convince PennDot to pay attention to larger issues before succumbing to economic pressures and road construction interests.

—NOTE—

This article is indebted to the journalistic work of Mike Joseph at [Centre Daily Times](http://www.centredaily.com/mld/centredaily/news/special_packages/i99/) in State College. See his compendium of I-99 investigative articles at http://www.centredaily.com/mld/centredaily/news/special_packages/i99/.

The opinions advanced here, as well as any factual errors, are the responsibility of the Moshannon Group.

COVE POINT EXPANSION UPDATE

By Ron Johnson, Conservation Chair

Dominion Transmission Inc. will be making a short presentation to the Moshannon Group at the December ex-com meeting (7 pm, Dec 3). The purpose is to get an update on the Cove Point Expansion project.

An expansion of the pipeline network is

planned to allow PA to store more natural gas in the summer and serve the northeast region during the peak winter months. It is expected that Clinton, Centre, Mifflin, Huntingdon, and Juniata counties might be affected. Dominion has previously hosted public meetings to provide information on

the project. At this time, it is unclear to what extent public lands in the central PA region will be impacted.

The Moshannon Group wants to ensure that potential issues are anticipated and addressed beforehand.

TIME FOR ACTION ON CENTRE COUNTY LANDFILL THREAT

The letters on this page are two letters that offer information on the landfill proposed for forested land located in Rush and Snow Shoe Townships. A grass roots group opposing the landfill is encouraging people to send letters to PENNDOT and to DCNR voicing opposition to the landfill and to the I-80 interchange that is necessary for the landfill to operate.

You may use the letters as they are presented here, or you may use them as a basis for composing your own letter.

The Moshannon Group has led a recent outing in the area that would be affected. An **On The Trail** column written by Ben Cramer shows what is at stake and is available for you to read in the archived section of our website.

RE: Proposed I-80 Exit, Centre County

Dear Secretary Biehler:

A Point of Access request for an interchange on Interstate 80 was submitted to the District 2-0 office on 08/17/04 by Resource Recovery, LLC. This interchange would be to access their proposed landfill/incinerator/industrial park in Centre County.

Given the recent disaster with I-99 in the area, I am very concerned about any major road projects that can impact the area where I live, own property, or visit for recreational pleasure. Please consider the following:

There is no relevant basis for an additional I-80 interchange to serve communities that are already adequately served by existing roadways. Per the District 2-0 office, Rush Township must officially request this interchange and a private corporation cannot. This interchange would never be requested if Resource Recovery, LLC didn't have a private venture planned for the area. Please note that with the exception of the Rush Township Supervisors, affected communities and residents are vehemently opposed to Resource Recovery's proposed landfill/incinerator/industrial park.

The existing area the proposed interchange would serve is nearly 6,000 acres of undeveloped wooded land with a few dirt roads. These roads are nearly impassable in some areas and are not used for daily travel. According to regulations, the Point of Access Study must address the effects of the interchange on the existing roadway system. There is very little existing roadway system in this wooded area. Resource Recovery, LLC intends to rebuild and relocate Peale Road, which will connect to Gorton Road, to accommodate their proposed landfill.

The Point of Access Study must also demonstrate that the proposed interchange is consistent with local planning. The property in question is located in both Rush and Snow Shoe Townships. Rush Township has no zoning in place and has signed a host municipality agreement with Resource Recovery, LLC to host the proposed landfill. The land in Snow Shoe Township is zoned forest/open space, and there are many camps and summer homes in the area. Snow Shoe Township Supervisors rejected a request by Resource Recovery, LLC to change their zoning and did not sign any agreements with them. The proposed interchange is not consistent with local planning in Snow Shoe Township. This must be considered as residents and property owners of Snow Shoe Township are in much closer proximity to the proposed landfill/incinerator/industrial park than are Rush Township residents.

Large amounts of wooded land will be destroyed and wildlife will be displaced if this project is allowed to proceed. Resource Recovery, LLC refers to this land as a "brownfield," however, one only has to visit the area to see otherwise.

There is no *local or state* need for this landfill. Pennsylvania citizens already share an undue burden for the disposal of the nation's waste with the importation of more garbage than any other state.

