

River group targets mine drainage

LRCA seeks funding for study to fulfill a "long-term goal" for the Lackawanna.

BY SHARI SANGER
STAFF WRITER

The Lackawanna River Corridor Association is exploring ways to remove acid mine drainage from the Lackawanna River and possibly develop private investment and related business opportunities.

"It's been one of our long-term goals to get the acid mine drainage at the Old Forge borehole and the Duryea outfall under control, and we are developing proposals and attempting to secure funding to get a study under way," said Bernie McGurl, executive director of the community-based, nonprofit group.

He said the study would be the first step in a complicated process to get the area placed on a list of qualified sites eligible for application of federal mine reclamation funding.

"We think the problem ... should not be the responsibility of the citizens. It's long been recognized that it's a problem of federal importance, so it should receive federal funding to help remedy it," Mr. McGurl said.

The borehole — which can easily be spotted because of bright orange rocks downstream — is the discharge point for a huge underground reservoir of groundwater from hundreds of abandoned coal mines that underlie much of the Lackawanna Valley.

The water becomes polluted as it picks up minerals from the coal and enters the river, he said.

A wider problem

"We believe it's significant and in need of remediation because it flows right into the Susquehanna River and into the Chesapeake Bay," Mr. McGurl said.

He said the lower Lackawanna River is classified as a problem because it exceeds the maximum daily load for iron by thousands of pounds.

Unlike a separate project proposed by local inventor Chris Gillis, who is looking

Culling trees may be a threat to trout

BY JEREMY G. BURTON
STAFF WRITER

A longtime Lackawanna River advocate and some residents who fish its waters are concerned that tree removal along the banks in Green Ridge will make the river there inhospitable to trout.

Bernie McGurl, executive director of the Lackawanna River Corridor Association, said he worries about a loss in Green Ridge of the river's character, which could be an economic and recreational draw.

"We have one of the most

outstanding trout streams in all of Northeast Pennsylvania," he said, and it is "remarkable" that it weaves through the heart of a city.

The shady trees have been removed for the last stage of the Scranton flood-control project, with levees being built from between East Market and Poplar streets. Paul O'Hara, the city's coordinator for the project, said the problem is a set of federal guidelines in place after Hurricane Katrina that might require a greater area on either side of levees to be

clear of trees and their roots.

He said he sympathizes with the environmental impact, but the integrity of the levee system must be the first priority.

To survive, trout need cool temperatures, and the loss of shade means the sun will be beating down on that stretch of the river, an upsetting thought to Kevin Devine of the Pine Brook section. Mr. Devine has been fishing the river since he was a boy growing up in North Scranton, even when it was terribly polluted.

He said he is frustrated "nobody was notified" about the changes. He and Frank Trojanowicz of South Side aired their concerns last week with local officials, who toured the project with Sen. Bob Casey.

Mr. McGurl said he'll speak with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about planting new trees to prevent "a significant loss of habitat" if possible. Mr. O'Hara said "we're only taking down the trees absolutely necessary"

Contact the writer:
jburton@timeshamrock.com

to divert the flow of the borehole through a network of settling areas and gently agitate the iron from the water; the association is looking for a broader-based solution.

"I don't believe there is any single solution; it's going to take a range of solutions," Mr. McGurl said.

Mr. Gillis has also proposed harvesting the metal removed from the water and selling it in up to 12 potential markets.

Scientific approach

The association's focus, however, is more on developing scientific and engineering resources to study ways to treat and mitigate the pollution from the drainage points in Old Forge and Duryea, rather than selling anything.

Mr. McGurl said the association is also looking to involve a broad sector of the community in decision-making that will hopefully lead to the creation of a large master plan for the lower Lackawanna River.

The association's initial funding applications are for about \$170,000 — the estimate for preliminary engineering studies.

Mr. McGurl said it could cost another several hundred thousand dollars to create a measurement apparatus to determine how much water is flowing through the borehole system.

The association has received a \$30,000 grant from

the Willary Foundation in Scranton but is looking for matching funds.

Looking for help

The group recently submitted funding proposals to the state Department of Environmental Protection, Lackawanna County commissioners and Susquehanna River Basin Commission.

"If we get all the funding together, we will be making an announcement to launch a program," Mr. McGurl said, adding it would combine both public investment of mine-reclamation funding and support from private investment in industries.

He said the association, throughout the entire process, would work closely with

the two boroughs and residents, who own sizeable pieces of the 2,000 acres of abandoned mine land along the west side of the river.

"They will be major partners with us as we try to develop an understanding of all the variables that affect the borehole," he said.

Contact the writer:
ssanger@timeshamrock.com