

LOCAL

Conservation district, conservancy are working together to fight AMD

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The Somerset Conservation District and Somerset County Conservancy have worked on many projects to help the environment in Somerset County.

And both groups cite their work in acid mine drainage remediation.

District Executive Director Len Lichvar said his office has a staff of five full-time and two part-time employees. He said the district has been working with partners since the early 1990s and is responsible for AMD passive treatment system operations and maintenance on the Stonycreek and Casselman rivers.

"That is a huge, heavy lift behind the scenes for 25 years," he said. "People don't realize how these historically polluted waterways became (the) much more viable and economic-generating waterways they are today."

He said the Hawk View site on the Stonycreek River was under construction and was



Photo by Len Lichvar

Somerset Conservation District watershed specialist Greg Shustrick examines a valve at one of the Oven Run AMD Passive Treatment Systems on the Stonycreek River. The district is responsible for the ongoing operation and maintenance of the systems.

about 70% complete when the shutdown began for COVID-19.

"The site there is not functioning," he said.

He said a neighboring site is also not functioning well and is in need of repair.

"Right now we are struggling with the ability to do that for a variety of reasons, including

COVID-19," he said.

He said that funding is also an issue. Lichvar said he is working to develop a trust fund to help fund these systems for years to come.

"The funding issues have put a lot more bad water in the Stonycreek River than in many years," he said.

Lichvar said that AMD

was never eliminated in Somerset County.

"All we've done is treat it," he said. "There is just as much AMD as there was 50 years ago. If these treatment systems fail, we will lose all those water quality improvements we gained. That is the scary part and the challenging part. We are the first responders to that dilemma."

Lichvar said that many people may not remember that the conservation district started the initial work on

what is now known as the Great Allegheny Passage.

"When it was first proposed, it was the Allegheny Highlands Trail," he said. "The original surveys was the Somerset Conservation District. We basically kick-started that, which has now become the Great Allegheny Passage."

He said the district has a dirt and gravel road program that improves water quality and travel opportunities on low-volume roads. He said the dis-

trict also completes work with farmers on agricultural best practices.

Somerset County Conservancy President Jim Moses said he is proud of their work to take ownership of the property where the conservation district has its treatment systems.

"They don't remember 30 years ago when it would stain your kayak orange and there were no fish," he said.

Previous owners didn't want to own the property for experiential treatments.

"We agreed to take ownership so the district could build passive treatment systems," he said. "Those systems are what has restored the Stonycreek to the condition it is in today."

Moses said that acquiring the Kimberly Run area to create a natural open area for low-impact recreation and forming the Somerset Lake Action Committee, which helped raise the initial funds for the Somerset Lake Dam remediation project, are some of their other accomplishments.



EARTH DAY 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The Daily American is recognizing this milestone with a series of stories focusing on efforts in Somerset County.

Unable to open museum, Meyersdale historical society loses major funding source

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The Meyersdale Area Historical Society is "waiting in limbo" during the COVID-19 shutdown, hoping to soon reopen the train station museum and trailhead along the Great Allegheny Passage. On warm spring days, dozens of people walk and bike past.

The society is charged with looking after the 1910 train station and its exhibits that show the history of the Meyersdale area.

Board member Jennifer Hurl said the station was originally set to open on April 13, but the museum is not on the governor's list of essential facilities.

"The decision when we open is really made, not only at the

county level, but it's at the point where we have to follow county, state and federal guidelines," she said.

And while the museum is closed, the society is without one of its major fund sources: the gift shop.

Station manager Dale Shultz said that last year the station was visited by people from every state and 32 other countries. In addition, approximately 1,000 Somerset County residents visited.

Many of these people spent money at the gift shop last year, but out-of-town visitors will be few this year.

Profits from the gift shop pay for the museum's utility bills, repairs and other expenses.

"The visitor center keeps it going," Shultz said.

The society also takes in an-



Staff photo by Dylan Johnson

The caboose at the Meyersdale Area Historical Society was repainted last year with help from local donors. Lettering will be painted at a later date.

nual dues of \$15 to \$25 from its 150 members, but Hurl said those funds pay wages for the museum's three employees to operate the building every day for 28 weeks.

Another large portion of the society's budget is paid for by the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau tourism grants; however, with everyone limiting travel and hotel stays, it's likely there will be less money garnered from the hotel tax to fund the grants.