—CALL TO ACTION—

Allen D. Biehler,
Secretary of Transportation
PENNDOT Central Office
Keystone Building
400 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120
General Information: 717-787-2838,
Fax: 717-787-1738
ra-penndotexecutiveOffices@state.pa.us

—CALL TO ACTION—

Michael DiBerardinis,
Secretary DCNR
400 Market Street, 7th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17105
Phone: 717-787-4137
Fax: 717-772-9106
ra-askdcnr@state.pa.us

RE: Proposed Landfill in Centre County

Dear Secretary DiBerardinis:

I write to ask your support in stopping the bioreactor landfill/incinerator/industrial park project proposed for Rush Township, Centre County.

As part of the Pennsylvania Wilds initiative, Route 144 in Snow Shoe Township has been designated a part of the Elk Scenic Drive. Large amounts of wooded land will be destroyed and wildlife will be displaced if this project is allowed to proceed. A landfill/incinerator/industrial park in this area is totally inconsistent with the Pennsylvania Wilds effort to expand nature-based tourism in this region of Pennsylvania. An exit sign on I-80 reading "**TEWAR LANDFILL & INDUSTRIAL PARK AND ELK SCENIC DRIVE**" will not be very appealing to tourists coming to view the elk and enjoy the natural beauty of our area.

Cleaning up acid mine drainage in the West Branch of the Susquehanna as part of the Pennsylvania Wilds Program may very well be undone in the future from pollution and contamination of the Red Moshannon and Black Moshannon Creeks from this landfill.

Please do not let the developer sell this as an economic development opportunity for our region. This could very well destroy the outdoor recreation activities for which our area is known. The many local businesses that enjoy a surge in their revenues throughout the year from outdoor enthusiasts could see a considerable drop in their income. How many, who once enjoyed our beautiful outdoors, will want to vacation, camp, fish, canoe, hunt, hike, and ride ATV's in the vicinity of a giant dump? The real economic opportunity is the millions of dollars in profit going into the pockets of the Lancaster developers. Resource Recovery, LLC refers to this land as a "brownfield," however, one only has to visit the area to see otherwise.

There is no *local or state* need for this landfill. Pennsylvania citizens already share an undue burden for the disposal of the nation's waste with the importation of more garbage than any other state. It is of utmost importance that we work to preserve and protect our communities, water sources, forest, and open space for future generations.

Statements By Candidates For The Executive Committee Of The Moshannon Group and Ballot

—BEN CRAMER—

With a lifelong interest in conservation and environmental matters, in the year 2000 I read a biography of John Muir which then inspired a personal investigation into the history and political stances of the Sierra Club. I then quickly joined the Club, and in early 2003 I became involved with the Moshannon Group executive committee. I was soon appointed Group Vice-Chair, Outings Chair, and Website Coordinator. My greatest accomplishments for the ex-com thus far were writing the final draft of the Pennsylvania Chapter's extensive district-by-district public comments on DCNR's 2003 State Forestry plan, and extensively redesigning and maintaining the Moshannon Group Website. As Outings Chair I have also increased the frequency and variety of Moshannon Group outings, and have made efforts to increase participation among both Moshannon Group members and the public.

With a lifelong love for the outdoor recreation opportunities in the forests and hills of our beautiful region, I have developed a deep knowledge of our environmental and conservation issues. After nearly a decade as a very enthusiastic hiker, I have logged more than 2,000 miles on Pennsylvania's hiking trails. I am also a frequent camper and backpacker, and have recently taken up mountain biking. This vast outdoor experience has made me interested in promoting the low-impact recreational opportunities available in our region, and I have become significantly interested in the governmental issues related to our State Forests and State Parks, hiking and biking trails, and especially our Natural Areas and Wild Areas. For these reasons I have greatly enjoyed my participation in the Moshannon Group executive committee, and the opportunities I have been given to make an impact on our local conservation and environmental challenges. With your vote I would value the chance to continue my involvement in the years to come.

—BILL TANNER—

Sierra Club member for 16 years. Moshannon Group Treasurer for past five years. Retired from AT&T, last 16 years as accounting manager. Program assistance for past several years. I wish to serve the Moshannon Group for another 2 years.

—JUDY TANNER—

As a member of the Sierra Club for 30 years, and currently a member of the Moshannon Group Executive Committee, (serving as Secretary, Political Chair, and Population/Growth Chair), environmental issues are very important to me. In today's political climate, protecting the environment will be a challenge that will require the attention and efforts of each of us, but we must take a stand. We cannot remain silent as we watch the attack on our air quality, forests, water, endangered species, and other natural resources. At the same time, we must individually examine our lives and determine ways in which we can alter our consumerism in order to decrease the impact on the environment. I hope to continue serving on the Executive Committee and ask each of you to commit to joining with the Sierra Club in our efforts to make a difference.

