

# Soap Hollow Run improvements underway

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Photo by Len Lichvar

Under the direction of Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick, volunteers from the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited construct a bank stabilization and fish habitat structure on Soap Hollow Run in Greenhouse Park.

amenities, the major draw is the Stonycreek Whitewater Park on the Stonycreek River that attracts countless kayakers and other boating and white water enthusiasts to the man made rapids. It is also a staging point and put in area for float tubers and others who want to enjoy a fun float to takeouts in Johnstown a few river miles away.

The primary reason that the park can attract outdoor users is the historic improvements to the water quality of the Stonycreek River over the last 20 years. A principle organization that has been responsible for that improvement, the Somerset Conservation District, is now leading the enhancement efforts of the other waterway in the park, Soap Hollow Run.

The small stream, which flows alongside State Route 403 before entering the Stonycreek, is inconspicuous and often goes unnoticed. However, only a few years ago the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, under its unassessed waters initiative, surveyed the stream and confirmed the existence of a wild reproducing brown trout population that made the Commission's Class A listing that signifies the resident trout population is at a high level and that the water quality is also cold and clean.

Greenhouse Park, located in Conemaugh Township, is a well known and popular outdoor recreational destination point. The park is used for a variety of organized as well as everyday public low impact recreation.

Aside from the green space, pavilions and other

Despite this positive data, Somerset Conservation District Watershed Specialist Greg Shustrick noted that the waterway in the park was choked with knotweed and also held minimal holding water for the trout. The district discussed the issue with some young leaders out of the Johnstown Chamber of Commerce, the Conemaugh Township supervisors and also brought the need for a potential improvement project to the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MLTU).

The result has been the formation of a partnership of these local entities to improve Soap Hollow Run in and near Greenhouse Park. Over the past two years the conservation district, Natural Biodiversity, MLTU and other volunteers physically cut and then sprayed the knotweed along the banks several times successfully reducing its growth and survival.

Also during that time Shustrick, through his role with the district, designed a habitat improvement project and also applied to numerous funders to implement the in-stream projects and replant with native vegetation.

The success of that effort secured funding from National Trout Unlimited's Embrace-AStream Grant Program, Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited's Forever Wild Mini Grant Program, Pennsylvania Environmental Council's Laurel Highlands Landscape Initiative Grant Program. Additional funds were also provided directly from MLTU and from the Johnstown Vision 2025 River Capture Team initiative.

The funding combined with in-kind contributions from the Conemaugh Township supervisors, the conservation district and MLTU has led to the currently underway effort of stabilizing the streambank and creating habitat for the trout with the construction and placing of log vanes, mudsills, root wads, j-hooks and random boulders.

Recently volunteers from MLTU, using their own equipment and manpower, installed root wads and mudsills that has and will compliment the work of the District's contractor, Blackner

Excavating, who is currently completing the project over the next week.

Native species vegetation in the form of live stakes and trees will then be planted to restore the streambank to a more natural state and the wild trout population should prosper even more from the habitat created.

The Conservation District and MLTU plan to use the high profile area as showcase and example of the existence and significance of the wild trout resource and how it can both coexist and increase the economic and recreational opportunities of the more manmade attractions at the park as well as in other locations throughout the region.