Last year, the society received about \$20,000 in tourism grants, according to Hurl.

Shultz said he is confident that the museum will keep operating, but there may be limited open hours in 2021 without the tourism grant.

Scheduled speakers and other group activities are also

on hold until the society is given the go-ahead to reopen the museum.

Hurl said she hopes to see more local residents on the trail and supporting local businesses once the pandemic restrictions are lifted.

"A lot of local people, not only right here in Meyersdale, but Somerset County in general, have never been inside the train station," she said.

"A lot of times we take for granted what's right in our backyard."

She also encouraged people to join the society and support local history. Anyone interested can contact Hurl at jhurl@meyersdalelibrary.org, or mail a check to the Meyersdale Area Historical Society, P.O. Box 134, Meyersdale, PA 15552.

Berlin Plank Road work to resume

DAILY AMERICAN

Work is scheduled to resume Monday on the Berlin Plank Road roadway rehabilitation project in Berlin and Somerset boroughs and Brothersvalley and Somerset townships, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

On Monday, HRI Inc., of State College, will begin work on the section of the project between Menser Road and the intersection of old Route 219 and new Route 219. Work will include the installation of underdrain, milling, paving and shoulder reconstruction. This work will take place under flagging operations. Minimal delays are expected.

Overall work on this project consists of milling and resurfacing 8.2 miles of roadway, shoulder and partial lane reconstruction, three structure rehabilitations, and drainage, tree trimming, guardrail and sign upgrades.

All work on this approximately \$10 million project is expected to be completed by September 2021, according to PennDOT.

POLICE BLOTTER

Scam reported

On April 15 someone tried to scam a 41-year-old Boswell man. Police said it was a case of attempted identity theft. The man was not named in the report. Police said he received a notification from his credit card provider that someone tried to set up a cred-

it line for Dell Financial and a credit line for Chase Credit Card, using personal information.

Coal spills during accident

State police are investigating a one-vehicle accident that happened on April 16 on Mason Dixon

Highway in Brothersvalley Township. Police said that Donald Jodon, 67, Windber, overturned when attempting a sharp, right turn.

The load of coal he was hauling spilled onto the roadway.

An injury was reported, but not the severity, police said.

MAGISTRATE REPORTS

The following preliminary hearings are scheduled before District Judge Ken Johnson in Somerset:

Obscene material

• Laura Mildner, 39, Lynn Road, Sarver, was charged April 2 with obscene and other sexual materials and performances; unlawful dissemination of intimate images; and harassment. According to a probable-cause affidavit, on Dec. 18 a woman went to Somerset Borough police with a package she received at her workplace. The package contained messages and sexually explicit photos that had been exchanged via Facebook Messenger between Mildner and another person.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. June 9.

Driving under the influence

• Melanie Rexroth, 30, Division Street, Berlin, was charged April 1 with two counts of driving under the influence and four summary offenses. According to a probable-cause affidavit, at about 2:49 a.m. Feb. 29 state police stopped a vehicle driven by Rexroth in the Family Video parking lot in Somerset Borough for swerving. Rexroth had a blood alcohol content of 0.17%, according to the affidavit. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 10:10 a.m. July 7.

• Joseph Monaghan, 38, West Fair-

view Street, Somerset, was charged April 1 with two counts of driving under the influence, drug paraphernalia possession and a summary offense. According to a probable-cause affidavit, at about 9:42 a.m. March 14 state police stopped a vehicle driven by Monaghan along Route 219 in Somerset Township for speeding. Police found a container with suspected marijuana residue and an aluminum smoking device with suspected marijuana residue in the vehicle, according to the affidavit. A blood test showed Monaghan had multiple drugs in his system at the time of the stop, including marijuana, methadone, fentanyl and clonazepam, according to the affidavit. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for

9:15 a.m. June 30.

Aggravated assault

• Tracy Kocher, 47, West Main Street, Somerset, was charged Sunday with felony aggravated assault, simple assault and a summary offense. According to a probable-cause affidavit, at about 8:20 p.m. Sunday Kocher punched and kicked a man in the face at Laundry Arena in Somerset Borough. The man was seriously injured and treated at UPMC Somerset, according to the affidavit. Kocher was arraigned Tuesday before Johnson and sent to the Somerset County Jail in lieu of a \$15,000 bond. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 10 a.m. Tuesday.

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