—STAN KOTALA—

Dr. Stan Kotala has been a lifelong nature enthusiast and conservationist. He began birding at age 12 and has been a member of the Audubon Society for thirty years and the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology for more than a decade. He is also a member of the Sierra Club, the Sinking Valley Watershed Association, the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsman's Clubs, Shaver's Creek Environmental Center, the Southern Alleghenies Conservancy, the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, the National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Wilderness Society. Dr. Kotala has served as president, newsletter editor, conservation chair, and Important Bird Area coordinator for Juniata Valley Audubon, based in Altoona. He was the conservation chair and education chair for Blair County Trout Unlimited. From 1996 till 2004 he was the Western Ridge and Valley Regional Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Herpetological Atlas Project and now serves on the Amphibian and Reptile Technical Committee of the Pennsylvania Biological Survey. Dr. Kotala is a DCNR volunteer at Canoe Creek State Park near Hollidaysburg. He currently serves on the Watershed Protection Committee of the Altoona City Authority and on the steering committee of Blair County Natural Heritage Inventory.

Dr. Kotala earned his medical degree at Temple University in Philadelphia and practices family medicine in Blair County. He lives with his wife, Alice, and daughter, Helena, in Sinking Valley. His family enjoys hiking, biking, birding, kayaking, camping, gardening, and nature study.

*******Ballot*******

Vote by placing a checkmark next to no more than four nominees and return this ballot concerning the governing executive committee of the Moshannon Group of the Sierra Club. Ballots must be received by **January 3, 2005**. Mail to **Elections, Sierra Club Moshannon Group, P.O. Box 513, State College, PA 16804**.

Ben Cramer
 Stan Kotala
 Bill Tanner
 Judy Tanner

_____ **Write In Candidate**

Note: For verification purposes your mailing label should remain attached on the opposite side. You may black out your name and address on the label, but not the zip code. If joint membership two sets of checks are permitted.

**Moshannon Group of the
Pennsylvania Chapter of the
Sierra Club**
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State College, PA 16804

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Moshannon Group Directory

*members of the Executive Committee

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Vice Chair, Website & Outings	*Ben Cramer	237-4187	doomsdayer520@yahoo.com
Treasurer	*Bill Tanner	542-8519	billtann@penn.com
Secretary	*Judy Tanner	542-8519	billtann@penn.com
Programs	*Ronn Brouman	867-0624	ronnb@adelphia.net
Conservation	*Ron Johnson	355-5434	cavenkenu@wmconnect.com
Ex-Com Member	*Hilary Vida	371-3277	
Chapter Delegate	Dave Coleman	234-0839	dyatesc@aol.com
Membership	Jan Filiaggi	466-7362	rjf21@adelphia.net
Newsletter Mailing	Nancy deStreel		
Intern	Position Available		



**The Banff Film Festival World Tour
returns to State College on Sunday
April 10, 2005, at Eisenhower Auditorium
on the Penn State Campus!**

♻️ Printed On Recycled Paper ♻️

Read **On The Trail** a monthly column in the **Centre Daily Times** that is devoted to hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and snowshoeing in Central Pennsylvania.

Moshannon Group members Ben Cramer, Dave Coleman and Gary Thornbloom have been writing this column since February 2002. The column is published once a month on Sunday, usually the first Sunday, on the **Woods & Waters** page of the Sports Section. The column can also be viewed online at www.centredaily.com.

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

Membership

Yes, I want to help safeguard our nation's precious natural heritage. My check is enclosed.

Name _____
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Cardholder Name _____
Card Number _____

Contributions, gifts and dues to the Sierra Club are not tax deductible; they support our effective, citizen-based advocacy and lobbying efforts. Your dues include \$7.50 for a subscription to *Sierra* magazine and \$1.00 for your Chapter newsletter.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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REGULAR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$39	<input type="checkbox"/> \$47
SUPPORTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100
CONTRIBUTING	<input type="checkbox"/> \$150	<input type="checkbox"/> \$175
LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1250
SENIOR	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
STUDENT	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32
LIMITED INCOME	<input type="checkbox"/> \$24	<input type="checkbox"/> \$32

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